# Peer Reviewed Government: Public Value for the People

### O'Brien, Ann

National University of Ireland Galway, Ireland. j.obrien30@nuigalway.ie

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### Abstract

Globally government initiatives are being introduced that seek to engage citizens in a co-creation process with government agencies. For the first-time this paper blends theories from public administration and IS to explore citizens' value perceptions of Web 2.0 platforms in eParticipation These technologies appear to have huge potential to engage citizens, yet, uncertainty remains regarding the value of these process and the value of Web 2.0 in eParticipation. Sense of community theory is introduced to eParticipation as a mediating factor to the creation of public value in eParticipation, where the outcome of the success model are public value/net benefits. The aim of this paper is the construction of a framework using a sense of community index unique to the context of eParticipation, to evaluate the success of the individual/group experience eParticipation.

# **Author Keywords**

eParticipation, Success model, Sense of Community, Public Value.

# **ACM Classification Keywords**

K4.0 – Computers and Society, General, J.1 Administrative and Data Processing, Government, J.4 Social and Behavioral Sciences, Sociology What **value perceptions** do citizens have of eParticipation?

In what way does sense of community mediate users **experience of value** in eParticipation?

With reference to sense of community, what **role** does Web 2.0 **information communication technology** play in eParticipation?

#### Introduction

This format is While eParticipation has experienced a huge growth of interest in recent years [44], the evaluation of eParticipation remains both challenging and complex with a diversity of power relationships, actors and influences [45, 71]. eParticipation can be defined as "technology-mediated interaction between the civil society sphere and the formal politics sphere and between the civil society sphere and the administration sphere"[63]. It is recognized that the impact on governance institutions and relationship building with citizens are affected by the increasing role of technology in society [15]. Yet, fragmentation of evaluation efforts still exists [71]. And "a more effective evaluation of initiatives is needed to identify under which conditions citizen participation is or can be beneficial"[53]p170.

Following extensive research, public value and sense of community theories are brought together for the first time, and applied here to eParticipation. The most relevant areas of these theories are outlined in the following sections of this paper, and an eParticipation public value success model is drawn. Using the newly identified public value/net benefits of eParticipation as an outcome of the model. A new measure of sense of community in eParticipation is proposed as a mediating factor to the experience of value in eParticipation. The term eParticipation 2.0 refers to the sociotechnical criteria that are proposed as antecedents of an experienced sense of community in eParticipation.

## Aims of the Research

This research is concerned with the interaction between stakeholders and government agencies within eParticipation from a citizen perspective, enabled by Web 2.0 technologies. With the aim of creating a public value success model of eParticipation. Using the phrase "peer-reviewed government" to describe the role of citizens as arbiters of public value [68], and the new two-way interaction between citizen/stakeholder and government agencies [50]. In recognition of this new relationship and of the ever-expanding range of technologies enabling connectivity, information sharing and co-creation in eParticipation, this paper asks:

## **Public Value Net Benefits**

Please Bullet list In order to review the literature on public value, public administration, eGovernment and political studies literature was consulted. It then became apparent that the research areas of public value and participation are of strategic importance to the future of public administration research [50]. There is a tradition of public value research in eGovernment [4, 16, 26, 66] yet, this is the first research to work towards the creation of an instrument to measure the public value of eParticipation from a citizen perspective.

Public value (PV) has been defined by Moore as a framework that helps us connect what we believe is valuable and requires public resources, with improved ways of understanding what our 'publics' value and how we connect to them [72]. There are three ways that the theory of public value can be utilized in eParticipation research: [52] the recognition that eParticipation can provide the means of creating a 'public', the context defining role of the public value strategic triangle, and in considering citizens not as customers but as cocreators with an obligation to participate [68] The creation of a 'public' that can understand and act in its

own interests is at the heart of the public value paradigm, enabling citizens to be arbiters of public value [49].

To respond to the challenges of the eParticipation governance process, public value theory assists the analysis of the power relationships between government, citizen and bureaucracy, regarding the rights, benefits and obligations of citizens to society, the state and one another. As countries move towards a holistic approach to co-ordinate the efforts of the legislature, judiciary, independent state institutions and sub-national governments. In the hope of fostering transparency, participation and accountability. The OECD calls on "state actors to join forces with civil society, academia, the private sector and other interested stakeholders to build cohesive initiatives" [53] P263. This change towards co-creation practices as well as creating many potential benefits also create challenges to the public value strategic triangle as proposed in the managerial mode of governance [17] and regime values [54].

