

A REVIEW OF E-PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN STRENGTHENING GOVERNMENT GOVERNANCE

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ABSTRACT

E-public participation is assuming an increasingly significant role in the process of public decision-making. Comprehending the present state, deficiencies, and prospective avenues of research regarding the design of e-government platforms is of the utmost importance, specifically with regard to strategies that enhance interactive engagement with public sentiments. This paper undertakes an initial endeavor to conduct a historical literature review on e-public engagement by reconsidering several concepts, such as the public sphere, public engagement, e-public engagement, and public engagement. Thus, the notion of public engagement is elucidated, and the public requirements framework is introduced to underscore the necessity of redesigning the contents of e-government platforms in order to foster greater citizen interaction. Future researchers are encouraged to explore a theoretical framework that centers on e-public engagement, according to the findings of this paper's review.

Keywords: E-engagement, e-participation, e-government, and the public sphere

1. INTRODUCTION

A number of prior studies have documented the positive effects of e-public engagement, which is also known as e-participation, on both governments and individuals. While considerable emphasis has been placed on the consequences of governments utilizing Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to inform, communicate with, and involve their citizens in the decision-making process of states, there has been comparatively little effort to examine the most effective methods of involving citizens with ICT artifacts. Investigating public engagement via ICT will not only assist policymakers in refining their ICT strategies, but it will also aid researchers in developing a theoretical comprehension of how ICT might facilitate the public decision-making process. The objective of this study is to examine the progression of public engagement within the realm of governance, present the current status of research on electronic public engagement, and advocate for the establishment of a conceptual level of engagement to aid electronic public engagement. Three research concerns are addressed in the research paper: 1) Define electronic public engagement. 2) Which variables have been identified as influencing e-public engagement in prior research? 3) In terms of e-public engagement research, what is the present research void? A comprehensive examination and evaluation of 91 articles, primarily sourced from Google Scholar, is provided. By conducting a thorough examination of the philosophical and social origins of public engagement, this article makes a scholarly contribution to the field of e-government and suggests a research agenda for e-public engagement.

2. METHODOLOGY

Several studies have shown that e-public engagement, or e-participation, benefits governments and individuals. The effects of governments using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to inform, communicate with, and involve citizens in state decision-making have received much attention, but the best ways to involve citizens with ICT artifacts have not. Investigating public interaction via ICT can help policymakers improve their ICT policies and scholars understand how ICT might benefit public decision-making. This paper examines public involvement in governance, presents the current state of research on electronic public engagement, and advocates for a conceptual level of participation to assist electronic public interaction. Three research issues are addressed in the paper: 1) Define e-public involvement. 2) Prior research has indicated which elements affect e-public engagement? 3) What research gap exists in e-public engagement? A thorough review of 91 Google Scholar publications is offered. This essay contributes to e-government scholarship and proposes an e-public engagement research agenda by examining the philosophical and sociological roots of public involvement.

