

## **E-participation: A systematic understanding on public participation in the government in 21<sup>st</sup> century**

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Received Date: \*18 October 2018

Accepted Date: \*30 December 2018

### **ABSTRACT**

*Public participation has been a subject of active discussion in many fields particularly in political and administrative science. This concept emerges when public became, to a large extent, more concerned about the involvement in governmental decision-making processes than they had been before. In most of the countries, public participation issue increasingly catches the interest of the academics, practitioners, regulators as well as the governments. Currently, with the extraordinary growth of information and communication technologies (ICT), e-participation has been proposed to indicate the integration of ICT purposely to support the traditional participatory process. It is believed that these technologies namely the internet has made it possible for the public to easily communicate, deliberate, and collaborate. E-participation helps to improvise public involvement in the government as it serves to encourage two-way communication between the government and citizens, educate citizens on the underlying principle and complexity of policy-making, legitimize government decisions, and provide opportunities for mutual learning. Theoretically, e-participation seems to open huge possibilities and various benefit to the public as well as to the government than the traditional way of participation. Yet, either it is traditional participation or e-participation, public knowledge and understanding remained unclear. Therefore, this paper attempts to explore the concept of this subject matter in comprehensively manner.*

**Keywords:** *public participation, e-participation, internet, government, Malaysia.*

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Over the years, the advancement of the information and communication technology (ICT) has greatly reshaped the landscape of the local democracy (Alonso & Barbeito, 2016). The ICT has emerged with a new form of public participation which is known as e-participation (Rose & Sanford, 2007). E-participation aims to support active citizenship with the latest technology development by increasing access and availability of participation in order to promote fair and efficient relationship between the society and government (Sæbø, Rose & Flak, 2008). There are various existing researches that may contribute to a better understanding of e-participation and the development of future research direction. However, the divergent and complexity that comprises in e-participation might cause misinterpretation. Understanding such emerging field is a complex endeavor because there is no generally agreed upon definition of the field, no clear overview of the research disciplines or methods it draws upon, and because the boundaries of the field are undecided (Sæbø et al., 2008). Simultaneously, different

approaches have emerged in exploring this multidisciplinary field from multiple perspectives (Panopoulou, Tambouris & Tarabanis, 2014). As a result, e-participation field still suffers from a diffuse and heterogeneous state of knowledge (Wirtz, Daiser & Binkowska, 2016). Furthermore, Mohamad Aizi and Shahizan (2011) in their study verify that government organizations in Malaysia do not promote e-participation concept, to be precise; there are lack of knowledge and collaboration effort. Consequently, this paper aims to systematically deliberate the work of defining the e-participation concept to provide useful insights. It is important for the public to have the basic knowledge and understanding in the subject matter.

This study compiled and reviewed various literatures from secondary sources either in printed form or electronic including scholarly journal articles, books and reports. The relevant literatures were obtained then interpreted using the conceptual analysis by breaking down the concepts into their constituent parts. It is comprehensively organized with the general context and background of e-participation, the transformation from e-government to e-participation, the needs of e-participation, the benefits of e-participation, the e-participation framework and design and e-participation initiatives in Malaysia and other countries. Even though this study focuses on e-participation, we are unable to neglect the necessity to recognize the concept of public participation to have secure grounding for knowledge and understanding. This is because, Alonso (2009) in his study revealed that most citizen had little exposure to any traditional instruments of citizen participation. In addition, Zikri, Tarmiji and Aziz (2015) highlighted that the public is still confused regarding their understanding on participation concept. Azizan (2015) further asserted that lack of knowledge about public participation and low level of education among public contribute to the public exclusion in the process. Therefore, this paper starts by embracing part of public participation concept.

## **2.0 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There is no doubt that people can live without participating in any of the governmental activities. In fact, political system also can get along without permitting participations. However, for people who are not politicians or officials, participation is one of the subject matters in political analysis that enables them most directly to relate their lives to the systems that govern them and through which they may hope to govern themselves (Hague & Loader, 1999). Either the public realizes it or not, public involvement occurs in almost our daily live. Public develops their own belief, norm and institution by engaging within their own society through shared duties, functions and responsibilities. Public participation presents a whole new interpretation of concept that called citizenship and governance. In the past, citizens used to be the one who is governed. And as good citizens, they were expected to obey with the rules and fulfill certain obligations to those who governed. In return, those who governed, hold a responsibility in improving and giving a better life to the citizen by protecting, serving and supporting them as well as help them to work out on any difficulties (Ahmad Jailani, 2006).

### **2.1 The Emergence of Public Participation**

Public participation is a practice that concern on the public involvement in various governing process such as in the decision, agenda and policy making process (Rowe & Frewer, 2005). Public participation seems as one of the best ways to involve the citizens in the government. As the time goes by, this concept became a great concern and highly discussed all over the world. Public participation holds its own story in shaping the society. In the past, it appeared as an inspiration that public should be given the opportunity to influence the decision that could affect their lives. From the fifth century and beyond, in

the old institution of Athens, each of their people was given their right to participate and contribute to the community and administration through the participatory democracy. During this time, people could start to participate after the principle on the ownership property for the government position was eliminated (Edmundson, 1997).

As the world moves forward, the necessity for the public participation arose when social and economic segment failed to perform. Due to that, the demand on public participation became one of the main issues discussed during the war and revolution era. Public participation evolution began in the United States of America in the early 1960's, due to the racial and wealth discriminations. Due to the weak relationship between the government and the people, the USA government failed to resolve the people's objection towards their dreadful services. At this time, they also failed in dealing with the conflict in different classes of society, especially when the lower income group of black people in fought against white people bureaucracy (Kamarudin, 1991).

