Citizen 2.0:

Public and Governmental Interaction through Web 2.0 Technologies

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Chapter 12

Web 2.0 for eParticipation:
Transformational Tweeting or Devaluation of Democracy?

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ABSTRACT

Recent developments in social media allow people to communicate and share information instantly and have led to speculation about the potential for increased citizen participation in decision making. However, as with other developments in ICT, social media is not used by everyone, and there is a danger of certain groups being excluded. Further, if social media tools are to be used by government institutions, there needs to be new internal processes put in place to ensure that the participation is meaningful. This chapter will critically evaluate and analyse the role of Web 2.0 tools (such as social networking services) for facilitating democratic participation, investigate and evaluate the development of Web 2.0 tools for eParticipation, and determine how they can be used to facilitate meaningful political participation.

INTRODUCTION

The growing popularity of Web 2.0 technologies has led to intense speculation about the potential impact for engaging citizens and facilitating participation in politics (Saebø *et al.* 2009). New technologies have been developed includ-

ing: social networking services, location-based services, crowdsourcing, modelling and visualisation and semantic web tools (Millard, 2010). These developments have arisen at a time where there is a widely reported public disillusionment with formal political structures (Dalton, 2004) yet public participation in informal politics has increased. In particular, the growing popularity of cyberactivism has led some to think that Informa-

tion and Communication Technologies (ICTs) could be a solution to the problem of disengagement with politics (Anderson, 2003; Berman and Mulligan, 2003).

Social media technologies provide a platform for groups of citizens and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to share information, campaign and communicate with each other on issues that are important to them (Yang, 2009). It is recognised that online campaigns are more likely to be successful if a large number of people are engaged (Saebø *et al.*, 2009) and social media technologies can play an important role in this by facilitating the rapid 'viral' dissemination of ideas and issues and creation of networks for campaigns. Recent examples of the use of social media for political activism include anti-government protests in Iran whereby social networking technologies were used to coordinate protests and facilitate communication with reporters, human rights activists etc outside the country (Shangapour *et al.*, 2011). The apparent success of online activism has led to speculation that social media may facilitate democratic transition in authoritarian political systems (Xie and Jaeger, 2008) and during the 'Arab Spring' protests of 2011 social media was reported to have been crucial to the coordination of protests and raising awareness. It is important not to regard cyberactivism as a homogenous activity, however, boyd (2005) argues that online social networks attract collections of like-minded people who communicate with each other but that these networks may be virtually invisible to those who do not share their interests. Further, it is important to bear in mind that there are complex political, economic, social and cultural factors that influence political activity and that cyberactivism is one element of many that can contribute to political change.

While the radical claims made about the revolutionary capacity of social media are unproven, the use of web 2.0 technologies continues to grow and governmental organisations are increasingly utilising social media as a means of communi-

cating and engaging with the public. As these new technologies become more widely used by government organisations with ever increasing numbers of 'Apps', Twitter feeds and Facebook fan pages it is important to critically reflect on these technologies and determine what role they can play in facilitating meaningful participation between citizens and government organisations. As has been indicated so far in this chapter, the development of ICT and Web 2.0 technologies in particular has led to a great deal of speculation about the implications for political participation. However, few empirical studies have been undertaken (Schlosberg *et al.*, 2007) and there is a dearth of studies that try to make a meaningful contribution to theoretical developments of eParticipation within the context of public participation theory. Much of the literature on eParticipation examines the phenomenon in isolation rather than attempting to evaluate what role, if any, social media can play in the overall consultation and engagement strategy of government institutions.

Unlike some other research in this area this chapter does not contain original empirical research on the development of Web 2.0 systems, nor do I attempt to present an audit of all possible web 2.0 interventions. This is because the systems are developing so rapidly that it would be impossible to provide examples of all systems because the developments in ICTs have been so fragmented that it is difficult to find one system that is representative of democratic innovation (Smith, 2009). Instead this chapter addresses the gap in the literature about the challenges of integrating web 2.0 technologies into the broader governmental strategies for citizen engagement and participation. I will discuss the development of eParticipation with particular focus on those that utilise social media. An analytical framework will be outlined and the benefits and drawbacks will be discussed along with their potential impact on democratic institutions. The chapter will go on to propose solutions and recommendations for the successful adoption of web 2.0 in government

institutions and proposals for future research will be outlined.

BACKGROUND

Much of the literature on Web 2.0 for eGovernment services claims that new technologies could have a transformative impact on Government-Citizen relations. Some believe that social media has the capacity to facilitate a more demand-led approach to governance to empower citizens, improve engagement, increase, transparency and allow government organisations to be more responsive to the needs of the public (Hui and Hayllar 2010, Millard 2010, Bertot *et al.* 2010). Chun *et al.* (2010) argue that social media could facilitate 'disruptive innovation' in digital government by forcing governments to adapt and change to accommodate the new technologies. Bertot and Jaeger (2010) identify opportunities for governments to use social media technology for activities such as:

- Democratic participation and engagement
- Coproduction, through which governments and the public jointly develop, design, and deliver government services
- Crowdsourced solutions, through which governments seek innovation through public knowledge
- Transparency and accountability
- Real-time location-specific information using apps (Bertot and Jaeger, 2010, p55)

The literature on the use of ICT in government and democracy and its development is huge and impossible to cover in a single chapter and so this chapter does not directly examine topics such as electronic voting nor online campaigning for election by political parties. The particular focus of this chapter is eParticipation.

Macintosh and Whyte (2006) define eParticipation as:

... the use of ICTs to support information provision and 'top-down' engagement', i.e. government-led initiatives, or 'ground-up' efforts to empower citizens, civil society organisations and other democratically constituted groups to gain the support of their elected representatives. (p. 2)

In this chapter, eParticipation is defined as being the use of ICTs (primarily but not exclusively web-based technologies) for facilitating engagement and participation in the policy making process. The term eParticipation is most appropriate because it has clear connotations of participative democracy as opposed to the term eDemocracy which has connotations of elective democracy, specifically online voting. The term eParticipation cannot be applied to all forms of electronic interactions between citizens and government. The generic term for the use of technologies for government to citizen interactions is eGovernment which is understood in this chapter to mean 'the delivery of government information and services online through the Internet or other digital means.' (West, 2004, p. 16) The focus of investigation is on participative mechanisms that have been developed rather than examining whether or not citizens can pay their council tax online or report street light faults. These are considered to be transactional or administrative rather than participatory actions. It is recognised that defining exactly what constitutes eParticipation can be difficult but for example, an online form on a government institution's website to report pot holes in the streets would be considered eGovernment. However, an online form for residents to give their views on the road network strategy or how the repairs service could be improved would be considered to be eParticipation.

