Chapter 5
Models of Political Representation for ICT Adoption in a Networked Society

ABSTRACT

The Internet, a global network of digital technologies, is arguably the largest and most democratic system that human beings have ever created. It is often proposed that ICT revolution, particularly the Internet, could be well utilised by the parliamentarians to improve the responsiveness and efficiency of transactions between government and elected politicians, elected politicians and their constituents, public services and the citizen. Models of political representation in a networked society and the technological and the constitutional are addressed in this chapter. The former sees the transformative opportunities of the Internet, whereas the latter model sees the Internet as a support to existing relationships between parliamentarians and their constituents. To illustrate this, the chapter examines the role of parliament within contemporary democratic governance and political online communication. Different models of political representation and parliament as a symbol of political representation in the networked society is addressed.

INTRODUCTION

More and more people are joining the information society worldwide. According to Norris (2005), the main influence of this development, as it is theorized in a market model, will be determined by the “supply” and “demand” for electronic information and communications about government and politics. Demand, in turn, is assumed to be heavily dependent upon the social characteristics of Internet users and their prior political orientations. Given this understanding, the study predicts that the primary impact of knowledge societies in democratic societies will be upon facilitating cause-oriented and civic forms of political activism, thereby strengthening social movements and interest groups, more than upon conventional channels of political participation exemplified by

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voting, parties, and election campaigning. Even though both the number of fixed- and mobile-broadband subscriptions in developing countries surpassed those in developed countries, penetration rates lag seriously behind plus other challenges such as major disparities remain in the coverage, price and quality of broadband services (United Nations, 2013).

With the general growth of research work to investigate the impact of new information and communication technologies (ICTs), in particular the Internet, upon parliamentary democracy in Western countries, it is hardly surprising that the relationship between the role of digital technologies and politics has attracted considerable attention in recent years. In an attempt to go beyond the conventional assumptions about how technological change pertaining to communication since the telegraph, telephone, radio and television, studies have focused on anything from the evolutionary phases of political communication, right through the arrival of the Internet technologies which its exponential growth that open wide the door to electronic democracy (eDemocracy). While some research has focused only on the description of differences (e-voting, e-polling, e-consultation and e-petitions which could stimulate greater political participation (Ward & Vedel., 2006), other work has sought to show how Internet has both strengthen and transform party organizations and the institutional legislative authorities (Vedel, 2006; Coleman, et. al., 1999, Ward & Vedel, 2006).

Accordingly Zittel (2003), in his study of the use the Internet by parliamentarians, proposes two models of political representation in a networked society: the technological and the constitutional. The former sees the transformative opportunities of the Internet, whereas the latter model sees the Internet as not to redefine but to support existing relationships between parliamentarians and their constituents (Norton, 2007).

Much of the theoretical aspects of the debate revolve around several key characteristics of new ICTs, which look to broaden the debate solely from a technological one-to-one concerned with the nature of democracy and democratic activity (Feebenberg, 1999 & Graham, 1999). Thus, Shahin and Neuhold (2008) contend that this can “invoked in different stages of the decision-making process, from agenda setting right the way through the monitoring process.” While there are clearly some problems with this contention such questions about the validity of these instruments for enhancing meaningful political participation, or even, problems related to access and representation. Studies has shown that the Internet so far has failed to attract more citizens into the political process, and instead is repeating a ‘virtuous circle’ of political activism in which the already engaged and politically active are the ones using the new technologies in a political way (Norris, 2002). It is clear that the emphasis on the usage of ICT remained at the centre of much of this debate. Research also has shown how Internet-based political participation is largely applicable to the well-educated and wealthy men, so far as the UK experience is concerned (Gibson, et al., 2005). This is somewhat similar to the finding by Di Gennaro and Dutton, who argued that online political participation was reinforcing or even exacerbating existing inequalities in offline political participation by increasing the involvement online among those who are already politically active, thus disadvantaging those from the less educated and lower socio-economic groups. The chief focus of this approach, then, has been to show how patterns of interaction and usage between MPs and constituents reflect the specific rules and principles theme in it.

Clearly, the use of ICTs as ‘an integral tool of strategies to revitalize governance and renew democratic culture’ (Lawson, 1998) is somewhat undeniable. Much of these researches have invited optimistic view much to the pessimistic views. The former argue that the interactive nature of Internet technologies has the potential to reinvigorate
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