By stratifying public values into constellations e.g. the relationship between public administration and the citizen [30] began with clearly demarked relationships for each group of stakeholders. More recently there has been a move towards government as a platform [46], where the worlds outside government are linked and integrated to the worlds inside government for the specific purpose of creating public value [45]. Citizen centric policies and increased co-creation activities have resulted in blurring of the boundaries between citizen and public administration. These new relationships and new challenges can result in improvements in the relationships between government and other

stakeholders, but do not always translate into broader benefits resulting in a move towards contextualization and policy driven governance [29].

Building on the empirically validated PV eGovernment Net Benefits [65] the concept of PV net value (the creation of PV as a function of both the value received and the cost of consumption), is echoed in the DeLone and McLean concept of Net Benefits in IS Success research [19].

The following public values of eParticipation as net benefits are proposed: beginning with trustworthiness [3], which describes the potential of ICT as an enabler of the trust, consisting of competence, benevolence, honesty [42, 73]. Openness is a second PV of eParticipation which is concerned with well informedness [26] transparency [5, 25] and accountability [27]. Process Fairness, consisting of legitimacy [13], procedural fairness [12]. Equity consisting of all affected interests [21], progressive opportunity [9] and empathy [35] and the final public value Effectiveness referring to the instrumental value of eParticipation and effective information provision [19, 62].

## Sense of Community in eParticipation

The advent of Web 2.0 and the change to citizen centric policies that invite citizens to co-create with government [48] precipitate a change to the citizen/government relationship. To accommodate this change, the community psychology theory of Sense of Community (SoC) is introduced to eParticipation. As SoC has been found to facilitate the exploration of the mechanisms through which social involvement can

influence trust and efficacy [2] both offline and online [8].

The theory of Sense of Community (SoC) [43] is refined for eParticipation as a feeling that participants have of belonging. That citizen's opinions matter to one another and a belief that their needs will be met through participating.

SoC is proposed as a mediating factor to successful eParticipation; as community building is a key role of citizen participation that includes the coming together and forming of online communities of eParticipation and the empowerment of such communities Tambouris et al. [70].

SoC can provide many levels of value to eParticipation including: SoC has been found to act independently of individual level traits of gender income etc., and is a strong and positive predictor of internal and external efficacy and personal and political trust [2]; it has been found to positively affect organizational citizenship behavior; loyalty, civic virtue, altruism, and courtesy, in work communities [11] and in fostering both civic and political participation in offline communities [41, 57].

In a virtual community, sense of belonging refers to the feeling of belonging, membership, or identification to the virtual community; the feeling of members that they are integral parts of the virtual community, Zhao equates this to a SoC [76]. Trust has the strongest influence on a sense of belonging to a virtual community [39], reflecting the differences between electronic and face-to-face communication and the importance of identity online. This measure is refined specifically for the eParticipation context in Table 1 below.

Construct	Description
Sense of Belonging [28, 33, 43, 64, 74, 75]	The extent to which individuals recognize each other and feel comfortable participating.
Equitable Interaction [33, 43, 74, 75]	Users should feel they can make a difference by participating, while feeling that the views of the other participants also matter.
Integration and shared values [28, 43, 64, 74, 75]	The individual-group association must be rewarding for its members. Individual values shared among the stakeholders, affects the ability of the users to organize and prioritize their needs fulfilment activities.
Identified participation [1, 8, 28, 34, 43, 64, 75]	To share the emotional connection, users must be able to identify with other users or identify with the interactions of other users.

Table 1: Sense of Community Index in eParticipation

Hypothesized outcomes of an experienced SoC in eParticipation include, increased feelings of trust and security in eParticipation. Recognizing the importance of the users' feelings of equity and political efficacy and highlighting the importance of experiencing fairness in the eParticipation process.

In an effort to explore the social mechanisms enabled by Web 2.0 in eParticipation, SoC enables the measurement of the individual's feelings that have been empirically proven to have implications for group behavior, such as trust, engagement and participation [33, 76]

# eParticipation 2.0

The term eParticipation 2.0 in this paper refers to the sociotechnical criteria that are proposed as antecedents of an experienced sense of community in eParticipation. We contend that SoC has important implications for Web 2.0 eParticipation as it assists the analysis of the quality of the interaction on the platform, from the perspective of the user. Particularly important for platforms such as participatory budgeting and deliberative platforms that seek to engage citizens. Preece describes two main determinants of virtual community success sociability and usability. Sociability refers to human to human interaction as supported by technology. Usability is concerned with how intuitive and easy it is for individuals to learn to use and interact with a product [59]. Earlier research has recognized sense of belonging as a factor that may influence reading in technology mediated social participation [60]. Sociability in eParticipation is at present under theorized, notable exceptions are the introduction of psychological factors of eParticipation [20] and the four spaces of deliberative digital habitat of [18]. Particularly important for eParticipation is the degree to which the platform provides a safe environment for participation and fulfils the needs of the user in a timely and convenient way e.g. mobile. Responsiveness is long recognized by the public administration literature, referring to the way in which government employees

respond to citizens, [22, 32], the use of a distributed moderation system and service quality [56]. Geolocation is included as these services can overcome the tyranny of place e.g. citizens crowdsourcing [36] and the extended offline benefit of the eParticipation process to offline meetings [69]. As shown in Table 2 below.