It is important to consider the motivations for government institutions to adopt web 2.0 tools and determine whether they aim to provide channels for participation in policy making or whether the tools are used for service delivery or customer relations purposes. Studies have shown that many of the

developments in ICT in government have focussed on service delivery or eGovernment rather than on public participation (Mahrer and Krimmer, 2005). The modernisation agenda which has driven developments in eGovernment is seen as having an ethos of the citizen as a consumer of services and hence promotes private sector ideologies of efficiency, value for money and responsiveness to customer feedback. This consumerist perspective is seen by some as being contradictory to the notion of the citizen being an engaged and politically active member of a society. It could be argued that by viewing people as consumers of services rather than democratic citizens (McLaverty, 2010) this demonstrates a devaluation of the role of citizenship and represents an erosion of the ideals of public participation. Orr and McAteer (2004), however, dispute the notion that citizenship and consumerism are necessarily mutually exclusive concepts and are also rather dismissive of the dichotomous view of participative and representative democracy arguing that the lines between the two are not as clear as some of the literature implies. Hui and Hayllar (2010) concur with the notion that there is not an inherent problem with the notion of citizen as a consumer of services and argue that Web 2.0 technologies have the potential to facilitate 'Citizen Relation Management' in a similar way that private sector organisations use these technologies for customer relations management. There are potential risks with using Web 2.0 technologies in this way, however. For example, in the private sector, some businesses have found that there have been negative consequences of social media such as poor reviews on websites such as Trip Advisor (Irvine and Anderson, 2008) and there is a potential for campaign groups who have been early adopters of social media to use these new channels for lobbying and campaigning and 'flood' the system which may overwhelm administrators or skew results of consultations.

The majority of examples cited in the literature are on administrative or procedural uses of web 2.0 technologies in government rather than

participation in policy making. This may be because the use of ICT for policy making involves the development of new institutional processes as Bertot and Jaeger (2010) outline:

It's one thing to solicit participation and feedback but quite another to actually incorporate such public participation into government regulations, legislation, and services. This shift requires processes and mechanisms by which comments, feedback, and other forms of participation are incorporated into the government organizations, vetted, and acted upon in some way. (Bertot and Jaeger, 2010, p56)

As with all forms of eParticipation and participative processes in general, social media applications for eParticipation must be integrated into the decision making process in a formal and transparent way so that people can tell that their opinions are being taken into consideration. The rapid development of ICTs has outpaced the ability of governments to adapt to the changes (Bertot and Jaeger, 2010) and these tools have been adopted by governments without consideration of their effectiveness (Jaeger and Bertot, 2010). This could be due in part to lack of clarity about political goals during the planning of the initiative and low levels of impact on policy-making (Taylor-Smith and Linder 2010). In addition, a large number of projects that are developed for eParticipation are pilots rather than being embedded into political institutions for decision making. It is important for research in this field to determine the conditions that these new technologies can become formal parts of governance systems (Molinari 2010) and understand the relationship and interplay between technology, organisation and government values and the impact that this has on the integration (or not) of eGovernment processes (Grönlund, 2010), Lampe et al, 2011). This chapter will now briefly outline the theoretical background of public participation and eParticipation in order to provide a

context for the discussion on the use of Web 2.0 for political participation.

The concept of public participation in policy making is not new but the development of participative mechanisms has accelerated over the last few years (McLaverty, 2002). Examples of participative mechanisms include: Citizens' Panels, Citizens' Juries, Community Planning, Planning for Real, Resident's surveys which are used alongside more offline forms of consultation such as public meetings and postal questionnaires (Smith, 2005).

Pratchett (1999) argues that the relatively recent trend towards participatory mechanisms can be attributed to three main factors:

1. The citizen-consumer agenda of the 1980s and attempts by public service managers to emulate private sector management techniques
2. Organisational politics that emerged when institutions threatened with reorganisation have sought to reassert their legitimacy by demonstrating close links with the communities which they serve
3. Initiatives that have emerged through party-political agendas and are associated with ideological predilections. (Pratchett, 1999, p. 617)

It is argued that the greatest advantage to government organisations for engaging the public in participatory initiatives is that if the public are consulted, policies will have greater legitimacy. Participative policies can also be argued to have a role in educating the public and making them aware of the work of government and the issues behind decision-making (Mehta and Darier, 1998). Theorists such as John Stuart Mill argued that public participation leads to better government (Hindess, 2000). Some believe that the public will be much more likely to comply with and respect new policies if they are involved in consultations and are allowed to express their views and concerns

about new proposals (Dryzek, 2000). It is argued that this is the case even when, ultimately, they disagree with the final policy provided they feel that the consultation was fair and their opinions were listened to (Grimes, 2006). Wilson (1999) disputes this claim, however, and posits that citizens believe that participative initiatives have failed if the decision goes against what they have asked for.

As well as having a positive impact on the legitimacy of policies and decision-making it is also argued that public participation may have a positive impact on the policies themselves making them more suitable to the needs of the people. This has been a driver behind the development of community planning initiatives such as 'planning for real' which aims to meet the needs of local people better than policies devised at the local authority level (Smith, 2005). The role of participation is seen as being more than just creating effective policies, however. There is also a broader issue of engagement that is being sought to overcome the problem of the democratic deficit and apathy towards politics within the general public that is perceived to be occurring at the local level in order to make the institutions of government more responsive and legitimate (Chandler, 2000). Participative governance strategies are promoted as being part of the solution to the problem of social exclusion and may broaden the base of participation (Newman, 2005). Of particular concern are the so-called 'hard-to-reach' groups such as young people, ethnic minorities and people from low income households (Pattie, Syed and Whitely, 2003).

Traditional methods of consultation such as public meetings are not perceived to have solved the problem of getting the 'hard to reach' to participate and leads to criticisms that participative initiatives are dominated by politically motivated groups or people who have mobilized over issues that they perceive as having a direct impact on their lives. Wilson (1999) believes that the widespread lack of interest allows small groups

to dominate participatory activities and therefore the outcomes of participation initiatives are easy for politicians to dismiss because the participants are often not representative of the community as a whole. Ensuring that participative initiatives are representative of the local population is, however, very difficult to achieve in practice. Further criticisms of participative initiatives are that they can waste time and encourage procrastination in the development and implementation of policies (Shapiro, 2003). In addition, increasing participation leads to questions about the relationship between representative democracy and participative democracy and the extent that decision making should be devolved to the public (Albert and Passmore, 2008). Some argue that participatory initiatives could have negative democratic impacts as power is shifted away from elected representatives who are accountable to the public and that elected members may be unwilling to become involved in participatory exercises because they see them as a threat (Kiljn and Koppenjan, 2002).