These circumstances had caused the planning and public services system of the black people being governed by black people personally as they believed that black people should solve black people's problem in the black community. Therefore, most of the development plan at that time such as improvement of the services and facilities was rendered only to the white middle class people. These different situations had led to the phase of the development where the demand of public participation was increasing. Meanwhile, the demand on public participation in Britain took place after the successful of public participation in the United States of America (Kamarudin, 1991).

## **2.2 Public Participation in Malaysia**

There is a lack of discussion on the commencement of public participation in Malaysian history. Therefore, little has known regarding this subject matter. However, looking back at the history, Malaysia also has experienced public demand and participation. In the 1940s people in Malaysia started to protest on the street, voicing out specific demand to the government. At that time, the protest saw Malay women breaking the tradition by joining the marches in Malaya's anti-colonial movement against the Malayan Union (Kheng, 2007; Josiah, 2017). Accordingly, protest is not new to the civil society in Malaysia. Still, the street protest is not including in the most of public participation definition. Nevertheless, the street protest brings along the theme of democracy, civil right as well as freedom of speech and assembly that uphold the key of public participation itself. Nowadays, street protests have become one of the most popular approaches in term of expressing political ideology. According to Wilson (as cited in Terchek, 1974) protest plays as a bargaining source that allows ordinary people who do not possess any political control to assemble and convey unconstructive critics to the people that control the decision. Generally, street protest happened in most of the parts in other countries including Malaysia. While Malaysia takes up the streets, there are some who strongly condemned street rallies by saying that public demonstration is not part of Malaysia's political culture. However, public protest, in one other way or another, played an important role in shaping the country.

Street protest in Malaysian history include The Malayan Union Rallies (1946), Baling Incident (1974), Reformasi Movement (1998), BERSIH or Coalition of free and Fair Elections (2006), HINDRAFF Rally (2007), BERSIH 2.1 (2010), BERSIH 3.0 (2012) and BERSIH 4.0 (2015). Looking back on each of these protests, each of it tried to convey the message to the government. Public protest might not be our culture, but it is important to understand why people choose to behave in certain way. In the 1940s especially, the public might not have a proper channel to communicate with the ruling elites. But as we move forward with the technological advancement, Malaysia still takes up the street. Thus, it is believed that public participation is not about specific parameter or approach, but it is about the benefit that public gain from it.

### 3.0 E-GOVERNMENT TO E-PARTICIPATION

Most governments make every effort to provide the best services for their people. Consequently, government begins to make use of the internet in order to interact with its citizens. The application of web-based internet technology in government operations is recognized as electronic government (Harris, 2002). Electronic government started in the United States of America in the early 1990s. Later, the idea is copied by the European Union. The electronic government is usually presented in order to provide an easy access to government information and services to the citizens and business; to increase the quality of services, by increase speed, completeness, process efficiency and other; and to give the citizens opportunities to participate in democratic processes of different kinds. The focus is typically on external services, but one important idea is to use these to make internal operations more efficient (Gronlund, 2002).

Malaysian government's initiative in enhancing the service quality of public sector should be acknowledged since the government had launched the Malaysian Electronic Government or Malaysian EG through the introduction of Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) in 1996 (Razlini, 2012). Malaysian EG, which is one of the MSC flagships applications that utilizes the technologies by means to reinvent the way government functions (Norshita, Halimah & Tengku Mohammad, 2010). According to Mohsin and Raha (2007), there are seven main projects under e-government applications which involve Generic Office Environment (GEO), Electronic Procurement (eP), Project Monitoring System (PMS), Human Resources Management Information System (HRMIS), Electronic Labor Exchange (ELX), Electronic Services Delivery (eServices) and E-Syariah. Besides these projects, Malaysian government also launched My Government, a short form for the Malaysian Public Service Portal. It is an initiative that undertaken by Malaysian Administrative Modernization and Planning Unit (MAMPU), a unit within the Prime Minister's Department. My Government was designed as a single gateway that provides an easy access to information and services as well as answer to government related enquiries and concern through the internet. This portal linked the users with more than 900 government agencies website nationally (MAMPU, as cited in Mohamad Aizi, Shahizan & Mohamad Syakiran, 2011).

Largely, these initiatives namely seven pilot projects and My Government portal are aimed to transform the administrative process and services through the means of ICT. So, these projects are implemented in such a way to support the goal of Malaysian EG which involve improving the convenience, accessibility and quality of interaction with citizens and businesses, that subsequently will improve the information flows and processes within the government as well as to improve the speed and quality of policy, coordination and enforcement. Consequently, MAMPU came out with the vision to achieve the goals which include to transform administration process of the government through the usage of information technology; to drastically improve the performance of the government; provide high value administrative services at low cost to public and business; make use of multimedia technology in order to promote an effective government; and attract world class multimedia web shapers to Malaysia (MAMPU, as cited in Mohamad Aizi, Shahizan, Mohd Farhan & Azizul, 2012). However, looking back to Malaysian EG goal, projects and its applications, it obviously shows that there is no statement regarding public participation that involve. Specifically, there is no platform in Malaysian EG that support e-participation. According to MAMPU (as cited in Mohamad Aizi et al., 2011) even though one of the components in MyGovernment portal namely E-Community Centre seeks for citizen involvement in Malaysian government; however, the current status prove only the poll mechanism is successfully running. The average number of people involve in poll is just 1000 people per poll. As a result, it is believed that Malaysia need for e-participation platform to ensure citizen can be involved in government process.