Construct	Consisting of
Sociability	The degree to which the platform provides a safe environment for participation. [59] [40, 56]
Usability	The extent to which the platform fulfils the needs of the user in a timely and convenient way also mobile. [12, 40, 56, 59]
Responsiveness	The role of interaction on the platform, the role of a distributed moderation system. [7, 31, 37, 58, 67]
Geo-location	To enable offline benefit of the eParticipation process. e.g. meetups [10, 12, 69]

**Table 2**: eParticipation 2.0

### Research Framework

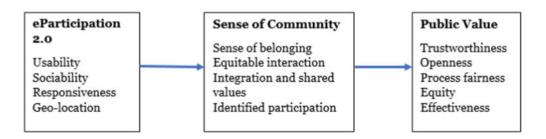


Figure 1. Public Value eParticipation Success Model

The aim of this research has been to develop for the first time a SoC in eParticipation index and identify a constellation [30] of public values of eParticipation. With a view to creating a Public Value framework of eParticipation Success. The conceptual model development process used by this research is a rigorous methodology for developing constructs based on Churchill [14] following a framework as advocated by Lewis [38]. At the heart of this research is the identification of the newly created SoC index in eParticipation as a way to measure the value of the interaction enabled by ICT in eParticipation.

SoC is proposed as mediating factor between the use of Web 2.0 in eParticipation and the user (s) experience of public value. The identification of the sociotechnical criteria in eParticipation 2.0 enables the examination of the role of Web 2.0 as an antecedent to SoC in eParticipation.

This research proposes that participants in eParticipation equate to a 'public' a key part of the public value theory. They are described as a group who are the arbiters of public value [68], where the quality of the interaction between members of the 'public' is a key indicator of the quality of the public value being created [47].

The key utility of the sense of community index to eParticipation, is that the perceptions of the individual can be used to measure the collective experience of net benefits/public value in eParticipation. Enabling the creation of a public value framework of eParticipation Success.

# Methodology

The Both qualitative and quantitative methods are employed at different stages of this research in an effort to triangulate data sources and prevent common source bias of self-reported data [23]. Since digital government is a complex social phenomenon, [24] Gil-Garcia and Pardo advocate the a multi-method approach to research in this context. Constructs for the new SoC in eParticipation index were deductively populated from the diverse literature of SoC and eParticipation which also influenced the choice of eParticipation 2.0 sociotechnical criteria that are proposed.

The potential public values in eParticipation, and the above constructs have been reviewed by academic and practitioner experts and are being explored and refined with the help of eParticipation users in focus groups. They will then be tested with project/community leaders and once again refined, before being circulated to eParticipation platform users in an online questionnaire. Following analysis of the results of the questionnaires, a post-hoc analysis will be used bringing the findings back to the projects and communities who participated in the research, using a confirmatory (top-down) and exploratory (bottom-up) approach [61].

# **Expected Contribution**

The creation of the new measure of SoC in eParticipation and demonstrating how it can be used to create a citizen centric evaluation of eParticipation will be a significant contribution to the eParticipation body of knowledge.

Developing new approaches that help participants engage with other participants on civic platforms is described as a critical challenge for civic platforms [51]. It is hoped that SoC might play an important role in influencing the design of future eParticipation platforms, as it has been successful in other online and offline settings e-learning [55], e-commerce [6, 34, 76] and social media communities [64, 75]. Yet, it has been a challenge to define a SoC measure specifically for eParticipation, due to the unique context of the citizen/government relationship.

This research proposes the first collection [30] of public values in eParticipation. In the past individual public values have been empirically researched in public administration, but this is the first grouping of values in eParticipation.

In public value net benefits, we use the DeLone and McLean Success Model and identify the sociotechnical Web 2.0 antecedents of SoC in eParticipation. To ensure that the role of technology is at the centre of this research process as called for by Sæbø, Rose, and Flak [63].

Conducting this research will shed a light on a previously under theorised area of research and lead to a greater understanding of users' perception of the value of eParticipation and of the challenges and benefits of Web 2.0 in eParticipation.

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