Mechanisms for citizen participation are widely varied and the influence that can be exerted by citizens depends on which mechanism is being employed and the transparency of how the results are incorporated into the policy making process to ensure that the initiatives are having a genuine impact. An additional issue is *'control over the agenda'* which means the extent to which the participants are allowed to set the agenda for the topic of the participatory exercise and conversely the extent to which the agenda for debate and participation are dictated by the authority. It could be argued that by participating in government initiated top-down participative exercises citizens are, in fact, subjecting themselves to different kinds of control (Hindess, 2000). Irvin and Stansbury (2004) argue that some participatory initiatives do not offer genuine opportunities for participation in policy making but are more akin to awareness-raising exercises 'where the participation process consists of government representatives guiding citizens towards decisions the administrators

would have made in the first place' (p. 57) and it is also argued that administrators only pick up ideas from participatory initiatives that fit with their own agenda (Mayer *et al.*, 2005). Newman (2005) argues that 'Public consultation is focused predominantly on changes at the margins of how public services are delivered, not on the consequences of the withdrawal of services or their shift to other sectors' (Newman, 2005, p. 134).

The development of eParticipation has been facilitated by the rapid development of communications tools and the adoption and acceptance of Internet technologies (Sanford and Rose, 2007). Some argue that new technologies can reduce the barriers to participation and lead to previously disengaged groups becoming active participants (Mitra, 2001). It is posited that by the creation of these 'new channels of democratic inclusion' (Kearns *et al.*, 2002, p. 13) that political participation can be both broadened and deepened by '… increasing the frequency and enriching the content of dialogue between citizens, elected representatives and all levels of government. ' (Kearns *et al.*, 2002, p. 13).

In the initial phase of Internet technology developments some believed that the Internet had the potential to transform the way that citizens interact with government creating a 21st version of ancient Greek politics (Kim, 2006). However, at the other end of the spectrum some have posited that ICTs will have a negative impact on democracy, reinforce social isolation and point to the dominance of corporate interests on the Internet (Rohlinger and Brown, 2009;). The dichotomous views of the potential of the Internet to either enhance or impede political activity is observed by Weare (2002):

Researchers have linked the rise of the Internet to greater citizen empowerment and to the reinforcement of existing divisions of power; to increased social fragmentation and to the rise of new forms of community; to reinvigorated democratic discourse and to Internet road rage that

poisons civic engagement; to a new golden age of participatory democracy and to threats of ever greater surveillance and control of individuals; to an interactive age of democracy that overcomes voter apathy and to a commercialization of political life that marginalizes democratic concerns. (Weare, 2002, p. 663)

Some theorists have switched sides as time has passed. For example Barber was initially optimistic about the potential of electronic democracy in *Three Scenarios for the future of Democracy and Strong Democracy* (1999) but in other works such as *A Passion for Democracy* (2000) he has promoted face-to-face deliberation above computer mediated communication. There are concerns that, rather than being more inclusive, eParticipation initiatives may exclude people from less affluent backgrounds and older people who are regarded as having lower levels of ICT access (Sagle and Vabo 2005; Mehta and Darier, 1998). The relatively low cost of developing eParticipation initiatives also leads to concerns about information overload (Kampen and Snijkers, 2003) and technological determinism whereby officers may develop eP-articipation initiatives without having carefully considered what the added value, if any, will be from these initiatives. While it may be simple to set up a Twitter account or to add a discussion forum to a website, if the participation is not linked to clear outcomes there will be a lack of transparency and accountability. Rather than increase engagement, a poorly conceived or implemented strategy will lead to further disengagement (Coleman and Gøtze, 2001; Coleman, 2004).

According to Wright (2006) there are three main schools of thought about the effect of the Internet on democratic politics:

1. The *'revolutionaries'* who believe that the Internet will transform the democratic system.

2. A more moderate view that the Internet will re-invigorate representative democracy by providing technical solutions to challenges.
3. Those that believe that politics will normalise the Internet into established structures.

With so many claims and counterclaims about what impact, if any, developments in ICTs in general, and web 2.0 technologies in particular have on participation, the importance of conducting research to investigate these issues is clear.

EVALUATING WEB 2.0 TOOLS FOR E-PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT

In order to critically evaluate the role of web 2.0 tools in citizen participation it necessary to develop 'theoretical lenses' which provide a useful framework for evaluation. Dahl's criteria for ideal democracy as a means of evaluating participation has been used by researchers such as McLaverty (2010) who utilised these criteria for evaluating deliberative initiatives and Smith (2009) developed an evaluative framework which were reflective of Dahl's criteria for ideal democracy.

Dahl's five criteria for ideal democracy are:

• *Effective participation:*
• *Equality in voting*
• *Gaining Enlightened Understanding*
• *Exercising final control over the agenda*
• *Inclusion of adults*
(Dahl, 1998, p. 38)

I believe that Dahl's criteria for ideal democracy lend themselves well to the development of a heuristic framework to develop a *'theoretical lens'* for evaluating web 2.0 for eParticipation tools. The interpretation used is outlined below:

Effective Participation: how can web 2.0 be used in citizen participation and are these appropriate mechanisms for gaining views?

Enlightened understanding: how can the potential for providing information to citizens using web 2.0 be utilised to increase public understanding of the issues?

Equality in Voting: are there clear processes for including the results of web 2.0 participative exercises in the policy process?

Control of the agenda: do participants have the opportunity to influence the agenda for the participatory exercise or is this solely determined by the local authority?

Inclusion of Adults: what efforts are made to promote the project to include as many participants as possible and are there checks to ensure results are representative?

This chapter will now go on to discuss the benefits and drawbacks of using web 2.0 tools for eParticipation under the five headings proposed above.

Enlightened Understanding: Does Web 2.0 Increase Available Information to Help People Make Informed Decisions?

It is argued that eParticipation initiatives could be more effective than offline forms of participation because citizens have access to more information on which to base their decisions and come to an enlightened understanding (Jensen, 2003) and that in turn administrators can use the information gathered to create better policies (Chadwick, 2003). Web technologies allow for large amounts of information to be made available at a relatively insignificant cost compared with distributing information in hard copy which could facilitate citizens to scrutinise and monitor the authorities to hold them to greater accountability (Äström, 2004). Further, developments in technologies such as RSS feeds, email alerts etc are allowing users to access the information that they desire (Scott, 2006). However, the view that making large amounts of information available will have an in-

stant impact on accountability and empowerment of citizens makes certain incorrect assumptions about the way that people seek information.

