Determinants of e-participation in the citizens and the government initiatives: Insights from India

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ABSTRACT

The paper attempts to examine the determinants of two types of citizens' e-participation — initiated by the citizens and the government. The factors of e-participation were delineated from a review of democracy and e-participation literature and a regression model was developed. On the basis of 407 responses collected through an online and offline survey among the Indian participants, the model was tested. The analysis showed that the citizens' participation efficacy and values determine e-participation of both types. For the citizens' initiatives freedom to participate and legal support for the participation efforts were also the determining factors. The extant research on types of e-participation services is inadequate. The paper attempted to fill the gap and contributes in i) explaining the importance of facilitating multiple stakeholders' initiatives for improved citizens' participation ii) differentiating determining factors among e-participation initiatives and iii) suggesting policy recommendations for successful e-participation initiatives. The future research can focus on determinants for collaborative service initiatives from the citizens and government.

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1. Introduction

The present paper attempts to understand whether citizens participate differently in the e-democracy initiatives when started by themselves than the government and the possible reasons for this differential participation. The increasing global population makes government efforts to stay close to citizens more challenging especially for the populous and democratic countries like India [27]. The use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) provides support to this effort by enabling new ways for government to interact with the citizens [40,44,62]. However, poor participation by the citizens would fail to reach the desired results of e-democracy [55,64]. In India, political participation by the citizens appears to be declining [32]. The ease to access the public information and services via official web-pages is also not good, as India ranks 178 among the UN member states in cyber power, with accessibility score of 54.57 percent [33,39]. Electronic Participation is considered as "connecting beneficiaries of eGovernance initiatives with the policy-making group and involves identifying ways of giving the beneficiaries greater stake in the policy-shaping process" [53,54]. The ICTs enabled democratic participation is pre-requisite for policy making in the Internet era [31,79]. In these lines, it is essential to examine the factors that influence citizen's online democratic participation since future of democracy is heavily dependent on ICTs enabled developments activities [74]. The previous attempts to examine the electronic participation were limited to studies of service delivery forums and digital divide or adoption issues. The present paper examines the factors that influence e-democracy participation.

E-participation is triggered by events with a sense of urgency [79] and is influenced by the participants' offline political environment [5]. Citizen participation in offline events can be explained by the participants' ability, choice and mobilization efforts [94]. The initial levels of e-participation success depend on service adoption [43,81]. But, at higher levels e-democracy faces unique challenges including lack of political will and citizens' lack of trust in the functioning of institutions [61,98]. This paper recognizes the challenges of e-participation initiatives and examines various theories including capability, mobilization and adoption to identify the determinants of e-participation.

The e-democracy are initiated from multiple stakeholders. An improved technological capacity of the citizens may influence the policy makers to bring changes in their policies [17,59]. For

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instance, in 2012 Government of India brought out the first social media guidelines, after Indian citizens largely used the new media to voice their criticism against corrupt functioning of institutions during the Lokpal (Ombudsman) movement [77,84]. The efforts to identify the possible influence of these e-democracy efforts from citizens seem to be inadequate [42,49]. The paper attempts to fill the gap.

The paper is divided into seven sections. The first section set the context for the paper. The second section describes the theoretical background of citizen and government e-democracy efforts, and presents the research hypotheses. The third section presents the research methodology. The fourth and fifth section share the findings and discusses them respectively. The sixth section brings forward the implications of the study. The final section concludes the paper with suggestions for future work.

2. Theoretical framework

In examining e-participation it is important to address non-governmental e-democracy initiatives. Moreover, the diversity of the field and the influence of non-technological factors warrant use of multiple theories in e-participation research [59]. This section discusses characteristics of an e-democracy model that consists of citizen and government initiatives. By consulting theories of capability, mobilization, adoption, with appreciation of the unique challenges of e-democracy efforts, this section examines the influencing factors of the e-participation.

