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Electronic Participation in Malaysia

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Abstract

This article seeks to highlight the prevalent role of electronic participation (e-participation) in the

implementation of e-government (EG) and possible approaches in enhancing the application of e-government through the insertion of e-

participation module.

Previous case studies on e-participation cover definitions and technique of e-participation, applicable strategies to implement e-

participation, and the quality of e-participation for top management decision making. Several literature in EG supports the statement that e-

participation could improve the quality of public sector governance process. As a result, most developed countries implemented EG projects to enable

involvement of citizens in the political decision making process through e-participation. However, this is not the case in most of the developing countries

which focus more on improving public sector services rather than e-participation. Among others, there are arguments which focus on the issue of

lack of citizen participation
in the political process
through the Internet. This
is particularly true in the
context of EG
implementation in

developing countries
whereby the focus is more
on e-services rather than e-
participation. Malaysian
government has
implemented EG, since

1997 under one of the MSC
flagships, to deliver
information and services in
an integrated manner.

Malaysian Government
Portal or myGovernment

performs as a single platform providing information and services related to government agencies. Despite this effort, myGovernment, as evident

in other developing nations,
also does not place
emphasis on e-
participation.

Keywords: e-government,
e-participation,
collaboration approach, my
government portal

Introduction

The huge potential of
Information and
Communication
Technologies (ICT) in

transforming the public sector brought around the phenomenon of e-Government to nations across the world. The rapid expansion of ICT in

Malaysia saw the launching of Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC), in 1996, to accelerate its entry into the Information Age. Putrajaya functions as the new seat

for government and federal administrative capital becoming the centre for the introduction of the concept of Electronic Government (EG). EG, one of the seven

MSC flagships is aimed at reinventing the public sector's view of the needs of citizens and the private sector. Simultaneously, information flow and

processes within the government are streamlined. Exploitation of ICT in government is expected to improve internal effectiveness and

provide citizens with better information and services.

Governments worldwide have now come to realize the importance of citizen

participation in democratic political processes and are trying to re-engage them in order to strengthen the process of democracy. On the other hand, citizens in

many countries are demanding for a more active role in government processes and not only to take part in the voting process (Tambouris, 2007).

World Bank (2001) defines citizen participation as “the process through which stakeholder influence and share control over priority setting, policy-making,

resource allocations and access to public goods and services". Since the last few years, many governments are experiencing the growth and adoption of

ICTs. Following this trend, e-government should be extended to include e-participation mechanism to get citizen's views and inputs on governments'

public policy and planning.
Some research referred to
e-participation as e-
Consultation (Whyte &
Macintosh, 2002), web-
based citizen input

(Elgarah & Courtney, 2002), and online public engagement (Coleman & Gøtze, 2001). However, Betancourt (2005) claimed that ICT and EG's initiatives

will not automatically
enable the people to
participate in EG.

E-participation serves
varied objectives such as

providing information to citizens, generating support among citizens, utilizing citizens' input in decision making, and inquiring for citizens' needs. It is

believed that e-participation can serve to encourage two-way communication between government and citizens, educate citizens on the

rationality and complexity of policy-making, legitimize government decisions, and provide opportunities for mutual learning (Coleman & Gøtze, 2001). As a result,

most developed countries
have already implemented
EG projects to enable
citizen's involvement in the
political decision making

process through e-participation.

In an attempt to provide seamless integration of information and services,

Malaysian government
launched myGovernment,
an abbreviation for the
Malaysian Government
Public Service Portal. It is
designed as a single

gateway to information and services provided by the Government of Malaysia via the Internet. Through myGovernment, users are linked to more than 900

government agencies
websites nationwide.
myGovernment is an
initiative undertaken by the
Malaysian Administrative
Modernization and

Management Planning Unit (MAMPU), a department within the Prime Minister's Department. Most of the Malaysian Government information and online

services have been on the internet for a long time, and myGovernment is created to provide easy access and search for these information and services as

well as answers to
government related
enquiries and concerns.

With this motivation in
mind, we investigate

an approach for assessing Malaysian government's effort in extending e-participation initiative with the current EG application. This paper is organized as

follows. Section 2 presents the issues on why EG application should be extended in e-participation. Section 3 introduces the Malaysian EG initiatives.

Section 4, presents the e-participation while section 5 describes the proposed approach for e-participation initiative in Malaysia. Finally, the

conclusions and future work are discussed in section 6.

