

Critical Success Factors in E-Democracy Implementation



Aderonke A. Oni
Covenant University, Nigeria

Adekunle O. Okunoye
Xavier University, USA

INTRODUCTION

The use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in enhancing citizens' political participation has been identified as a solution to the problems of representative democracy, particularly, the disconnection between representatives and citizens and the decline of political interest amongst the populace (OECD, 2003b; Polat, 2005; Backhouse, 2007; Kang and Dugdale, 2010). One of the key issues in e-democracy development is to acquire an e-democracy system that considerably meet the needs of the citizens to participate in the democratic process and the government's needs to provide citizens with adequate participation channels (Funikul and Chutimaskul, 2009).

A successful e-democracy implementation should target developing a system that will meet the government's needs and provide citizens with adequate participation channels. There have been several cases of e-participation projects initiated by different actors around the world but the issue of sustainability and citizens acceptance for online public participation remains a difficult task (Panagiotopoulos and Al-Debei 2012; Saebo et al., 2008). As noted by Wouters (2008), examples of good practice are extremely rare in e-democracy implementation. Most e-democracy implementation has experienced mixed success (Coleman and Norris 2005; Blackhouse 2007), some have failed to meet up with the demand of the dedicated advocates (Oni et al., 2014) while some are battling with lot of replication of efforts

within countries driving full fledged e-participation across their governmental bodies. Several scholars have also worked on having a lasting e-democracy implementation, some notable efforts are found in Black and Noble (2001), Clift (2004), Local E-Democracy National Project (2006), Funikul and Chutimaskul (2009) and e-democracy project planning route map. Ensuring success in e-democracy implementation requires harmonizing the technological, economical, political, legal, cultural issues pertaining to e-democracy. As noted by Kotsiopoulos (2009) barriers to greater online citizen engagement in policy-making are not technological but cultural, organisational and constitutional.

This article will provide an in-depth description of key issues to consider in making participatory e-democracy user-friendly, effective and deliver the expected outcomes. Important issues pertinent to the success of e-democracy project were explored. These are technological, social and political issues that make for good success in e-democracy implementation. These are beyond the traditional concerns of the digital divide.

BACKGROUND

Democracy is a system of government in which the power is vested on the people and the will of the qualified majority rules. Chi-Ha (1977) further describes democracy as an ideology opposed to silence, a system that respects a free logos and

freedom of speech and encourages the cacophony of dissent. Combining the words “Electronic” and “Democracy” according to Caldow (2004) means the use of ICT tools to facilitate, improve and extend democratic activities. Cliff (2000), e-democracy is considered as the use of information and communication technologies and strategies by democratic actors (governments, elected officials, the media, political organizations, citizen/voters) within political and governance processes of local communities, nations and on the international stage. E-democracy is, therefore, anything that governments do to facilitate greater participation in government and enhance effective governance using digital or electronic means (Colman and Norris, 2005). Hye, Jong and Hae (2008) gave a more explicit definition as they defined e-democracy as the use of cyberspace and mobile technologies to enhance effective governance. Macintosh (2004) referred to e-democracy as the use of information and communication technologies to engage citizens, support the democratic decision-making processes and to strengthen representative democracy. From these definitions, three major elements of e-democracy can be identified which are people, technology and political process or culture.

The people are the democratic actors including governments, elected officials, the media, political organizations, citizen, civil society groups, etc. Technology includes the various ICT infrastructure and e-participation tools used to facility online political participation such as e-consultation, e-petition, e-panels, etc. Political culture is the distinguishing beliefs, values, attitude, habits, and behavioural patterns that characterized a political community. It is the common perception of the right and obligations of citizens and rules for participating in political process.

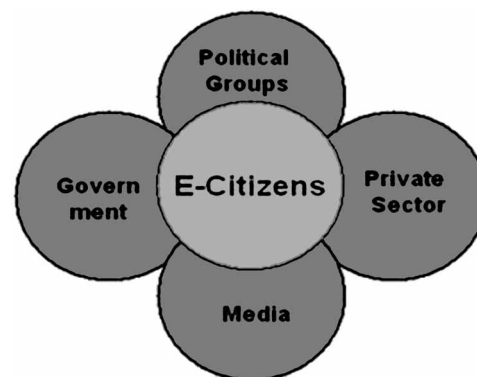
According to Caldow (2004), e-democracy has two sides: the tactical side and the strategic side. The tactical side deals with the use of information technology to advance communication and promote access to information while the strategic side considers how government can use digital media to actively engage citizens and advance

its public policies to the global community. This includes the use of e-democracy initiatives to engage citizens in democratic processes such as policy deliberation, information enquiry, petition against corrupt practice, and expression of opinions through forums (Coleman and Gotze, 2001; Funikul and Chutimaskul, 2009).

One of the key issues in e-democracy development is to acquire an e-democracy system that considerably meet the needs of the citizens to participate in the democratic process and the government’s needs to provide citizens with adequate participation channels (Funikul and Chutimaskul, 2009). A successful e-democracy implementation should target developing a system that will meet the government’s needs and provide citizens with adequate participation channels. The key characteristics of e-democracy are better service with the appropriate access time, reasonable cost of utilizing suitable ICT, responsiveness of government in listening, and support of citizens’ participation (Funilkul and Chutimaskul, 2009; Blumler and Coleman, 2001).

Over the last decade, academics have been exploring ways to effectively utilize technological tools to support democratic process. Literature reveals different models of e-democracy that can help governments and developers structure e-democracy implementation. Among such include modes from the following bodies of knowledge:

Figure 1. E-democracy conceptual model
Clift, 2003.



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