The nature of web 1.0 based information means that people have to be actively seeking the information in order to find it and therefore some argue that, rather than acting as an equalising force for improving information access amongst citizens, it may increase the gap between the information haves and have nots (Cornfield, 2003). While web pages do potentially provide much greater access for citizens to find information, this assumes that they are interested in obtaining the information and that they have the skills to be able to interpret it (Polat, 2005; Wallis, 2005). It could be argued that it is unlikely that many members of the public will have the time or inclination to browse through the information and documents available on government websites to scrutinise them. Some writers also question the assumption that access to information is really empowering at all (Galusky, 2003).

Web 2.0 tools differ from the previous web 1.0 model as they place emphasis on a more active role for users who become content generators (Traunmüller, 2010; Osimo, 2008) as opposed to being restricted to being information receivers of information given out by governments etc in a kiosk fashion (Hui and Hayllar, 2010). It is argued that civil society organisations are able to develop social media apps that cross 'administrative silos' in ways that are difficult for public sector organisations to do themselves (Millard, 2010) and may be more in keeping with the realities of how people seek information which is done often in response to a 'major life need' as opposed to being 'articulated in terms on needing information from a specific government agency' (Jaeger and Bertot, 2010, p374).

In a significant development from previous eGovernment technologies, eGovernment 2.0 is much more reliant on externally developed platforms and apps. For example, Hui and Hayllar (2010) cite examples of Virginia using YouTube

videos on their website and the San Francisco administration allowing registered users to tweet about problems such as street lighting.

Using YouTube, Twitter, Flickr, Second Life, or other social media sites to disseminate government information has the unusual characteristic of creating government information that is dependent on the existence of a particular company. Information is designed for a particular site, a site that controls the means of distribution and the materials distribute through the site. (Jaeger and Bertot, 2010, p374)

This development has the advantage of being able to capitalise on the success and popularity of these social media platforms and also allows for civil society organisations to also become producers of tools outside the control of government organisations (Osimo 2008). For example, in the UK Mysociety is a charitable project which develops digital applications such as www.write-tothem.com and www.fixmystreet.com '…that give people simple, tangible benefits in the civic and community aspects of their lives [and]… to teach the public and voluntary sectors, through demonstration, how to use the internet most efficiently to improve lives.' (mysociety.org, 2011)

While social media platforms provide relatively low cost opportunities for government organisations to develop new ways of communicating with their citizens there are concerns over the permanence of these new platforms. For example, in the UK over the last few years social networking sites such as Bebo, Myspace and Friends Reunited have all significantly declined in popularity as Facebook, Twitter and Flickr have risen in popularity (OFCOM, 2010). Content must be designed for a particular site and there have been concerns expressed regarding ownership of material (Jaeger and Bertot 2010). Also, while the rhetoric surrounding Web 2.0 often emphasizes the positive claims of democratisation of content production and empowerment, there are unin-

tended consequences and concerns about the extent of personal information that people are sharing without considering fully the potential negative impact of doing so and the potential for surveillance and corporatization (Zimmer 2008). There are also concerns about security of government data and information and accuracy of the data available (Bertot and Jaeger, 2010).

From an analysis of the literature to date it appears that web 2.0 technologies have a great potential for increasing the amount of information available to citizens but that there are challenges in ensuring that information is compatible with the various platforms and a risk that time and money could be invested in developing tools for platforms that become obsolete. More research must be conducted on how people use social media for government information seeking.

Inclusion of Adults: Can Web 2.0 Increase the Diversity of Political Participants?

The perception that ICTs could be an effective way of broadening the base of participation has been cited for many years. Kurland and Egan (1996) claimed that the Internet will foster democratic participation because 'The Net is blind to gender, race, socioeconomic status, and other demographic characteristics. All persons have equal standing' (p. 390). It is suggested that eParticipation can broaden the appeal of political participation by engaging 'hard to reach' groups such as people from ethnic minorities and young people (Gibson *et al.* 2005, Macintosh *et al.* 2003, Chatterton and Style, 2001) and that the Internet provides a potential for giving marginalised people a real voice in government policy making (Eggers, 2005).

It has been argued that young people will be amongst those who benefit from eParticipation initiatives because they are more likely to utilise new technologies such as social media platforms. As they are also a group which has a traditionally low level of participation and are disengaged with

formal politics (O'Toole *et al.* 2003), they have been the focus of many studies of eParticipation. Gibson *et al.* (2005) analysed data from a national opinion poll survey from the UK in 2002 and found that the claim that Internet use may have an impact on engaging young people may have some credence because while only 10% of young people participated in offline political activity, 30% of 15-24 year olds have engaged in online political activity. However, in their analysis, Gibson *et al.* (2005) point out that younger people tend to embrace new innovations but then abandon them and so it is too early to tell if the trend for digital participation will continue. Further, in an analysis of public participation in online and offline contexts in the UK using Oxford Internet Institute survey data from 2003 and 2005, Di Gennaro and Dutton (2006) found that younger people are more likely to seek political information online but also that they are not likely to use the Internet to contact public officials. Livingstone *et al.* 2005 found that younger children and those from a lower socio-economic background were more likely to be disengaged and argue that there are complex reasons behind take up of participative opportunities by young people.

The claim that the Internet can give a better voice to those who are marginalised from traditional political activity is unproven but it seems unlikely that simply creating a new medium for participation will change the traditional patterns of access to power and decision making (Rethemeyer, 2007). Some studies have tried to isolate the impact of the Internet on civic engagement usually by multivariate analysis of quantitative data. Gibson *et al.* (2005) found that the impact of the Internet on civic engagement was ambiguous but that there was no evidence that the Internet was transforming politically inactive people into active citizens.

It should also be remembered that technology adoption varies depending on cultural and social factors. Coco and Short (2004) examined a local government program in Queensland, Australia

and found that there were established local patterns of interaction and communication that had positive and negative impacts on the adoption of eParticipation. This means that making broad generalisations about eParticipation facilitating greater participation simply because it is more convenient for people are simplistic and that existing patterns and norms of communication should be accounted for and that initiatives must be designed with the needs of the community in mind (Chadwick, 2006).