Issues

Many governments of developing countries have tried to deliver their services to citizens through

ICT mechanisms. However, most implementations focused on publishing information and links to set of resources. Gupta, Kumar and Bhattacharya (2004)

argued that very few of these implementations provide actual transactional service delivery through government portals.

Furthermore, with non exhaustive infrastructure in term of access facility, it will complicate the delivery of a service to the people.

Malaysian government had set one major goal and several visions in ensuring successful implementation of EG. The goal is to improve the convenience,

accessibility and quality of
interaction with citizens
and businesses;
simultaneously, it will
improve information flows
and processes within

government improving the speed and quality of policy, co-ordination and enforcement (MAMPU, 1997). In addition, there are five visions that are

specified to achieve that goal which are to (MAMPU, 1997):

- Transform administration processes of government

through usage of leading
edge information
technology.

- Drastically improve performance of government processes.

- Provide high quality, low cost administrative services to public and business.

- Employ multimedia technology to foster government effectiveness.

- Attract world class multimedia web shapers to Malaysia.

However, it is obvious that the goal and visions stated above contain no statements regarding the role of citizen participation in EG. With reference to UN

Global E-Readiness Reports (2005), the following broad definition of EG has been adopted: *“The use of ICT and its application by the government for the*

provision of information and services to people. The aim of EG, therefore, is to provide efficient government management of information to the citizen;

better service delivery to citizen; and empowerment of the people through access to information and participation in public policy decision-making”.

The stated visions by MAMPU entail that more focus is placed on service delivery process to the public. EG is defined, as quoted above, not only to

focus on reliable service delivery but should also include public involvement in EG initiative.

Thus, a gap exists within Malaysian EG with reference to e-participation in its EG application. To ensure a more successful EG, this gap must be

bridged by creating a mechanism in EG which enables people's involvement in government processes. The government needs to play a major role

in determining how the citizen can participate in its EG initiative. This enables Malaysia to form a knowledgeable and active community in accordance

with the progress of ICT
beside the democratic
process in Malaysia.

United Nation, through
Global E-Government

Readiness Report 2004 and 2005, reports that Malaysia's achievement from the aspect of people participation inside the EG environment is almost

static. In 2004, people participation percentage is 8 %, while in 2005 the percentages attained in Malaysia is still under 10 %. The report also highlights

that Malaysia is at the
fourth place after
Singapore, Philippines and
Indonesia.

The government recognizes the need for public involvement during the formulation of policy, schemes, and programs. However, the conventional

mode of communication
and information gathering
mechanism makes it
difficult to enable public
participation in the process
of decision making. The my

Government portal is equipped with infrastructure and technology to facilitate such initiatives by various organizations within the

government but this is still not enough to ensure a smooth running of e-participation. The development of e-participation initiatives

requires public sector agencies to think well through the approach before developing an e-participation framework that can assist citizen's

participation in
government processes.
With the background
principle of democracy,
public participation in
government processes

through ICT is an absolute necessity.

Malaysian E-government

The aim of Malaysian EG is for people in government, business and citizenry to work together for the

benefit of Malaysia and all of its citizens (MAMPU, 1997). The aim calls for “reinventing [of] government” using multimedia/information

technology to dramatically improve productivity and creating a collaborative environment that fosters the ongoing development of Malaysia's multimedia

industry. The focus is also to ensure effective and efficient delivering of services for the people of Malaysia, enabling the government to become

more responsive to the needs of its citizens.

The 2008 e-government readiness rankings show that Asian countries make

up 20 per cent of the top 35
with Malaysia in the 34th
rank; this is an
improvement from year
2005 where Malaysia
ranked 43rd. Singapore

continues to lead the South-Eastern Asian region followed by Malaysia and Thailand. In the web measure index, Malaysia is ranked 17th while

Singapore is rank 25th,
mostly due to the strength
of Malaysia's three
ministries' websites,
namely: Social Welfare,
Labour and Finance (United

Nations, 2008). Malaysia has enhanced the websites of the three ministries by using multimedia tools (both audio and video). In addition, these sites

encourage citizen e-participation and provide the citizens with downloadable forms. The Ministry of Labour has a formal time frame by which

to respond to online queries and e-mails and the Ministry of Social Welfare has the ability to respond to its citizens via e-mail.

Malaysian EG identifies the services provided by government and the spectrum of multimedia application that will help deliver these services

according to the objectives of EG vision. The landscape of application is grouped into three categories: Public/business to government, intra agency

and inter agency. The main portal for Malaysian citizen or non-Malaysian citizen to refer to is myGovernment portal.