Most people across the globe currently are concerned about e-participation in engaging public in the government. However, there is also an argument in regarding the issue of lack of citizen participation in the political process through internet (Maslin, Edith & Sabariyah, 2013; Mohamad Aizi et al., 2011). Theoretically, e-participation is perceived as a tool to improve the quality of public sector governance process. For that reason, most developed countries implemented e-government projects in order to enable the citizens to be involved in the political decision-making process through e-participation. But this is not what happens in developing countries because the attention is more towards improving the public sector services rather than e-participation (Mohamad Aizi, et al., 2011).

Certainly, most of the governments in developing countries strive to serve the citizens through the means of ICT. Sadly, most of the implementations generally are not more than as an information and resources provider. Gupta, Kumar and Bhattacharya (as cited in Mohamad Aizi et al., 2011) also emphasize that the government portals offer a very limited actual transactional service delivery. Moreover, it is difficult to deliver the services to the people with the incomplete infrastructure especially in term of access facility (Mohamad Aizi et al., 2011). In the meantime, a report from G7/G8 had shown that the usage of the internet in 16 national governments is quite simple. The internet used in these governments is not more than just to disseminate the information. Besides, the government portals seem to be an additional cost because it is not replaced any manual operation. Although email is widely used within government agencies, the opportunities for citizen to communicate with government authorities, however, are limited (G8 as cited in Gronlund, 2002). EzGov (as cited in Gronlund, 2002) also highlighted, since 1997 most of the government portals are all about information and simple services. But the information available is typically static. It is not dynamic and the services are less interactive. Moreover, it is not even easy to search the information because it is organized from the view of that department not from the citizen's perspective. Consequently, it was proposed that e-government should be extended to include e-participation mechanism to get citizens view and input on government policy and planning for a better delivery of information.

#### **4.0 GENERAL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND OF E-PARTICIPATION**

Public participation issue, at this time, in the United Kingdom and elsewhere, increasingly catches the academics, practitioners, regulators as well as governments' interest (Leach and Wingfield, as cited in Rowe & Frewer, 2005). Tambouris, Liotas, Kaliviotis and Tarabanais (2007) demonstrate that as the governments worldwide realize the value of public participation, subsequently they are now striving to make the citizens take part in the political process by means to strengthen democracy. However, participation is not only about voting or campaigning as most people always perceived (Nagel, 1995). In the meantime, citizens in various countries are not satisfied by just being a part of the voting process but they are also demanding a more active role in democratic process as to support the democracy. Therefore, unsurprisingly that professionals and experts became increasingly concern in researching on the public participation over the last years.

As public participation started to be important in the 1960s, the first idea on the digital democracy using the information and communication technologies (ICT) arose in the 1980s (Kim, 2008). The digital media and the internet have enabled the e-democracy to arise (Beltrán, 2015). E-democracy is defined as exploitation of the ICT in engaging the citizen to support the democratic decision making process. Thus, it is apparent that e-participation is the subsequent of e-democracy (Macintosh, 2004). With the expansion of ICT, it enhances the e-democracy and with it, the e-participation which through various e-tools allows the public participation process to meet the widest possible audience (Kukovic & Haček, 2014). The field of e-participation is currently a rapid evolving one. In many cases, the main driving forces in e-participation are the advances in the technological area. However, if the traditional participation being

replace to e-participation, therefore it is important to understand in what way that the relevant supporting ICT tools would help to enhance the public participation (Tambouris et al., 2010). It is believed that these technological means are essential tool for the democracy where through it, millions of people can communicate with one another as well as with their representative (Etzioni, Laudon & Lipson, 1975).

Furthermore, social and political settings will not constantly remain because it changed gradually. The democracy in the government also had changed when the public for greater role in the government's decision making process. Due to that, the importance of public participation in the government started to be recognized. Nowadays, public highly demanded to be a part of the system that they had before. The public want to be heard by the government so that they can influence the governing process. The conventional form of non-participatory technique in the planning process, nonetheless, unsuccessfully attains the public interest towards the implementation of development plan. Subsequently, it leads to various conflicts such as disagreement and disruption on the plan (United Nation, as cited in Koekoek, 2010).

As time goes by, the method of public participation increases gradually, aligned with the globalization era, is necessary to cope with the changing needs of society. This trend towards more interactive and participatory planning will have major impact depending on the way the planning is practiced whereas planning will become more complex and increasingly dependent on information technology instruments. The trend pressures governments to open their decision making processes for citizens to participate over the Internet in so called e-participation. E-participation has the potential to establish more transparency in government by allowing citizens to use new channels of influence which reduces barriers to public participation in policy making (United Nation, as cited in Koekoek, 2010). E-participation is defined as the interaction on democratic issue between citizens, politicians and officers that take place between elections, including consultation, district representative and self-organization among citizens groups. E-participation supports the public participation in all the government process through a direct participation. E-participation also is a tool that enables governments to have dialogues with their citizens. By enhancing government's ability to request, receive and incorporate feedback from constituents, policy measures can be better tailored to meet the needs and priorities of citizens (United Nation, 2008).

#### **4.1 The Needs of E-Participation**

The e-participation is needed because the traditional modes of participation seem to have its own significant limitations. As we know, public can participate through variety of mode. Citizen committees, public hearings or town hall meetings and focus group discussion are some of the traditional mode that still useful to engage the citizen in the government programs and activities. There is nothing more effective than face to face interaction between citizens and public officials. These helps to break down the stereotypes and mistrust and showing each other that there can be a sincere and equal opportunity of participation in making the government more effective in meeting the needs of the community. However, typically these modes only reach and involve a small number of citizens engaging in in-depth dialogues and exchanges of ideas (Ho, 2007).