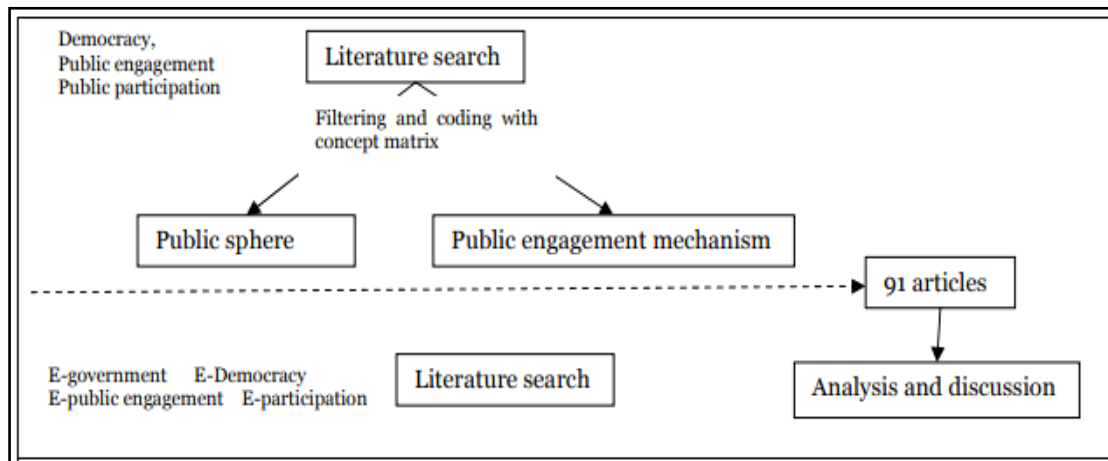


Figure 1. Research Process

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

First, analyze literature search results to provide a historical assessment of the public realm and public engagement to answer the first research question, "What is e-public engagement?" By studying the history of e-public interaction, we may better understand how it evolved from conventional public participation.

Public Sphere

The public sphere originated in ancient Greek society, which stretches back over two millennia. Plato and Aristotle envisioned a polis-oikos civilization. The polis' basic social unit, the oikos, represents "master and slave, husband and wife, father and child" (Roy 1999, p. 1). The public sphere, the city or state, is represented by houses, people, and justice officials in the polis (Kocan 2008). In contrast, Jurgen Habermas, a prominent German sociologist who coined the public sphere in 1962, proposes a tripartite society with a realm of private autonomy similar to Aristotle's oikos, a public power sphere with the power to govern, and a domain of private individuals who converge to form a public sphere that mediates between the public power and private individuals. Habermas (1964, p. 49) defines the public sphere as a realm where public opinion may be approximated, whereas public opinion incorporates diverse viewpoints and beliefs (Herbst 1993). Government should not restrict assembly or speech in the public domain. All people should have unlimited access, the freedom to voice their own viewpoints, and the right to contradict those of others in public interest discussions. Habermas also advocated that private persons build a public realm via unrestrained conversation. According to Habermas 1964, p. 49, there are two types of public spheres: the political public sphere, which expresses public opinion on politics and "issues associated with the operation of the state"

The public sphere is a platform for non-political, broad discussions. These debates depend on constituents' views and activities (Fraser 1992; Hauser 1999).

Each public sphere category remains open to anyone. The literal public sphere has existed since human society began, but the political public sphere emerged alongside social structures and systems (Graham 2012; Grbea 2004; Pusey 1987b; Shirky 2011) and was driven by revolutionary movements like the French and American revolutions (Kellner 2000).

Public Engagement

In contrast, the Economic and Social Research Council (2008) defines public involvement as follows: "the participation of experts in dialogue, comprehension, and listening with non-specialists." Medical researchers have widely embraced patient and public involvement/engagement (PPE/PPI), an extension of public engagement. Lorenc and Robinson describe this as consulting, listening to, and engaging patients and the public to create and execute services that meet patients' needs, enhancing healthcare results and patient experience. Citizen science involves the public in scientific research. This strategy lets researchers include the public.

This project will examine public involvement in governance and state decisions. Phillips (2013) defines public engagement as a democratic process in which the public actively participates in government. The Economic and Social Research Council defines public engagement professionals as government and policymakers. Non-specialists may mean the public. Thus, public engagement involves the public in government policymaking. At work, Rowe and Frewer (2005) divided public interaction into three levels. The first layer is passive public participation via communication. The state provides information to the public, who consumes it. Newsletters, booklets, and non-interactive TV are examples. The second quasi-active public involvement stage is public consultation. The state obtains public information monodirectionally via a state-determined procedure. Examples: voting, referendums, petition registration, surveys, etc.

Public involvement fosters active public interaction at the third level. In this system, information travels between the State and the public, with both trying to influence the other. Example: citizens' committees, deliberative opinion surveys, focus groups, and public hearings.