Further to the earlier concerns about the information seeking skills required to gain an *'enlightened understanding'* there is also great concern that the level of information literacy required to participate in eParticipation initiatives and differing attitudes towards the technology may exclude certain demographic groups and lead to disempowerment (Shelley *et al.*, 2004). Older people and people from lower socio-economic groups are often used as examples of those who could be excluded by eParticipation (Sagle and Vabo, 2005; Mehta and Darier, 1998).

Web 2.0 technologies such as social media have greatly increased in popularity with a huge growth in the use of social networking sites such as Facebook in the UK (OFCOM, 2010). However, when Internet use is broken down by demographics it becomes clear that different age groups do not use the Internet in the same way with younger people more likely to use the Internet for leisure activities and older people for functional purposes to find out specific information or complete tasks (OFCOM, 2010). With any eParticipation initiative there is the potential for digital exclusion and that instead of broadening the base of participation, web 2.0 tools for eParticipation could end up simply giving the already engaged more opportunities to participate. For example, there was great speculation about the potential for Twitter to provide a new 'direct channel' for democratic participation but a study by Pew Internet revealed that only 8% of online Americans use Twitter (Smith and Rainie, 2010)

From the analysis of the literature on the potential impact of eParticipation and web 2.0 on the characteristics of those participating it is evident that there are predicted winners and losers from eParticipation including participation using web 2.0. Those who predict that eParticipation will broaden the base of participation mainly point to reasons of convenience, the anonymity of the medium and assumptions about the way that people use technology- for example that because young people are more technologically astute that eParticipation will automatically appeal to them. Studies to determine whether this is the case or not have demonstrated that the problem of political disengagement is complex and viewing eParticipation as being a solution in itself is dangerously simplistic and suggests that some writers' expectations of the impact of technology could be disproportionate (Kubicek, 2005). It could be argued, for example, that the reason people are not participating in politics is not through lack of opportunities but simply because it is not a primary concern in their lives (Mechling, 2002). If people do not wish to participate in local politics offline, there is little evidence to suggest that they will participate in local politics online either (Saglie and Vabo, 2005).

Effective Participation: Examples of Web 2.0 Tools for e-Participation

The chapter so far has largely discussed eParticipation as a single phenomenon. However, the development of eParticipation has evolved through a combination of several factors and has been largely experimental in nature. As a consequence a multitude of tools and ideas for their implementation have emerged which some claim offer the possibility of strengthening participation. There have been so many experiments and different tools and mechanisms created for eParticipation that a comprehensive analysis of all the different types of eParticipation is impossible and analysis of the different sub-types of eParticipation is rather

sparse in the literature. However, some of the main eParticipation tools will now be outlined briefly.

Some eParticipation tools such as basic electronic questionnaires are essentially the direct electronic equivalent of paper based surveys which are a very widely used tool for public participation. The use of questionnaires by local authorities are primarily associated with consultations on a specific issue or a user satisfaction survey to gain views on service provision (Berntzen and Winsvold, 2005).

As well as providing opportunities to collect views from individual citizens, eParticipation tools can also be created to facilitate dialogues. For example discussion forums can be set up for a specific issue or strategy or can be 'open' to allow citizens to set the agenda for discussion. They can be conducted between citizens and elected members and officers or could be developed to encourage dialogues between citizens (Kim and Holzer, 2006). The data from discussion forums is difficult to analyse and getting definitive conclusions by aggregating responses is much harder than with quantitative responses to a questionnaire (Kakabadse *et al.* 2003). The purpose of the discussion and the way that the results will be used must be clearly defined so that participants are aware the extent to which their contributions will impact on policymaking.

Online discussion forums require moderation which can be time intensive and has cost implications.

There are also concerns about the quality of online discussions and whether or not they facilitate genuine participation. Ferber *et al.* (2006), examined public discussion as found on NJ.com and its public forums. They found that there was a large amount of political dialogue and that politicians seemed to be participating but that the quality of the debate was poor. Another example is IDEAL-EU (www.ideal-deabte.eu) which was studied by Talpin and Wojcik (2010) to compare the results of online vs offline deliberation. The authors discovered that the subjective learning

effect of deliberation appears to be stronger face to face than online (p. 86). The authors also noted that deliberation efforts are often not sufficient to change the minds of participants. There are further questions about the role of administrators such as web masters in the development and running of eParticipation initiatives.

…they foster electronic discussion, implement (and sometimes define) the rules of online debates and forward messages from the forum to politicians… and yet the webmaster has neither democratic legitimacy not legitimacy that is linked to technical or scientific expertise or knowledge. (Wojcik, 2009, p14).

Some researchers have conducted experiments with integrating novel computer science research with online discussions that seek to facilitate deliberation on policy issues. Cartwright and Atkinson (2009) for example give examples of a system called Paramedides which uses computational argumentation to support the debate.

… we can now not only see that a user disagrees with a particular statement, which part of this underlying evidence he or she disagrees with. This could help debate administrators further refine policy proposals and their choice of supporting statements…. It could even prompt a change for the policy proposal itself. (Cartwright and Atkinson 2009, p 50)

It is also argued that semantic web technologies can be utilised to 'match technical knowledge with 'popular' views of reality, in order to facilitate the interaction among stakeholders, administrative bodies and technicians.' (Tilio *et al.* 2009, p235). It is argued that future Web 3.0 developments which merge semantic web technologies with social media technologies will provide great opportunities for eParticipation utilising linked data and crowdsourcing (Peristeras 2009, Bizer 2009).

eParticipation initiatives can also include live chats with administrators and/or elected officials (Breindl and Francq, 2008). For example, these may take the form of online question and answer sessions arranged at specific times. Webchats can be difficult to manage and the rules must be established prior to the event such as whether the public can ask follow up questions or whether they are a straight question and answer session. As well as the participating elected member(s) or officer(s) there are also support teams required to assist with the technical side of managing the web chat.

Webchats can be seen as facilitating a more personal form of communication than online discussions and newer developments in technologies allow for the opportunity for using voice and video communication in addition to typing text. Webchats allow elected members and officers a direct form of communication with participants than some other forms of eParticipation. Web 2.0 tools such as Twitter and Facebook could be used as part of these chats or as supplementary tools to the discussion. For example, some participants 'tweet' from conferences or public debates. Analysis of the discussions is difficult, however, and it is difficult to determine whether or not participants are contributing to a policy process, in particular if there are supplementary social media discussions occurring that are not instigated by the organisers. There is also the danger that politicians can see webchats as being a marketing or PR exercise rather than a genuine attempt to engage the public in a dialogue.