In general, the public do have an opportunity to participate in the lower level of government. Nevertheless, the participation is not on an individual basis since there is often a representative representing the public opinion. Consequently, it is hard to ensure whether these representatives are there for the sake of the public or for their own personal interest (Ho, 2007). In fact, it is not easy to identify all interest that should be considered and much less to find a suitable representative. Some citizens may consider themselves misrepresented by those people who act as stakeholder representative on behalf of their interests (Lourenco & Costa, 2007). Furthermore, the frequency and length of discussion are also

constrained by the physical location and meeting place at the time scheduled. Citizens who volunteered to participate in these meeting tend to be the community activists or citizens who can afford the time. Hence, they may not be accurately representing the demographic profile of a community (Ho, 2007).

In addition, Nagel (1995) also stressed that most people want the right to participate, but no one consistently participate. Therefore, participation often serves the interest of privileged. In such a climate, it is not surprising that both administrators and citizens are often frustrated and in disagreement with each other. The citizens believe that there is lack of accountability and transparency since the information they receive is managed, controlled and manipulated in order to limit their capacity to participate. Citizens often see the technique of participation such as public hearings, surveys or focus groups as designed, at best, to generate input and, at worst, to keep them on the outside of the government. Furthermore, citizens are particularly sensitive to false participation efforts that they ask for because of the discount of the public input. Thus, this inauthentic process simply contributes to a greater tension between administrators and citizens. People would think it is better not to work with them at all than to work with false and purely instrumental participations. Administrators, for their part, know that citizen involvement is desirable, at best, but at worst, they find it is one of a problematic instrument (King et al., as cited in King, 2007). Therefore, it is believed that elites use participatory devices to cover up their own manipulative rule (Nagel, 1995). In the meantime, the traditional modes of participation are also perceived as time consuming, costly and burden. Administrator are not necessarily trained or socialized to be a good facilitator of participation and engagement. Indeed, there is an inherent conflict between values of citizen participation and engagement, the structure and the process of bureaucratic government which create significant obstacles for meaningful citizen engagement with government and no end of trouble for administrators who gave good intentions about direct participation (Callahan, as cited in King, 2007).

We are, after all, a representative democracy, not a direct democracy. Any participatory efforts do not necessarily guarantee positive results or any results at all because sometimes they simply make a messy situation even messier (Berkshire, as cited in King, 2007). Above all, Wang (2001) asserts that we are still far from reaching genuine participation. Yet, there is still a way to achieve it. Therefore, most developing countries strive to serve the citizens through the means of ICT by implementing the e-government. However, as we discussed above, the e-government is not more than as an information and resources provider. It also focuses more towards improving the services in the public sector rather than increase the public participation quality. On this ground, the e-participation was proposed aiming to achieve an effective public participation. Above and beyond, the e-participation is needed due to shortcoming of the traditional modes of participation and e-government implementation.

#### **4.2 The Benefits of E-Participation**

Edmundson (1997) asserts that with current developments in online computer technology, it could help the citizens to move towards a genuine participatory democracy. For instance, Velikanov (2010) emphasizes that the internet has made it possible to easily communicate, deliberate and collaborate. Participation through the internet and electronic medium or known as e-participation provides various advantages including helping to gain the public support, serve the public with the huge range of information, obtain and utilize the opinion from the public into the government's administration as well as help to penetrate the necessity and demand of the public.

In the meantime, Kearns, Bend and Stern (2002) posits that e-participation may have real potential to connect citizens with the political process between elections by facilitating, broadening and deepening participation in a variety of ways. E-participation can facilitate involvement, by making it simpler and easier for public to obtain information, follow the political process, scrutinize government and connect with the views and opinions of others. It can also make it easier for citizens to form groups of

likeminded people and to campaign on issues of some importance to them. E-participation also help to broaden participation by creating new channels of democratic inclusion which may make participation less intimidating and more inclusive of previously excluded or hard to reach groups. Besides, e-participation also helps in expanding public involvement in political processes by increasing the frequency and enriching the content of dialogue between citizens, elected representatives and all levels of government

Other than that, e-participation opens new possibilities to solicit public input to the government decision-making in more convenient methods. Instead of coming to a physical location or filling out of a paper survey, public now can visit specific website to file complaints or services requests, report their dissatisfaction level with the government service and conduct synchronous discussion with officials and other fellow citizens to find solutions and improve government performance (Ho, 2007). In addition, e-participation also helps in improvising public involvement in the government as it provides a platform for both government and public to communicate, cooperate and learn in a meaningful way as well as offer the public with valuable knowledge regarding the underlying principle and intricacy of the government's policies implementation and authorized action (Coleman and Gotze, as cited in Mohamad Aizi et al., 2011). Overall, among the benefits of e-participation such as saving time, lowering cost, higher quality services and higher transparency, Zheng and Schachter (2016) concludes that public saving time is the key advantage that encourages the public to adopt e-participation rather than traditional method of participation.

## **5.0 E-PARTICIPATION FRAMEWORK AND SCOPE**

In order to understand e-participation, there are various studies that are devoted to e-participation framework and scope. We recognized that different scholars may indicate different perspectives of e-participation which include framework, scope, model, areas, dimensions, strategies, process, forms, mechanisms and technologies. However, each of the study contributes to understand the complex layers in e-participation. Therefore, this section, based on the previous studies, descriptively deliberates the main aspects and layers in e-participation field for better understanding.