Public engagement includes public information, consultation, participation, cooperation, and empowerment, according to IAP2 (2007). Public information, like public communication, provides neutral and objective facts to the public to help them comprehend government or policymaker issues. Public consultation entails actively seeking public feedback on government-approved alternatives or solutions. Public involvement involves include public input in alternative solution creation and in the resolution process. Public input must be included in alternative development and solution selection to encourage public participation. Citizen juries, delegated decisions, and votes empower the people by giving them final say. IAP2 (2007), unlike Rowe and Frewer (2005) and the previous, focuses on how the State incorporates public information into its decision-making process. The public realm facilitates citizen discourse and information exchange outside of authority, yet public engagement lets authority receive, evaluate, and utilize public information. Despite the belief that the public sphere and public power sphere are separate, citizens have influenced state decision-making through public empowerment, communication, consultation, deliberation, and participation. Deliberative democracy and participative democracy categorize how people affect governmental decision-making (Cini 2011). Participatory democracy's main goals are to (1) guarantee all citizens' active participation in decision-making processes that affect their standard of living and conduct of life, and (2) require the government to provide the necessary mechanisms for the public to autonomously contribute to said decision-making. Participatory democracy includes petition registration, surveys, balloting, and referendums (Rowe and Frewer 2005). This initiative measures public participation in state determination deliberations. Deliberative democracy emphasised discussion and public-state discourse as government decision-making (Fung 2003). Citizens actively engage when a process justifies all acceptable and accessible viewpoints, attitudes, and judgments. Focus groups, deliberative opinion surveys, public hearings, citizens' committees, and so on are examples of mechanisms (Rowe and Frewer 2005), therefore the quality of the argument or discourse influences its efficacy. Participatory and deliberative democracies benefit from public engagement.

The Internet: Its Effects on the Public Sphere and Public Engagement

E-public Sphere

After the French and American Revolutions of 1789 and 1665 and the Age of Enlightenment (1620-1780), the liberal public sphere arose. British, French, and German coffee houses, salons, and Tischgesellschaften were the epicenter of these public spheres from 1780 to 1880 (Habermas 1989). Habermas (1997) states that newspapers, magazines, radio, and television were needed to expand the public sphere. For this reason, newspapers, radio, and television were the new public communication mediums in the preceding century. Mass media, especially mass-circulation newspapers, radios, and TVs, have strengthened the public sphere by hosting rational-critical discussions and allowing public voice. Ken Loach's 1960s BBC film "Cathy Come Home" inspired a new public conversation on homelessness and changed UK housing policy. Mass media has had many negative effects, especially when state capitalism, the cultural industries, and economic companies and large business gain power in public spaces (Kellner 2000). Government agencies and international businesses that controlled the media dominated the public realm, reducing people to consumers of goods, services, political administration, and spectacle. From 1923 until 1945, the German government and Nazis strictly regulated radio broadcasts (von Saldern 2004). Radio was similarly regulated by the French government from 1922 to 1940 (Starr 2004). These activities advanced state and ruler goals. The McCarthyism era of the 1950s, when Joseph Raymond McCarthy unscrupulously accused many Americans of being communists and blacklisted media organizations to discourage Communism, is another example. These events weakened the public sphere as a platform for public conversation, deteriorating it. After controlling the few-to-many broadcasting infrastructure, a few people controlled a nation's ideas and perceptions (Rheingold 2004).

Hans Magnus Enzensberger proposed a participatory mass media system that prioritized communication above distribution in the 1970s to address the issues of mass media's few-to-many design and internet technology. Such media might revive a lethargic public realm (Enzensberger 2000). The internet facilitates communication and the quick and easy spread of huge amounts of information, supporting Enzensberger's notion. The new political technology, the e-public realm, is called the "new public sphere."

The online e-public sphere incorporates Habermas's (1989) Public Sphere, but it aims to reach a broader audience. This forum welcomes meaningful conversation regardless of socioeconomic status. It may serve as a common interest where people can discuss governmental issues rationally and discerningly, producing public opinion that holds leaders accountable. A state-independent realm is created. It may include everyone, regardless of region or politics. The e-public sphere needs internet access and e-literacy, which limits it.