The final tool that will be reviewed in this overview of eParticipation is ePetitions. ePetitioning has been used in the Scottish Parliament since 2000 and the Number 10 website introduced ePetitions in 2006. In order for an ePetition strategy to have credence there must be a commitment on the part of the government organisation to take into account petitions that meet a certain number of responses. This does not necessarily mean that new policies will be created as a direct result of the

citizens but would demonstrate a willingness to devolve some degree of influence to the citizens. However, this raises questions of accountability. The parameters as to what can be included in an ePetition must be set, for example someone could set up an ePetition to abolish council tax which, while it may be popular, is not a feasible option. There have been high profile examples of ePetition strategies backfiring, most recently with the ePetitioning initiative on the Number 10 website where some 2 million people signed up for a petition protesting against the government's road pricing initiative which revealed a lack of transparency in how the results of the ePetitions were being used and a negative response in the media (Miller, 2008)

The 'viral' dissemination effect of social media technologies such as Facebook and Twitter can facilitate the distribution of ePetitions. There is also a concern amongst some that due to the ease that ePetitions can be signed up for and the impact of *'virtual chain letters'* where requests to sign up for petitions can be passed around by email to potentially thousands or even millions of people, that respondents may not have carefully considered all the issues but have just signed because they were asked to by their friends.

ePetitions have been used as part of a pilot initiative for the local eDemocracy national project in Kingston upon Thames from 2004. Macintosh and Whyte (2006) found the initiative to be transparent because it established a process for publishing decisions and had strong political support but that it lacked integration with the wider consultative process and did not produce clear outcomes.

The diversity of tools available complicates research into the use of Web 2.0 for eParticipation. As has been mentioned earlier Smith (2009) argues that there is such little standardisation that analysing the effectiveness of eParticipation as a public engagement mechanism is extremely difficult. However, there is reason to be positive about the potential for utilising Web 2.0 for

eParticipation as the nature of social media is to facilitate communication and collaboration between large groups of people. The challenge is how these can be integrated into the processes for democratic engagement and policymaking which will be outlined in the following sections.

Equality in Voting: Ensuring that Web 2.0 Tools are Integrated into Decision Making

It is argued that eParticipation can facilitate transparency of governance and make government organizations more responsive to public preferences (Baker and Panagopoulos, 2004). Chadwick (2003) suggests that developments in ICT could mean that 'Government becomes a *'learning organization'* able to respond to the needs of its citizens, who are in turn able to influence public bureaucracies by rapid, aggregative feedback mechanisms such as e-mail and interactive web sites' Chadwick, 2003, p. 447).

However, as with any participative initiative, it will only succeed if it offers genuine opportunities for participation. The eParticipation initiatives must have clear objectives, processes for incorporating the results into the policy process so that the participants know that their participation will be worthwhile (Coleman and Gøtze, 2001; Coleman, 2004). This is particularly true given the climate of mistrust in government institutions where citizens feel disengaged. In order to build trust between citizens and governments, officers and administrators must demonstrate that citizens' views are genuinely being listened to and that power is being distributed (Yang, 2005).

It is argued the eParticipation may reduce the costs of consultation to the local authorities (Weare, 2002) and so may be seen as preferable to other forms of consultation. However, if eParticipation initiatives are just seen as a *'cheap and quick'* way of ticking the consultation box to satisfy statutory requirements then this would not represent a genuine shift to more participative

governance. Further, eParticipation is not *'cost free'*- new systems have to be developed or purchased which will have cost implications. Once the systems are in place there needs to be monitoring for improper use and there must be new processes in place for collecting, collating and analysing the data produced (Baker and Panagopoulos, 2004, Kampen and Srijikers, 2003) and producing clear and transparent outcomes. For example, it is easy to set up a Twitter account or Facebook page. However, if this discussion is to be used as part of a policy-making process, the data retrieved from these would need to be collated, synthesised and analysed and could prove time consuming to manage and monitor for improper use.

There are also organisational culture issues that may act as a barrier to eParticipation in government organisations. In order for any organisation, whether in the public or private sector to effectively integrate e-solutions into their organisation their must be both the technological capability and the support of the members of staff (Levy, 2001; Sterling, 2005). It is argued that the majority of government IT spending is focused on the administrative process more associated with eGovernment rather than on democratic or participative uses of technology (Mahrer and Krimmer, 2005). In addition, social media websites are often blocked by government organisations as they are considered to be an inappropriate use of staff time and there are further issues of privacy and security that have to be addressed.

When eParticipation tools are developed they must not be seen as an *'add on'* or as a way for a government organisation to appear more innovative and progressive or they will be doomed to failure. If people get the impression that their views are not taken into account (or at least acknowledged) then it will simply serve to further reinforce the perceptions of mistrust that the public have in government (Coleman and Gøtze, 2001). Clift (2002) states that eParticipation solutions should be incorporated into the official democratic processes in order to be effective which sup-

ports the argument advanced in this chapter that viewing eParticipation as being *'different'* from other kinds of participation leads to a fragmented participation policy and inhibits the development of genuine participation.

Osimo (2008) identifies issues that may impede the success of eGovernment 2.0 initiatives:

…adopting only the technology, but not the values; not putting in place the appropriate governance mechanisms; focusing on developing a proprietary web 2.0 application, while most collaboration/ conversation happens outside government websites and/or across applications.

Utilising Web 2.0 technologies on third party platforms is rather paradoxical in terms of legitimacy and transparency. On the one hand, the development of these apps allows civil society organisations such as mysociety to facilitate 'bottom up' participation but if these are done externally to the processes being developed within government institutions they are unlikely to have a significant impact on the policy process. To date a great many of the apps tend to focus on rather low level environmental issues such as street lights, potholes in the roads or graffiti. While these issues are important to local populations it is not clear how these apps could be developed to tackle more complex and multi-faceted issues such as poverty, local economic development or climate change.

Control over the Agenda: Can Web 2.0 Tools Facilitate Greater Citizen Power?

This issue of the extent to which a participatory exercise devolves decision making is important with all participatory initiatives, as has been indicted in the last chapter Irvin and Stansbury (2004) argue that some participatory initiatives do not offer genuine opportunities for participation but rather are awareness-raising exercises where

citizens are guided towards 'making decisions administrators would have made anyway' and it is also argued that administrators only pick up ideas from participatory initiatives that fit with their own agenda (Mayer et al., 2005). This section will primarily demonstrate that the institutional context that eParticipation tools are developed will have a bearing on how much control is devolved to the public and will also highlight some of the issues surrounding representative and participative democracy with eParticipation initiatives.