### **5.1 E-Participation Key Resources**

As e-participation allows public to engage with the government through certain technology, Mohamad Aizi et al. (2011) concludes that there are three key resources in e-participation namely citizen, process and technology. As shown in Figure 1, all these resources are interrelated. Citizen is the key resources even though they do not play a role in managing the information. However, citizen's active role in e-participation depends on the government initiatives through the structure of policies and training to assist the interaction through e-participation application. E-participation initiatives also include the design that fosters professional cooperation by actively involving citizen at every level of society in sharing information and knowledge of their opinion and suggestion for improvement. It is proven that government with the developed e-participation initiative and the cooperation between citizen and government will produce an effective and excellent working style and improve the democracy process. Therefore, Sæbø, et al. (2008) also stated that citizen is the focal point in e-participation implementation because the purpose of e-participation is to increase the ability of citizen to participate in the digital governance.

Next key resource is the process. This resource indicates that the management process in any government organization, either formal or informal, requires a flow of information. The element of this



process is in determining the ways of how to convey information by the government to the people and vice-versa. It also forms as a connection between technologies with citizen and becomes a resource to sustain the relationship between citizen and government. This process will play an important role because people will see whether the information delivered is accepted by the government and would further show whether the government is transparent or not. It should not only act as the relationship among government and people, but also to help establish ties between the people. The processes will help to produce the information needed by the government and to share the information for benefit people. (Mohamad Aizi et al., 2011).

E-participation is principally understood as technology-mediated interaction between the civil society and government (Sæbø, et al., 2008). Therefore, without technology as a key tool and resources, e-participation is unable to be achieved. Mohamad Aizi et al. (2011) posit that an effective technology in designing e-participation initiative will create an archive for the targeted citizen in exchanging information with the government. In the meantime, several countries have employed mobile technology as their process to make e-participation more successful. As for beginners in the running of e-participation like Malaysia, the authors suggest that Internet with the web-based system application is the best approach. Essentially, all these resources must play their own important role in order to have an effective e-participation.

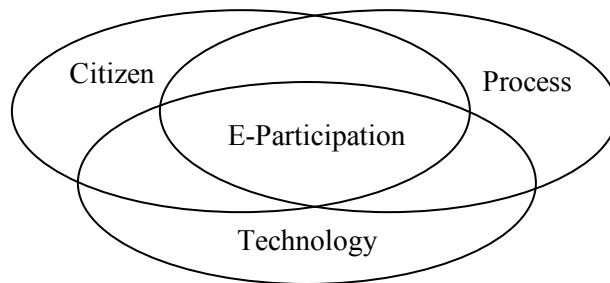


Figure 1: Keys of Realization of e-Participation

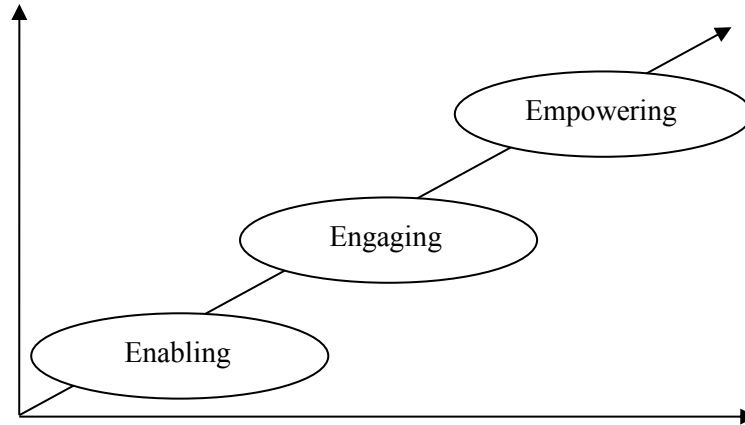
Source: Mohamad Aizi et al. (2011: 7)

## 5.2 E-Participation Level

Macintosh (2004) had developed three level of participation that can be used to characterize the e-participation initiatives as illustrates in Figure 2. First level is *e-enabling*, the use of technology to enable participation. E-enabling is about supporting those who would not typically access the internet and take advantage of the large amount of information available. The objectives are concerning with how technology can be used to reach wider audience by providing a range of technologies to cater for the diverse technical and communicative skills of citizens. The technology also needs to provide relevant information in a format that is both more accessible and more understandable. These two aspects of accessibility and understandability of information are addressed by e-enabling.

The second level is *e-engaging*, the use of technology to engage with public. E-engaging is concerned with consulting a wider audience to enable deeper contributions and support deliberative debate on policy issues. The use of the term 'to engage' in this context refers to the top-down consultation of citizens by government or parliament. The third level, *e-empowering*, refers to the use of technology to empower public. E-empowering public is concerned with supporting active participation and facilitating

bottom-up ideas to influence the political agenda. The previous top-down perspectives of democracy are characterized in terms of user access to information and reaction to government led initiatives. From the bottom-up perspective, the public are emerging as producers rather than just consumers of policy. This stage recognized that there is a need to allow the public to influence and participate in policy formulation (Macintosh, 2004).



**Figure 2: E-Participation Level**  
**Source: Macintosh (2004: 19)**

### 5.3 E-Participation Framework

According to Tambouris et al. (2007) it is equally important to have a better understanding on public participation and the relevant supporting ICT tools. Therefore, Tambouris et al. had developed the e-participation framework as portrayed in Figure 3. This framework indicates that e-participation should be a process that is intended to be democratic, which includes different participation areas and involve specific techniques that are supported by various categories of tools which are based on distinct technologies. The democratic processes include participation areas where citizens can interact with their representatives (G2C) or between themselves (C2C) and provide resources and social intelligence to the collective. While the participation areas have to do with the specific area or fields of citizen engagement and involvement in the democratic process. It addresses the issue of ‘what’, defining the context and the scope of the participatory process. Participation areas include the following: Information Provision, Community Building or Collaborative Environments, Consultation, Campaigning, Electioneering, Deliberation, Discourse, Mediation, Polling, Participatory Law-Making, Policy Processes and Citizenship Education.