E-public Engagement

Newsletters, leaflets, non-interactive television, balloting, referendums, petition signing, surveys, opinion polls, focus groups, public hearings, citizens' committees, and other methods were initially employed to engage the public (Dahl 1998; Phillips 2013; Rowe and Frewer 2005). The proliferation of the internet at the societal level has given rise to e-public engagement as a prominent area of research. E-public engagement, also referred to as e-participation, encompasses initiatives spearheaded by the government that leverage technology, specifically the internet, to foster and facilitate active citizenship with the aim of advancing equitable and effective governance and society at large (Saebø et al. 2008), with a particular emphasis on policy formulation (Ahmed 2006). With the assistance of ICT, e-public engagement refers to the interaction between governments and constituents. U.N. (2014) states that e-public engagement typically comprises electronic decision-making, electronic information, and electronic consultation.

E-engagement has the potential to strengthen both deliberative and participatory democracies, according to a review of the relevant literature. E-engagement has considerable potential for both unidirectional and bidirectional information transmission between the government and the general public. E-engagement will improve the majority of conventional public engagement frameworks by enabling the targeting of a larger audience via enhanced interactive functions. In the sections that follow, we provide summaries of three distinct styles of e-public engagement: e-decision-making, e-information, and e-consultation.

E-decision-making Citizenship empowerment and involvement in policymaking, service creation, and delivery techniques are improved. E-decision-making allows citizens to engage in government decisions (Charalabidis and Loukis 2012; IAP2 2007). Electronic decision-making is still developing. "Ideological notion"—Mainka et al. (2015, p. 239). TOM (English: "Tana Otsustan Mina"), the Estonian government's computerized decision-making system, is an example. Glencross (2009) says that TOM is more than a platform for obtaining signatures or votes; it allows individuals to debate legislative ideas within ten days of filing. Submission owners make changes based on public input before the 10-day deadline. The audience votes on the contribution, sends it to the relevant government agency, and TOM posts a response within one month of the window closing.

E-information enables citizens to participate by providing public information that is readily available and accessible without the need for special request. E-information was described by Mergel (2013) as transparency. While the transfer of information from governments to citizens is unidirectional, it has the potential to reach a more targeted audience in comparison to mass media.

E-consultation enables governments to solicit and incorporate constituent input into the formulation and operation of state services and policies. Electronic consultations may be active or quasi-active. Liberal and individualized, quasi-active e-consultation entails the unidirectional transmission of information from citizens to governments via predetermined channels established by the government (Hands 2005; Mergel 2013; Rowe and Frewer 2005). Examples of such channels include online petitions and surveys. Active electronic consultation is a reflective process that entails a reciprocal exchange of information between the government and its constituents. In this context, "strong democracy is fostered among citizens and between citizens and representatives through the use of computer-mediated communication" (Hands 2005, p. 13). Social media platforms have enabled active e-consultation, which consists of conversations occurring in real time (Hartmann et al. 2013). In addition to being user-centric, active e-consultation should be communicative, interactive, open, and social. According to Wright and Street (2007), governments employ three primary strategies to conduct active e-consultation: (1) the policy forums, which are ordinarily well-organized and specialized, facilitate the dissemination of policy documents to the public for perusal, followed by the submission of comments or inquiries by citizens. The 'have your say' sections, characterised by unstructured and open dialogues, often entail citizens instigating discussions on matters of personal significance, which may or may not align with the government's priorities. (3) the hybrid paradigm in which the policy forum and "have your say" areas are distinct. According to Flew (2005), e-government encompasses more than the provision of information, electronic service delivery, and limited consultation via e-voting and e-petitions. Flew emphasizes the advantages of active e-consultation in this regard. It is primarily about establishing concrete avenues for citizens to contribute their expertise to policymaking. Through e-deliberation, citizens participate in a procedure in which generally accessible and mutually acceptable justifications are provided for every opinion, position, and decision. It enables the formation of the e-public sphere, promotes a collaborative approach to generating solutions within the state, and engages both citizens and public officials who are impacted by the issue. Furthermore, it fosters consensus-building and reciprocal understanding by means of public discourse, which serves to refine and revise preferences. Active electronic consultation platforms offer a means for individuals to participate in public deliberations while also granting governments the ability to organize, coordinate, and appropriate these discussions. Given the perpetual nature of such discussions in the public sphere and the potential for incitement of civil unrest if appropriated by activists or opponents of the state, this becomes an

extremely crucial point. Moreover, according to a study by Jensen (2003, p. 349), public online political debate platforms achieve democratic ideals of transparency, deliberation, enlightenment, and respect more effectively than private ones.