My Government Portal

My Government is the government's initiative to improve service delivery introduced in 2003 by the

Malaysian Administrative
Modernisation and
Management Planning Unit
(MAMPU) under the Prime
Minister's Department. My
Government portal won top

prize in the public sector
award category in the 2008
Global ICT Awards. This
portal begins its operation
in 2005 with its main
objective to enable the

public and business
community to acquire
online information and
government services that
can be obtained through
the local service centre.

Services offered are prime
news display, event
calendar, job vacancy,
tender notice,
advertisement,
announcement, public

complaint and form
downloads. Through this
portal, dealings with agency
become more efficient, easy
and the public can reduce

time spent at the physical counter.

The my Government portal contains six (6)

components (MAMPU,
2007):

1) My Home is where users
register with my
Government portal and

personalized information display according to their preferences. Through this personalization, consumers are able to accept message up-dates, upload

documents, and view online
service status offered
through my Government
and web agency sites link.

2) Message's Centre which acts as a communication centre facilitating exchanging of messages among users and my

Government
administrators.

3) E-Community Centre
which provides community
oriented services such as

poll, service or information subscription, advertising and general questions. E-community Centre is a component that seeks for citizen involvement in

Malaysian government.
However, based on the
current status, only poll
mechanism is successfully
running. The average
number of people involved

in poll is just 1000 people per poll. This brings a greater need in an e-participation platform to ensure citizens'

involvement in government processes.

4) E-Business Centre supplies all the downloadable forms and

online interactive services
by public sector agencies in
my Government.

5) Administrative Centre
which enables my

Government administrator
to manage the portal.

6) Content Delivery Centre
which provides
infrastructure in managing

my Government content
such as search engine
facility and my Government
content broadcasting
through Internet. The most
popular services on the My

Government portals are used for
accessing government
tenders, checking
employment prospects in
government agencies,
renewing a driving licence,

paying traffic summons,
registering a business, and
filing of income tax return
electronically.

The portal links more than 900 public sector websites at federal, state and local levels, as well as delivering government services to citizens. Currently, 30 per

cent of agencies provide
their services through my
Government portal. UN
researchers in the annual
Global E-Government
Report evaluate criteria

such as multi language,
website personalization,
feedback mechanism,
workable support links and
navigation within
tolerance. The number of

visitors to the portal has increased almost threefold in two years with a number of 6.5 million visitors as at May 15 2008, according to MAMPU. The multi-channel

service typified by my
Government is being
continued in the Ninth
Malaysian Plan 2006-2010
and further improvement

for the convenience of users is being promoted.

As mentioned above, E-community Center is a component that encourages

citizens to get involved in Malaysian political process. However, based on the current status, only poll mechanism is successfully run indicating a low level of

citizens' involvement in e-government. Based on the statistic, average number of people who are involved in poll is only 1000 people per poll. Thus, it is clear that

Malaysian government
badly needs an e-
participation platform to
improvise citizen
involvement in e-
government process.

Currently, this E-community Center has added a few mechanism to extent citizen involvement through e-government initiatives which are

survey, feedback and
enquiry and public
complaint.

E-participation

E-participation is seen to be an essential part of e-government. Many case studies were conducted

previously on e-
participation which
includes definition and
technique of e-
participation, applicable
strategies to implement

e-participation, quality of e-participation for top management decision making and others. Some literature on EG supports the statement that

e-participation could improve the quality of public sector governance process (Verma, Singh & Misra, 2007). According to Scherer, Schneider and

Wimmer (2008), EG is a well-established field in research and practice, while e-participation trails behind with only a low number of programs and

strategies at the moment. It also reflects ideas of the concept of good governance in term of ethical behaviour, governance process and others.

Citizen participation has been discussed widely especially in the field of political sciences and administration. It is often defined as a citizen action

that influences or seeks to influence policy decisions (Nagel, 1987). Meanwhile Zimmerman (1986) claims that citizen participation is an action that incorporates

the demands and values of citizens into public administration services.

Citizen participation can be categorized into 2 parts; political participation and

administration
participation (Zimmerman,
1986). Political
participation relates to
citizen involvement in
election in political

proceeding while
administration
participation relates to
citizens' participation the
management processes of
government agencies.

E-participation has gained rising importance within the information society. In general, participation means “to take part or to be involved in it” (Chamber

21st Century Dictionary, 1996, p. 1005). With the exploitation of ICT, participation will be more of electronic nature known as e-participation.