As in the next step, the participatory techniques are defined as the methods used to engage and involve public as well as other stakeholders, decision-makers and politicians in the democratic process. Therefore, participatory techniques address the issue of ‘how’ the participatory process is brought to bear. There are numerous techniques that have been employed to facilitate participation. A comprehensive list of these techniques includes 21st Century Meetings, Charettes, Citizens’ Juries, Consensus Conferences, Deliberative Polling, Delphi, Expert Panels, Focus Groups, Public Hearings, Participatory Evaluations, Planning Cells, Scenario Workshops and others (Steyaert & Lisoir, 2005). Meanwhile, the categories of

tools refer to the software applications, products, tools and components that are being used to enhance and support the techniques which are in turn based on several diverse technologies. Categories of tools used to support e-participation include Chat Rooms, Discussion Forum/Boards, Decision-Making Games, Virtual Communities, Online Surgeries, ePanels, ePetitioning, eDeliberative Polling, eConsultation Platforms, eVoting Platforms and Suggestion Tools for Formal Planning Procedures. The introduction of tools and technologies in the traditional participatory process will lead to e-participation. However, the ICT tools cannot support every participatory technique. Participatory techniques may require significant modifications that alter their initial structure in order to be adapted to an e-participation context (Thorleifsdottir & Wimmer, 2006).

In this framework, Tambouris et al. (2007) concentrated that technologies cannot support the participatory process in isolation from tools, techniques and areas, while the democratic processes lie more in the field of political sciences. Thus, as the top-down approach addresses e-participation as a democratic process, therefore it could be a catalyst by facilitating communication between the government's policy makers and the public and between themselves (G2G). It should be noted that there is also a bottom-up approach that can be envisioned from the present framework. Emerging technologies can result in the development of innovative ICT tools. New tools can lead to the introduction of new participatory techniques that were not previously possible in the absence of supporting technology. These tools can lead to a broadening of the participation activities and hence to new types of public participation. In this case, the use of ICTs is no longer simply supportive, but rather takes on a proactive role, which can result in a broadening and re-defining of the scope of the public.

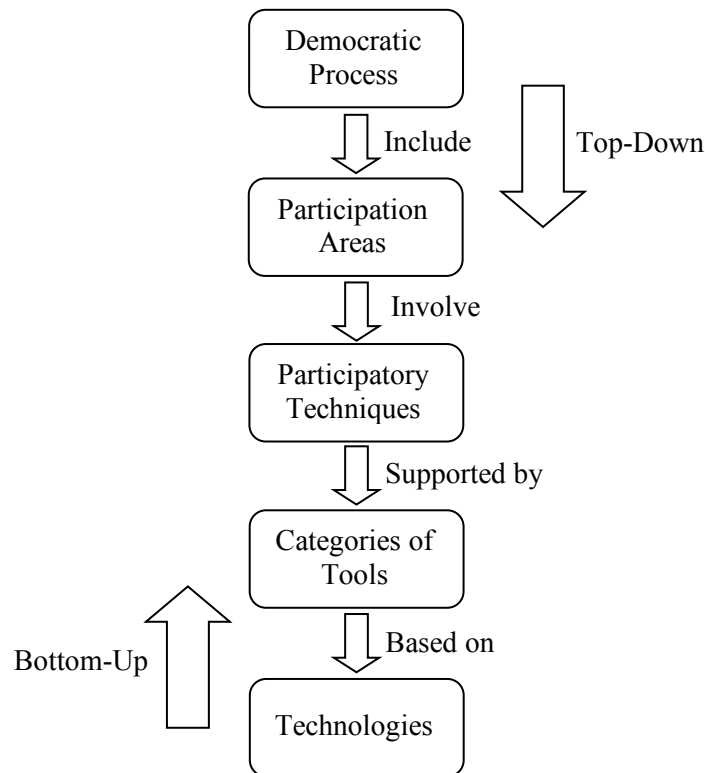


Figure 3: E-Participation Framework

Source: Tambouris et al. (2007: 288)

#### 5.4 E-Participation Tools

The introduction of ICT tools is the domain of public participation that leads to e-participation (Kalampokis, Tambouris, & Tarabanis, 2008). According to Thorleifsdottir and Wimmer (2006) there are several software applications, tools and components that have been used in e-participation projects that range from weblogs and alert mechanisms to the more sophisticated consultation platforms. Thorleifsdottir and Wimmer further expand the list of e-participation tools that have been developed by Macintosh, Coleman and Lalljee (2005) into different categories namely the core e-participation tools, the tools extensively used in e-participation and the basic tools of e-participation. **The core e-participation tools** include Chat Rooms, Discussion Forum/Boards, Decision-Making Games, Virtual Communities, Online Surgeries, ePanels, ePetitioning, eDeliberative Polling, eConsultation Platforms, eVoting Platforms and Suggestion Tools for Formal Planning Procedures. In the meantime, the **tools extensively used in e-participation** include Webcasts, Podcasts, Wiki, Blogs, Quick Polls, Surveys and GIS-Tools. Meanwhile, **the basic tools of e-participation** include Search Engines, Alert Services, Online Newsletters, Frequently Asked Question (FAQ), Listservs, Web Portals and Groupware Tools. Above all, there are various sophisticated tools that available in supporting e-participation implementation and currently these tools and technologies also are constantly growing. However, to understand each of the tools requires further in-depth analysis and comprehensive discussion.

