Chapter 59
An Empirical Study of
E-Participation Levels in Jordan

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between citizens and governments is the core of e-government. E-participation is one of the political dimensions of e-government which focuses on informing, consulting, involving, collaborating, and empowering citizens to take part of the decision making process. This study adopted a framework for the five levels of e-participation and tried to test such model empirically using 400 responses from Jordanians. The study tried to measure Jordanian perceptions towards e-participation initiatives and practices in Jordan, and to measure the achievements on each level as perceived and reported by subjects. Results indicated that the highest perceived level was e-involving, and the lowest was e-consulting. Also, the CFA results indicated a distorted distribution of items between the major levels. Results of other issues explored are discussed further in this study.

1. INTRODUCTION

The foundation of e-government concept is to open channels with citizens and try to understand their needs. E-participation is the major electronic channel to communicate with citizens, and reach them where ever they are. The latest trends in e-government research focus on open government concept, where e-participation is a major dimension of the Obama initiative and can drive governments (Abu-Shanab, 2015). The focus on information quality and e-government success is emphasized by previous research (Alenezi, 2015), where transparency and collaboration are the other two dimensions of open government. Based on that, research on e-participation is becoming more important.

Research proposed many models that describe e-participation levels and the technical tools to facilitate each level's requirements. It is important to understand how e-participation can serve the political process and open doors for a successful relationship between citizens and governments. It is important

to understand e-participation, its levels, and the needed/suitable tools for each level. It is our believe that e-participation is the backbone of the democratic process, and thus research emphasized its importance and its role to the success of e-government projects (Schlosberg et al., 2007; Sæbø et al., 2008; Peristeras et al., 2009). Research indicated that e-participation initiative would not succeed if its website is not easy to use and useful, and the cost of making any transaction is low (Al-Quraan & Abu-Shanab, 2015).

This study adopted a five level schema that was reported in previous research. The major levels of e-participation proposed in this study are: e-informing, e-consulting, e-involving, e-collaborating, and e-empowering. On the other hand, for each participation level, specific tools and technologies can serve the objectives of governments and the communication type. A set of tools and technologies were proposed by the work of Abu-Shanab & Al-Dalou' (2012), and related to each level. Their study tried to conceptually synthesize the levels of e-participation based on a Meta analysis of studies and concluded to a set of levels that comprehensively sum all aspects of e-participation. The second contribution of their study is to propose a set of tools and performance indicators of each level.

This study tried to empirically explore the Jordanian society in relation to the specific levels of e-participation. The study adopted the scheme of five levels and some of the indicators proposed by previous research (Abu-Shanab & Al-Dalou', 2012; Al-Dalou' & Abu-Shanab, 2013). The work is part of an unpublished graduation project for Raya Al-Dalou', a master student in the MIS department at Yarmouk University. The following section will review the literature focusing on three major areas: e-participation levels and stages, e-participation tools and technologies, and the role of social media. Following is the research methodology used in this study. The following section explores the data used and the analysis and discussion,. Finally, conclusions and future work are depicted at the end.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The Concept of E-Participation

Citizens' participation is not a new phenomenon; it started in ancient Athens, where governments turned to the representative democracy because of the augmented number of citizens (Clive, 2012). Furthermore, and with several indicators of the crisis in democracy and administrative decision-making process, public authorities started to increase citizen's participation directly (Schlosberg, Shulman & Zavestoski, 2007) utilizing many new channels and tools to involve citizens in public policy processes. The emergence of new information and communication technologies (ICT) especially the Internet supported this reengaging the public in the political arena (Åström & Granberg, 2007). Based on all of that, huge investments were devoted by governments all over the world in ICT to reap the benefits of electronic participation (so called e-participation).

The adoption of ICT for the purpose of improving citizens' participation is emerging as a new technologically-mediated innovation in "government to citizen" (G2C) relationships or a dimension of the new e-democracy era (Medaglia, 2007). In the service dimension of e-government, research indicated the importance of citizens' centric approach while developing e-government projects (Weerakkody et al., 2012). Other research emphasized the role of human resources factors, partnership, availability of resources, and systems, structures and processes are all predictors of the success of implementing innovations in public sector organizations (Al-Refaie et al., 2014).

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