Macintosh (2006) describes e-participation as “*ICT-supported participation in processes involved in government and governance. Processes may*

concern administration, decision-making, service delivery, and policy making”.

It transforms relations between citizen and decision-makers, and those

activities are expected to help renew the representative model of democracy. Meanwhile, according to Europe's Information Society

Thematic Portal (“e-participation is about reconnecting ordinary people with politics and policy-making and making the decision – making

process easier to understand and follow through the use of new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)".

However, based on OECD report, e-participation is a term used to refer to the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in

supporting information,
consultation and
participation. E-
participation is, to a certain
extent, the same as
marketing activities and

CRM (Customer Relationship Management) in the private sector (OECD, 2001). The definition is supported by United Nation e-participation index where

e-participation is defined as ICT-enabled “participatory, inclusive, deliberative process of decision making”, including the increased supply of

information (e-information), enhanced consultation (e-consultation) and the willingness of government to take into account the

e-input of citizens into the decision making process and subsequently inform citizens on what decisions have been taken based on the consultation processes

with the framework of G2C and G2B interaction (e-decision-making) that may lead to increased input of citizens in decision making (United Nation, 2008).

Through successful e-participation implementation, government processes will be more transparent. This argument is supported by

Hacker and Van Dijk (2000)
which emphasize on e-
participation's role in
improving the transparency
of governmental activities:
“e-participation has the

potential to establish more
transparency in
government by allowing
citizens to use new
channels of influence which
reduces barriers to public

participation in policy making”.

E-participation Approach

Multi-perspective approach is one of the e-participation approaches used in

developing an e-
participation initiative.

The Politics and Organization Perspective

It is assumed that the involvement of citizens in the process of decision-

making and implementation will make the public sector agencies more responsive and effective. As such, the government needs to find

ways in eliminating the gap between citizens and government. E-participation could be an effective tool for collecting or disseminating

information and knowledge from citizen, experts, and stakeholders.

However, there are potential problems that

could prevent the smooth process of implementing e-participation for a more open, transparent and inclusive public. Also, stronger involvement of

citizens and more responsive and effective performance should be looked. Currently, citizen participation through the Internet plays only

a marginal role in the political process (Koulolias, 2007). Government should focus on the potentials and impacts of the ICT (Internet) for two-way-

communication in e-participation. The authorities should pay more attention in ensuring access to all citizens to the e-participation. The access

to the Internet is a key barrier for e-participation success. It should be seen as a responsibility of the government to overcome this barrier.

The Communication and Interaction Perspective

This perspective focuses more on the citizen participation process. This

means that design and implementation of process are always studied in relation to the use context. Authorities should focus on interaction and

communication in both design processes and in the designed system. Developer should emphasize on designing systems to contribute to quality in use

by developing techniques for users to participate in the design process. The participation processes in the design of information systems will lead to

improved quality in use
(Myers et al., 1997).

Interactions perspectives
are at: 1) both user levels
were focusing on the
support of them in order to

make them capable to participate and ability to let users interact and communicate. 2) An organizational level to develop techniques and

processes in order for
different stakeholders to
participate.

The Technology and Infrastructure Perspective

This perspective takes into consideration system applications such as voting

systems, poll, debate
system, forums, people
voice systems and others.
Some applications are
dependent on
infrastructure either

physical infrastructure or
conceptual infrastructure.
Infrastructure is an
important aspect of
concern because e-
participation needs

a suitable infrastructure for effective implementation.

The development and implementation of e-participation system and the infrastructures are co-

dependent. The main issue in e-participation is citizen involvement in the new applications. In order to capture the most effective e-participation, system

developer has to consider
the successful variables of
e-participation.

Malaysian E-participation Approach

Governments expanded
their e-participation
initiatives through certain

processes determined by their management. As suggested in this paper, Malaysian government should expand e-participation initiative

through the knowledge process approach. Creating and sharing the idea or information, is the most important element in this e-participation initiative.

Beside strengthening relationship and exchanging ideas or information, it can also improve the decision making process in

government sector.

Technical systems have been developed as a foundation for e-participation. To provide facilities for e-participation,

organization must look at
the future technical site as
well as information
environment such as
human interaction policies,
and information transfer

process. Understanding the context in depth is also important which includes pressures from the outside environment such as communities, government

and stakeholders
(Devenport, 1997).