Despite the views held by some that web 2.0 eParticipation could devolve more power to the public than offline methods of consultation there is little evidence presented that this has happened to date. Parvez (2008) found that eParticipation strategies tend to be implemented from the top down, that the design of the tools tend to reflect existing practices for engagement and that there is little integration with online consultations and the traditional offline exercises. The institutional context within which the initiatives are developed will strongly influence the way that the eParticipation tools are developed and provide the norms and procedures surrounding their use (Parvez and Ahmed, 2006). Studies have shown that government websites are the product of technical, political and other choices and that the technical design of websites also has an impact on the level of participation by the public. For example, the design of online discussion forums has an impact on the deliberative quality of the debate (Wright and Street, 2007). Although web 2.0 eParticipation may utilise third party apps and may therefore overcome some of these problems, the decision regarding which apps to use and for what purposes will still be made according to institutional norms and policies.

While the idea of engaging the public in more participation to enhance the legitimacy of political institutions sounds appealing, it potentially creates the paradox of de-legitimising the institutions that it seeks to enhance. Power may be devolved from the elected representatives and more authority

placed in the hands of the administrative side of government who are largely responsible for initiating eParticipation initiatives (Chadwick, 2003). Officers and civil servants may gain more power by gaining control over the information flows between citizens and elected members because they largely control the ICT resources and so can influence the agenda in more overt ways than with traditional offline consultations (Clift, 2003; Parvez and Ahmed, 2006).

Mahrer (2005) discussed findings from a survey of parliamentarians across Europe and found that politicians feel that they are more qualified to participate in decision making than ordinary citizens, that they fear a loss of power from eParticipation and a *'fear of change'*. These findings also add credence to the notion that the drive for eParticipation is largely coming from the administration side of local authorities and that elected members were not playing a part in the development (Clift, 2003). Parvez (2008) also found that initiatives such as online consultations and discussion forums were created to provide support to and enhance representative democracy rather than being an attempt to devolve responsibility to citizens.

There are further concerns expressed in the literature about the erosion of representative democracy by participative mechanisms and that there is potential for eParticipation to 'dangerously overextend the sphere of democratic decision making into what should be the sphere of individual or corporate decision making because the institutional constraints that have been developed in *'analogue democracy'* do not exist in the digital setting.' (Kakabadse *et al*. 2003, p. 51). However, as has also been identified, it must be borne in mind that members of the local populace may not want more input into decision making than they already have and that citizens may be happy for elected members to take on the majority of governing responsibility (Eggers, 2005, p. 156)

It is evident that there are issues of power and accountability with web 2.0 eParticipation

initiatives and that, rather than devolving more power to the public, eParticipation tools may be devolving more power to administrators at the expense of elected members who can be disengaged from the development of eParticipation. While it could be argued that web 2.0 eParticipation tools could facilitate easier and more extensive devolution of power to citizens, the issue of whether the citizens actually want to shift the balance of representative and participative democracy is highly questionable.

SYNTHESIS AND ANALYSIS

As it has been established from the literature that there is a belief that offline participatory mechanisms are not successful at engaging a representative sample of the local population, the biggest selling point of web 2.0 eParticipation would be if more people from a greater variety of backgrounds than the 'usual suspects' participated. Participative exercises have a wider objective beyond consulting the public to validate policy decisions and also sought to foster more engaged communities in order to broaden involvement, achieve community capacity building and tackling social exclusion. The new opportunities created by web 2.0 technologies could make a contribution to overcoming the participation gap by offering more opportunities by making information more easily available and lowering the entry costs to participation by making it easier for people to participate. However, one of the primary barriers to public involvement in participatory mechanisms is that the issues being consulted upon were not of interest to the public as a whole. Much of the work conducted by government could be considered rather mundane and uninteresting to the general public and it is unlikely that social media could overcome this issue. Some public simply do not want to participate in government policy making and therefore developing innovative mechanisms

such as web 2.0 eParticipation will not transform the inactive into active citizens.

As stated at the start of the chapter it is important to consider web 2.0 for eParticipation within the broader strategy for citizen engagement as well as examining the novel technologies themselves. As web services increasingly become a core part of service delivery and communications for organisations, the online/offline dichotomy is becoming less useful for assessing citizen participation efforts as a mixed media approach can be used that encompasses both 'traditional' and online forms of participation. So, in the case of web 2.0 technologies, social media can be used in an enabling capacity to promote traditional forms of participation or to provide additional information rather than being utilised as a primary data collection tool, a 'bricolage' approach may be utilised whereby different forms of traditional and eParticipation tools could also be utilised, or a participatory exercise could be conducted entirely online utilising the 'dialogic' potential of eParticipation to facilitate online deliberative efforts.

Web 2.0 tools for eParticipation are likely to be more useful for certain participatory activities than others and eParticipation should play a part in the broader participation strategy along with other mechanisms such as postal questionnaires or meetings. Administrators should utilise a mechanism that is appropriate for the type of participation being undertaken taking into consider issues such as sampling, the demographics of the respondents being targeted and, where appropriate, ensuring that offline alternatives are provided so as not to exclude members of the public.

From the synthesis of the literature it seems it is too early to tell what the specific impacts of web 2.0 for eParticipation will be but that it is vital that there is clarity of purpose, procedures for the results to be fed into the policy process and for expectations of participants to be managed so that they understand what impact their participation will have and the stage of the policy cycle that they are feeding into.

SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter has demonstrated that Web 2.0 technologies present new opportunities for engaging the public in active participation. However, with the new opportunities there are also challenges associated with selecting appropriate technologies that are sustainable, developing processes to incorporate the technology into the public policy process and ensuring that certain groups are not excluded. In order to move eParticipation beyond the 'experimental' stage into a mechanism that is an available tool in the 'participation toolbox' a number of policy recommendations can be made.