2.1. Electronic democracy efforts

Scholars define e-government as the use of ICTs for enabling improved service delivery to the citizens; whereas e-democracy is the subsequent stage of e-government that uses ICTs for enabling participatory functioning of democratic governance [43]. Scholars are concerned that e-government might not lead to e-democracy automatically [64], though perceive it as an initial step towards online democratic participation [50]. This civic engagement has different forms including administrative participation like elections have or autonomous participation like protest rallies [70]. Unlike e-government, the e-democracy involves multiple stakeholders' initiatives [10,41]. But few scholars recognize the difference between citizen and government initiatives. This can be result of ambiguous e-democracy models developed from multiple democracy theories [14,34,64]. Studies that explain stakeholder aspects of e-democracy are provided in Table 1. To address the ownership paradigm, an e-democracy model that rely on equal status for stakeholders is important for any e-participation research.

2.1.1. E-participation framework
The e-democracy models discussed by scholars identify citizen, government, vendors, corporate and media as the major

stakeholders for initiating e-participation services [79,23]. However in Indian context, it appears that other than government- and citizen-entities other stakeholder's interest in participation activities is always under suspicion [77]. The authoritative nature of e-democracy initiatives differs among stakeholders [23]. For instance, online communities, discussions groups, chat rooms, and blogs enable the citizens to initiate e-participation without any intervention from the government [67].

The participation in government and citizen initiatives differ from each other and demand specific forms of communications. For instance, government initiatives consist of formal communications while citizen initiatives may consist of informal communication. The government initiatives might guarantee legal support and hold responsible official to regulate and ensure two-way communication. For example, the e-petitioning systems from government may generate a reference number and citizen can challenge the decision in court. This government initiative provides awareness of audience such as knowing the official in charge of responding to complaints. The government initiatives require certain steps and type of participations [13] including signatures, other documents and time lines. Moreover, government initiatives have certainty in the delivery of outcomes and their impact, for instance in elections results [92]. The growing nature of participation and the participation cycle differ among different initiatives.

2.2. Influential theories in citizen e-participation

The e-democracy participation is taking place through various service channels that may be initiated by different stakeholders. The objective of participation in these forums may differ, for example in e-petitions the citizen may be 'pleading' to redress the grievance [68] in e-voting the citizen may participate to elect their political representative, whereas in deliberative forums including blogs citizen may participate to share their opinion about an issue. Verba, Schlozman, & Brady [94] suggest that citizen choice, ability and mobilization factors should be examined to explain the determinants of citizen participation. A summary of select studies that attempted to explain the determinants of e-participation is provided in Table A.1.

Few scholars rely on IS adoption theories including Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) for explaining the constructs of e-participation [63]. However [31], argued that use of Technology Adoption Models (TAM) and its derived models are inadequate to explain citizen e-participation, and insights from psychology and socio-cognitive theories should be used for examining the determinants. Further, scholars say there is an ambiguity about whether technology is having any influence in e-participation [37]. Few scholars say influence of political interest is low for skilled internet users' e-participation [18]. Using Rational choice theory [29], identified that citizen with high comprehension capacity may have interest in politics. They also noted that voter turnout is

Table 1
Studies explaining stakeholder efforts for an e-democracy.

Author/s	Constituents of e-democracy model	Remarks
Jensen [52]	The emphasis is laid on two distinct categories of discussion space — government-sponsored and anarchic form.	The study explains the possible better 'quality' of discussions in government —sponsored efforts than the other. It also argues that the Internet may not necessarily contribute to better inclusion.
Dahlgren [28]	The study applies the public sphere lens and its practice to identify possible — i) e-government, ii) advocacy/activist, iii) civic, iv) parapolitical and v) journalistic — existing democratic forums in Internet.	The research explores democracy in public space as comprising dimensions of structure, representation and interaction. It identifies the limitations of deliberative models and argues that online political participation is on account of 'civic-culture'.
Ainsworth et al. [2]	The study examines two internet based discussion forums that respond to the Development Gateway of World Bank, of which one is officially moderated and the other is not.	This study identifies presence or absence of moderators contributes to the e-democracy model in result. Control over the outcome of participation is also influenced by stakeholder intervention.