Factors Affecting Active E-public Engagement

Active participation on the internet, especially social media, has become crucial for marketers who want to improve customers' online experiences, increase ad interest, and increase revenue. Social media has also been used by politicians to recruit supporters. Organizations and people are interested in how well their websites and content engage customers and followers.

E-public interaction relies on government information, or "a government's attempt at transparency." According to Zuiderwijk et al. (2012), e-public interaction began with the government sharing information that the public used. Citizens gave the government input on information implementation. This "data produced or commissioned by government or government controlled entities" "can be freely used, reused, and redistributed by anyone". Also known as Open Government Data. Open Government Data (OGD) enables participatory governance, transparency, and a "read/write" society where citizens watch and comment on government activities (Susha et al. 2015). It is believed that OGD, like other internet artifacts, is valuable for its diffusion and "publication." Several scholars believe that the subject's true value is in helping the public, audience, or citizens improve their decision-making and actively participate in public affairs. Internet access and online presence do not immediately translate to e-public participation; individuals must actively interact with the material. Active e-engagement requires individuals to interact with government material and information online before contributing, which leads to cooperation. Governments must move beyond providing information and content online to engage their citizens. Information and substance must engage the people before governments can. From this perspective, e-public interaction must prioritize ICT-based information and content engagement. The degree to which citizens engage with and pay attention to government online content (e.g. OGD) is determined by contribution to the discourse (Albrecht 2006; Dahlberg 2001; Wright and Street 2007). Ubaldi (2013) called this "contribution in public affairs."

E-public engagement research has mostly focused on government-owned platforms and how their layout and moderation support or hinder dialogue. Few studies have examined the value of government-provided material and information and its influence on e-public involvement (Janssen et al. 2012). Zuiderwijk et al. (2014) observed that people' use of government information is an unknown niche area that warrants additional research. This error must be corrected since insightful comments indicate audience involvement with the topic (Sample 2014).

4. CONCLUSIONS

This research provides a comprehensive literature overview of e-public engagement's history. We tried to answer three questions: 1) How does electronic public involvement relate? 2) Prior research has indicated which elements affect e-public engagement? 3) What research gap exists in e-public engagement? We analyzed the growth of public sphere and public interaction in the internet era using Habermas's (1964) paradigm. The internet has expanded the conventional public realm but also increased the bar for public engagement; people must have internet access to participate in public affairs. E-public engagement, a government-led effort, promotes and enables citizen-government contact (by e-consultation or e-information) to enhance public decision-making using ICT, notably the internet. How often individuals interact with government online information is the biggest factor in e-public engagement. However, most government public consultation sites' content fails to engage the public. Audience-content interaction is vital for e-public deliberative discourse, therefore it should be the first step toward e-public consultation affordances. Citizens must abstractly interact with government web information before substantive e-public consultation.

Currently, there is not enough study to address the growing question: "What are the determinants that promote citizen-content engagement on the internet?" Prior research has relied on government online content dissemination and discussion as sufficient evidence of citizen-content engagement. Some experts argue that audience involvement with online information is unrelated to its distribution. They also claim that internet comments may be irrelevant. Scholars have called for studies on how people use government-provided internet information.

Future research should focus on how citizens' interaction with government-provided online information can improve e-public engagement and consultation, rather than the wider effects of information and communication technology (ICT). Public involvement theories and methods have been scarce. Most studies use qualitative analysis, thus more empirical research is needed.

Quality analysis may limit this research. For a literature study, a well-coded database provides better analytical tools. Nvivo and other literature review tools will improve this paper's idea map. This section's restriction will be addressed in the next generation.

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