E-participation can be
assumed as a mechanism
that allows citizen in

a country to create a community for collecting information and sharing the knowledge they know to increase the quality of government process. Based

on researchers' readings
and opinions, e-
participation initiative in
Malaysian environment
should be carried out
through three main

resources: citizen, process and technology. These three resources must play their role together to make e-participation effective as depicted in Fig 1.

**Fig 1. Keys for
Realization of E-
participation**

**Please see Fig 1 in full
PDF version**

Citizen

Citizen does not play a role in managing the information, but the government can structure

policies and training to assist the interaction through e-participation application. E-participation initiative can include design that fosters professional

cooperation by actively involving citizen at every level of society in sharing information and knowledge of their opinion, idea or comment and suggestion

for improvement. Looking at governments with developed e-participation initiative in their country, it is proven that cooperation between citizen and

government as one group will produce an excellent working style, more effective and improved democracy process. This working group will create a

relationship, trust and expertise between citizen and government. As an outcome of this resource, it will encourage development and facilities

for communities of practice
(CoP) element.

Process

Management process in government organization, be it formal or informal, requires a flow of

information. Most citizens do not realize the existence of such process in some organization. The element of this process is in determining the ways of

how to convey information by the government to the people and vice-versa. It also forms as a connection between technologies with citizen and becomes a

resource to sustain the relationship between citizen and government. Many methods developed by other countries can be deployed into the

Malaysian environment.
This process will play an
important role because
people will see whether or
not information delivered is
accepted by the

government and would further show whether the government is transparent or not. It should not only act as the relationship among government and

people, but also to help establish ties between the people. The processes will help to produce the information needed by the government and to share

the information for
benefits.

Technology

Technology functions not
only as a centre of
repository of resources and
not only as reference in

using e-participation.
Technology also acts as a
tool and requires
contribution from the
citizen to ensure a more
effective government

process. Effective technology in designing e-participation initiative will create an archive for the targeted citizen in exchanging information

with the government.
Several countries have
employed mobile
technology as their process
to make e-participation
more successful. Internet

with web based system application is the best approach for a beginning in the running of e-participation within the Malaysian environment.

After Multi-perspective approach and key for realization of e-participation have been explored, one collaborative approach for Malaysian

e-participation initiative has been developed. Researcher suggested the collaboration approach is shown in Figure 2. The approach has two

important elements that
are dependent on one
another: Information
Acquisition and
Information Dissemination.

Information acquisition is described as the acceptance of information submitted to government by citizen i.e. Communities, NGOs, Individual and Interest

Groups while, information dissemination is described as the process of delivering information to particular users. The main processes in this element are

knowledge collection and storage to be disseminated to people. Information will be gathered from outside or inside sources and will be stored in the repository.

The combination of these elements will create and establish e-participation process. Three perspectives (people, process and technology) are the

controlling mechanism to establish a successful e-participation initiative.

In brief, knowledge process approach in e-participation

concept is an approach that requires commitment from every stakeholder for smooth and effective running of e-participation. There is a crucial need in

understanding how to integrate this collaboration approach within Malaysian environment. Conversely, an organization investing in new technology without

first understanding the organization and their patents, will not achieve potential and profits from the investment made (Petrides & Nodine, 2003).

**Fig 2. Collaboration
Approach for Malaysian
E-participation Initiative**

**Please see Fig 2 in full
PDF version**

Conclusion and Future Work

With the help of ICT, e-participation will increase citizens' input to

government and citizen's participation must come together with ICT support. It can be concluded that work is needed on both sides (citizen and

government) to enable wider interaction and benefits. Although e-participation could increase the level of transparency, participatory decision

making and accountability,
the government faces huge
challenges to implement
and facilitate it.

This collaborative approach is a basic foundation for the development e-participation framework in the next phase. In ensuring successful implementation

of e-participation, there is a need for awareness of some factors such as the process, the level of participation, the communication platform, the role of

facilitation and consultation and the role of ICT (Jansky & Juhal 2006). These factors should be scrutinized to ensure successful e-participation

initiative. The result should clearly describe how citizen participation fits into government process. This approach can be integrated into an e-participation

framework and can be used
for participatory
techniques and strategy
with ICT tools.

The process of e-participation should be adopted concurrently with a system whereby people from different background have an equal opportunity

and equal access to participate in the government process. This is necessary to ensure that a larger number of people participate in the

movement of e-government. Consequently, this will realize the vision of 'reinventing government' where Government-to-Citizen and Citizen-to-

Government communication is freely accessible under main portal (mygovernment portal).

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