- Online forms of participation including those that employ web 2.0 technologies should not be viewed as distinct from 'traditional' forms of participation but should rather be integrated into the strategic public communications and participation strategies of government organisations. There should also be recognition of the different strengths and weaknesses of the various tools for participation and advice provided for selecting appropriate methods of participation depending on the topic, user group and purpose.
- It should also be recognised that different 'tools' (both online and offline) can be employed in a 'bricolage' approach to participation in order to maximise responses. For example, a consultation on a local plan may include traditional focus groups, online debates, electronic questionnaires and crowd sourcing of ideas via Twitter. In these circumstances, however, it is important to ensure that there are clear processes for incorporating the results into the policy process and to manage the expectations of participants.
- Government organisations should have internal public participation guidelines and quality monitoring procedures to ensure that best practice guidelines are followed. This would reduce duplicate consultations and also help to ensure standardisation of procedures and allow for better coordination and understanding of which public participation mechanisms (including eParticipation with web 2.0) are the most effective by allowing officers an overview of all consultation and engagement activities.
- Internal working groups involving elected members, ICT officers and officers involved in public participation in government organisations should be set up to review how ICTs should be used to engage the public and feed into the wider eGovernment strategies.
- Resources should be made available to provide staff training for officers and elected members to learn more about how web 2.0 can be effectively employed as a way to engage the public in participative activities. This would hopefully ensure that technologies selected are
- Government organisations should engage in knowledge exchange networks with each other, academics, NGOs and other organisations to conduct research with groups of citizens to share best practice and research into which participation tools including web 2.0 are most effective at engaging citizens, in particular those from 'hard to reach' groups.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As ICT is a rapidly evolving area it is inevitable that there will be more developments in web 2.0 technologies in the future. At this stage it is simply too early to tell what the future impact of these technologies will be and therefore there is great potential to conduct more research into this

phenomenon. I propose that interesting future research could include:

- Comparative studies of the implementation of web 2.0 for eParticipation in different countries and also examination of variances between highly localised use of social media in communities vs national level initiatives.
- Studies of people who do not participate in public participation initiatives would be interesting to determine in more detail what the barriers to participation are and whether or not web 2.0 eParticipation mechanisms would make them more likely to participate.
- The development of impact indicators and ways of analysing if and to what extent public participation mechanisms in general (not just eParticipation) make a meaningful contribution to policy making to ensure that participative initiatives are transparent.
- Smith (2009) wrote that he believed more research was required to analyse whether online deliberative debates differed from those in the offline context. I believe that this would be beneficial but suggest that it should be broadened to examine whether or not responses to other forms of ePartcipation and from web 2.0 in particular differ from their offline equivalents.

In order to evaluate any eParticipation initiatives including those that utilise web 2.0 technologies it is necessary to examine the context in which the initiative is developed as well as the tools themselves. MacIntosh and Whyte (2008) have produced some evaluation criteria for eParticipation which have three components:

- The democratic perspective considers the overarching democratic criteria that the eParticipation initiative is addressing. Here one of the most difficult aspects is to un-

derstand to what extent the eParticipation affects policy.
- The project perspective looks in detail at the specific aims and objectives of the eParticipation initiative as set by the project stakeholders.
- The socio-technical perspective considers to what extent the design of the ICTs directly affects the outcomes. Established frameworks from the software engineering and information systems fields can be used to assess issues such as usability and accessibility. (Macintosh, 2008, p. 5)

External and internal factors that affect the development of participative policy making must also be examined such as local, regional and national statutory guidance. In order to gain a good understanding of how the eParticipation initiatives are being conducted it is necessary to gain insights into the workings of the particular institutions being examined through primary research conducted with elected members and officers and examination of internal working documents (Chadwick 2011). Methodological tools that can be used include the usual qualitative and quantitative methodologies employed in the social sciences but there are a number of new network analysis software tools that can also be used. For example, some researchers use software such as Node-XL to analyse online networks on Twitter and Facebook which can be used to map and graphically represent online networks indicating the strengths of network connections, how organisations and individuals are connected and how much interaction occurs between nodes on a network (Hansen *et al.*, 2011). These software tools could be used to provide a visual representation of interaction between government organisations and their 'followers' in order to analyse the extent to which government organisations are embracing them as a two-way communications tool by engaging in a dialogue. Of course there are limitations to what this software can tell researchers about

the nature of the interaction and the impact that it is having on policy making but these tools could prove to be useful additions to a researchers toolkit for investigating eParticipation.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has outlined new developments in using ICT for political participation with particular focus on social media technologies. While there has been speculation about how new social media technologies can have a transformative impact on democracy there is little evidence to date that this will happen. However, there is evidence that web 2.0 tools could be effectively utilised for developing new opportunities for engagement. The base of participation could ultimately be widened by web 2.0 eParticipation initiatives to include those who would be willing to participate but are either not sufficiently inclined to invest the time in 'offline participation' or are unable to do so for reasons such as childcare or geographical location. However, there has been no evidence found that eParticipation would be effective in engaging those who do not want to participate or who feel that their contributions are not valued or that the topic of consultation is not relevant to them. More data would be required to investigate whether or not eParticipation actually increases the diversity of participants e.g. whether or not more responses are received from young people.

It is clear, however, that not only is the impact of eParticipation very ambiguous, but that there are also ambiguities of the impact of participation mechanisms in general. With this in mind it is believed that the debate about eParticipation vs 'offline' participation is framed in such a way that it overlooks these fundamental issues with public participation in government decision making. In order to effect genuine participation, when public participation mechanisms are employed they should be conducted with clear indications of how the results will be used to ensure that participants

have an impact. This should be the case whether the mechanism is online deliberation via social media, a postal questionnaire, public meetings or any other type of participation.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Consultation: Used in the broad sense to describe either: 1). The dynamic process of dialogue between individuals or groups, based upon a genuine exchange of views and, normally, with the objective of influencing decisions, policies or programmes of action; or 2). Where people are offered the opportunity to comment on what is planned, but are not able to develop and input their own ideas or participate in putting plans into action. (Consultation Institute website, 2009a)

Engagement: Is a less easily defined concept but can be seen as Actions and processes taken or undertaken to establish effective relationships with individuals or groups so that more specific interactions can then take place (Consultation Institute, 2009b).

eParticipation: Is defined as being the use of ICTs (primarily but not exclusively web-based technologies) for facilitating engagement and participation in the policy making process. The term eParticipation is most appropriate because it has clear connotations of participative democracy as opposed to the term eDemocracy which has connotations of elective democracy, specifically online voting.

Participative Democracy: Refers to the involvement of citizens in policy making and the running of government. It often involves a degree of decision making and responsibility being devolved directly to the people and the term 'direct democracy' is sometimes used as a synonym.

Participatory Mechanisms: Is used to describe all forms of public participation that contributes either directly into decision making or form part of a wider engagement strategy by government organisations

Representative Democracy: Refers to the more traditional model of democracy whereby citizen participation is limited to voting in elections while the main activities of governance are conducted by elected members.

Representativeness: Is used in this chapter to describe whether or not the respondents to participatory mechanisms constitute a valid sample of the wider population or whether or not certain groups dominate participatory initiatives while others are harder to reach.