Chapter 6
Technological Features and the Structuring of Political Participation: A Lens for Investigating Social Inclusion and E-Governance

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ABSTRACT
This chapter develops a theoretical lens based on the structurational perspective of technology for the analysis and investigation of such social aspects in e-Governance as social inclusion. After presenting a brief description of the research context and motivations in the introductory section, it continues with presenting the epistemological approach of interpretivism that the structurational perspective employs and the central tenets of Structuration Theory. Subsequently, it identifies the major dimensions of the context of social inclusion and construes them by using ideas and concepts from Structuration Theory. The chapter closes with some implications for research on social inclusion in e-Governance and the concluding remarks of the work.

INTRODUCTION
Technological advancements of the last years, both in the computer industry and in the communications and electronics industry, have led to an unprecedented increase in utilization of electronic means of communication in general and internet use in particular. Consequently this increase has formed a spirit of high technological modernization, which enables both governmental and private organizations to adopt information and communication technologies (ICTs) in order to, among other things, upgrade their internal communication mechanisms (van den Hoof & de Ridder 2004), be more accessible to external entities (people or other organizations) (Abanumy et al. 2005, Bruno et al. 2005, Winthereik & Vikkelso 2005) and develop novel procedures to...
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manage the organizational knowledge based on the creative capabilities of ICTs (van den Hoof & de Ridder 2004).

In the governmental sector in particular, this technological modernization has brought about changes and transformations that range in scope and impact from purely technological (Kaliontzoglou et al. 2007) to ones integrating both the technical and the social dimensions (Meneklis & Douligeris 2010). Changes were identified in the ways governmental information systems are designed and implemented, citizens and stakeholders conceptualize e-Government, and governmental organization develop and deliver electronic enterprise services (Meneklis & Douligeris 2010).

Studies of these modernization processes in governmental organizations to date have mostly focused on the technological features of ICTs, on the infrastructures (both technological and organizational) of the supply side and on the penetration of the corresponding technologies to markets or groups of people in terms of numbers. In other words, these studies have approached the matter employing technological rationality and determinism as the preferred tools of analysis and were primarily based on positivist epistemology. Whereas the above tools do provide useful and practical information, the studies that choose to cover only the technological ramifications of e-Governance fail to address another, equally important, dimension of the phenomenon, the social aspect of the digitalization of public administration.

This work develops a theoretical lens for the analysis and investigation of such social aspects in e-Governance. More particularly, it focuses on the practical and day-to-day interpretation of political participation and social inclusion and the way these have evolved and have been transformed in the context of e-Governance through the appropriation of ICTs. The paper proposes that a quantification of the analysis of social inclusion phenomena exposes only half the picture, which a qualitative analysis employing interpretive tools can be used to complete. In other words, the quantitative data that have been gathered to date concerning the digital divide and social inclusion can be creatively combined with qualitative and more specifically interpretive analyses of the central concepts concerning social inclusion and the ways in which it is understood by citizens and lay actors.

The paper proposes that the investigation of the meanings that people attribute to the concept of social inclusion as well as their everyday practices (both explicit and implicit) concerning this matter expose an interesting interpretation of the phenomenon that can be thought of as supplementary to the existing abundant positivist/quantitative studies. Moreover, this interpretation can be employed to help policymakers as well as researchers with novel and fresh research conclusions, but most importantly it will hopefully aid in the efforts of empowering the citizenry with more appropriate and efficient democratic tools (Silcock 2001, Tolbert & McNeal 2003). Internet enthusiasts have in numerous occasions advocated the positively transformative power of the internet and its (most commonly considered as unquestioned) potential of democratization. However, recent works have started to comment on the adverse effects both of the internet on democratization (Morozov & Myers 2011) and of globalization on public knowledge dissemination (Ignatow 2011). These developments, expose the ever increasing need to identify and analyse the day-to-day interpretations (and eventual ramifications) of such popular concepts as internet democratization, political participation, and resistance in the light of recent sociological and technological advances. The produced interpretations may or may not lead to the introduction of new theories or new hypotheses to test and prove or falsify. In either case, this is not the main concern of the current chapter, the chapter’s main concern is to help students of e-Governance and social inclusion to look upon the subject with alternative and fresh perspectives. After all, as Dawkins (2008) cogently puts it, “it is possible
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