#### 5.5 E-Participation Index

E-Participation Index (EPI) refers to the government willingness to use ICT to provide high quality information and effective communication tools for the specific purpose of empowering people for able participation in consultations and decision making both in their capacity as consumers of public services and as citizens. In the simple term, EPI captures the dimensions of government to citizen interaction and inclusion by assessing the extent to which governments proactively solicit the citizen input. The 2018 Survey measures e-participation through the EPI based on three main elements consisting of e-information, e-consultation and e-decision-making (United Nation, 2018)

The first level is **e-information**, refers to the availability of online information. Governments should provide people with the information through the ICT channels to help them more informed on the choices at the next stage of consultation. E-information is critical because without the access to publicly held information, participation cannot be evidence-based, fully relevant or significant. Results shown that the Members States have shared an increasing amount of information with the public, which mostly regarding the education and health and followed by social welfare and environment (United Nation, 2018). Basically, e-information level is about making it possible for the public know and acknowledge everything by making the needed information available. The second level is **e-consultation**, which refers to the online public consultations. It allows public to be a part of the deliberation process regarding the decision that can be taken on crafting new policies, designing new services or projects. However, e-consultation does not mean that the government is obligated to use the inputs that received. Rather, it could influence the information obtained to better respond to public sentiments on a subject (United Nation, 2018). The government website explains e-consultation mechanisms and tools. It offers a choice of public policy topics online for discussion with real time and archived access to audios and videos of public meetings. E-consultation it is when the government encourages public to participate in discussions (United Nation, 2008).

Meanwhile, the third level is *e-decision-making* refers to directly involving the public in the decision-making process. There are two examples on how the public can provide their own input: (i) through direct e-voting and (ii) by identifying preferred or popular options and proposals by rating them through social media's function such as "Like/Dislike". While policy-making is the logical outcome of these types of public engagement activities; information gathering and consultations are equally valuable participation forms in their own right. Recently, policy discourse has been gaining special attention as new software tools are creating more complex and sophisticated systems of deliberation online (United Nation, 2018). In other word, e-decision-making evaluates the extent of a government's commitment to e-participation, as evidenced by the conclusive acknowledgement of an individual public's input and take it into account when making decisions as well as provide actual feedback on the outcomes of specific issues (United Nation, 2008).

## 6.0 E-PARTICIPATION EXPERIENCES: MALAYSIA AND OTHER COUNTRIES

The EPI discuss above is the main measurement used by the United Nation in measuring the e-participation performance among countries. In the 2018 Survey, the EPI was used in assessing the availability of e-participation tools on national government portals. It is noted in the 2018 Survey that more and more governments are encouraging citizens and businesses to collaborate by contributing ideas and providing feedback. According to the United Nation (2018) there are main e-participation features that measures in the survey include:

- Availability of sources of archived information such as policies, legal documents, budgets; use of digital channels including mobile devices; and open data technologies in the areas of education, health, finance, social welfare, labour, environment.
- Availability of online information regarding citizens' rights to access government information such as Freedom of Information Act or Access to Information Act.
- Evidence about government partnership or collaboration with third parties namely civil society or private sector in providing services.
- Evidence about free access to government online services through the main portal, kiosks, community centres, post offices, libraries, public spaces or free Wi-Fi.
- Availability of open datasets in machine-readable non-proprietary formats and related policies/guidance.
- Evidence about collaborative co-production, crowdfunding.
- Evidence about engaging citizens in consultation/communication to improve online/mobile services and raise citizens' satisfaction.
- Evidence about engaging citizens in consultation on education, health, finance, social welfare, labour, environment.
- Availability of personal data protection legislation online.
- Evidence about opportunities for the public to propose new open datasets to be available online.
- Availability of e-participation policies/mission statements.
- Availability of public procurement notifications and tender results online.
- Availability of online tools on the national portal to seek public opinion and other input in raw (non-deliberative) form policy formation.
- Evidence on decisions made that included results from online consultation with citizens in the education, health, finance, social welfare, labour, and environment sectors.
- Evidence about governments' publishing outcomes of policy consultations online

The result from the survey shows Denmark, Finland, Republic of Korea are ranked as global leaders on e-participation while Netherlands, Australia, Japan, New Zealand, United Kingdom, United States and Spain are following closely behind. Table 1 summarize the top ten countries that leading in e-participation. The top rank countries probably fulfilled most of the e-participation features. According to the United Nation (2018) the countries that are leading in e-participation are implementing different initiatives. For example, in **Denmark**, e-participation is part of the country's Digital Strategy for 2016-2020. It is mean that e-participation play the key role in every government's aspects. The report by the European Commission (2015) includes the details on the e-participation initiatives that have been implemented in Denmark. Citizens use their digital IDs called NemID to interact with the government, banks and private sector across a wide range of services. With their IDs, citizen simply can make bank transactions, retrieve tax returns from a government portal, and even schedule appointments with their hairdressers. Denmark is looking into personalized digital services, by providing targeted content for citizens on their NemID portals. For example, citizens at the brink of retirement will be presented with retirement planning options when they log into their portals. The country has also launched Digital Post, a government-provided digital letter box where citizens receive communications from the state. Today, over 90% of citizens aged 15 and above have their personal digital post-boxes and use it to communicate with public agencies and it resulted cutting costs across the whole public sector.

**Table 1: Top 10 E-Participation Performers**

Rank	Country	Index
1	Denmark	1.000
1	Finland	1.000
1	Republic of Korea	1.000
4	Netherlands	0.9888
5	Australia	0.9831
5	Japan	0.9831
5	New Zealand	0.9831
5	Spain	0.9831
5	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	0.9831
5	United States of America	0.9831

Source: United Nation, 2008.

In **Australia**, all agencies designing new or redeveloping public-facing services must meet the Australian Digital Service Standard, including ensuring the proposed service is accessible to all users, regardless of their ability and environment. Meanwhile **Japan** has the Digital Government Idea Box 2017 as a venue to widely discuss e-governance issues with its citizens and realize higher quality e-services. The successful e-participation implementation in **Finland**, shown that openness and democratic principles are key values and principles that are being applied in the digital era through the Openness of Government Act which was revised in 1999. Openness and citizen participation have been actively developed during the last decades. Good examples of these developments are the Government's Project Register (HARE) that established in 1999; the otakantaa.fi website that established in 2000 to promote public discussion on government proposals; the Hear Citizens project (2000-2005); the Government's Policy Program on Citizen Participation (2003-2007) and the on-going Democracy Network established in 2007. In the meantime, the government portal, www.demokratia.fi, available in Finnish and Swedish languages only, allows any citizen to suggest initiatives or make comments to the national as well as local

government. One of the key services is the Citizen's Initiative for a legislative proposal launched in fall of 2012. Initiatives that collect over 50,000 signatures at a given time are referred to the parliament to be assessed for legislative reform. In 2015, the Government initiated a program helping those who are unable or are not familiar to using digital services. The Ministry of Finance set up a project called HELP-project to draft a proposal on ensuring availability of sufficient assistance for those who need help in using digital services. It also set up an Advisory Board as known as 'Digitalization of Everyday Life' that consisting of representatives from over 20 civil society organizations and the academia, to ensure the diverse needs of service users are considered in the implementation of the goal to digitize public services (United Nation, 2018).

In the meantime, **Brazil** supports the social participation through the development of Digital Governance Strategy of Brazil which the objectives include: (i) to endorse the collaboration in the public policies cycle, (ii) to strengthen the social participation in the creation and improvement of digital public services, and (iii) to improve the direct interaction between the government and society. In 2014, the President signed Decree 8.243 establishing the National Social Participation Policy and creating the National System of Social Participation managed by the Secretary of Government of the Presidency of the Republic. Through its social participation platform called Participa.br ([www.participa.br](http://www.participa.br)), the initiative is engaging in the development of free software and in body communication tools, discussion forums, chat rooms, videos, maps, participation trails and other means of online social consultation. Since its creation, Participa.br has been hosting over 200 participatory processes and more than 30 public government consultations. The Brazilian open data policy has as its fundamental objectives: the promotion of transparency and social participation, the development of new and better government services, the increase of public integrity, and the promotion of entrepreneurship. The Federal Executive Branch of the Ministry of Planning coordinates this policy. Moreover, to better promote social participation, Knowledge Networks was established through Ordinance No. 290 of 2016, inviting citizens, institutions and communities to become involved in thematic discussion groups, in the E-Government Portal (United Nation, 2018).

Although **Malaysia** was not in the leading countries, but Malaysia performed better in 2018 by placed in rank 32 compare to 47 rank out of 193 countries in 2016 (United Nation 2016). In making e-participation in Malaysia reality, MAMPU (2018) highlighted through e-participation policy that the policy aims to explore the culture and practice of e-participation in order to improve transparency and public participation in improving the quality of services Malaysia Government. The government recognizes public involvement to enable Malaysia Government to explore a broader perspective, information resources, and potential solutions to improve results and services. It also provides the basis for a productive relationship, better dialogue and discussion and orderly governance. The objective of this investment is to involve the citizens in the policy development and decision making process using information and communication technologies. Among the communication channels used are Portal Poll, Public Participation, Portal Feedback which involve feedback, questions, complaints or suggestions, Customer Satisfaction Survey and Social Media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube.

However, Mohd Aizi et al. (2012) assert that there is no e-participation framework in promoting public participation in Malaysia's public policy formulation. In the meantime, we realized that there are lacks of studies which evaluate e-participation initiatives in Malaysia. Therefore, we believed that e-participation implementation in Malaysia is still in its early stage. Moreover, our government mostly provides the public with the basic tools such as opinion pools, complaints and feedback as well as media social such as Facebook. E-forum tools in the local government website, however, mostly are not working. But we believe that the government has put their effort in involving the public even though it is not sophisticated as other leading countries. Thus, recently, Malaysia has launched Mobile Cakna as one of the electronic medium where the public can participate and address their concern in any related issues. This initiative under The Ministry of Urban Wellbeing, Housing and Local Government aimed to bring

the public closer to the local government authorities (PBT). Public have an easy access to make a complaint and receive the responsive feedback through mobile (The Ministry of Urban Wellbeing, Housing and Local, 2015).

## 7.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Through e-participation, the public can convey their needs and the government's action would be very much valuable to the public's aspiration. The successful of e-participation depends on various elements and active role from all parties such as public, government and non-governmental agencies. E-participation in Malaysia is still in its infancy and lagged from other develop countries in term of the technologies and tools in e-participation. However, it is not impossible to be achieved in the future if we prepare ourselves and enhance each of e-participation tools and features. Malaysia should learn from the successful e-participation implementation of other countries. Above and beyond, although this study descriptively discusses on e-participation concept without any in-depth critical argument in the discussed element, we hope it provides useful insight, knowledge and understanding to the reader. Therefore, the future study would be very much valuable if it could evaluate the successful factor and challenges aspect of e-participation as well as investigate the e-participation tools within its context comprehensively.

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