Chapter 14
E-Democracy and Trust:
Social Networking and E-Government Services in Iran

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ABSTRACT

In developed countries, large numbers of citizens are benefiting from e-government services and information that is ubiquitously accessible. However, citizen’s democracy and trust play a crucial role in the advancement of e-government implementation and further progress. E-democracy is strongly linked to trust. Trust is established when one person can rely on the decision and action that another person takes. In Iran, government still struggles with injecting e-government content and value to both government employees and citizens. What is actually lacking is the establishment of Government Social Networking System (GSNS) to influence e-government expansion. In this chapter, GSNS and its contribution to e-government expansion in Iran is presented. Moreover, the author deliberates if government technological support and ICT can enhance e-democracy and trust in Iran. 800 Iranian citizens were examined through a self-administrative questionnaire containing seven structured questions. The results revealed that very few respondents were fully familiar with e-government efforts and GSNS. In case of democracy and trust issues, respondents appear to be positively resistive. They make a variety of dissimilar statements while supporting their statements with interesting but disappointing reasons. This chapter presents the outcome of this study.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-4090-0.ch014
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INTRODUCTION

One of the basic policies for democratic governance around the globe is to decrease the administrative efforts and costs and to increase the functionality of government body. Based on this fact, the target point for governments can be considered as proper use of information and communication technology in public administrations combined with an organizational change and new skills in order to improve public services and strengthen support to public policies. This will lead us to e-Government concept which is considered as a proper basis of good and efficient governance, keeping in mind that e-Government is more about government than about electronics (Sarpoulaki et al., 2008).

E-Government has attracted the attention of politicians, scientists, and statesmen of the world in the recent years and hence has been extensively approached by governments in many countries, many of whom have devoted considerable efforts and resources for its implementation (Sharifi and Zarei, 2004).

During recent years, government of Iran is moving its governmental information and activities into the online world. Issues such as those which are associated with information privacy—the ability for individuals who are the subjects of information to exercise some control over what information is collected, how it is being used, with whom it is being shared, and to whom it is being disclosed. Protecting information privacy in the context of e-Government is critical to achieve the potential benefits promised by e-Government. The traditional model of government of Iran is not working any longer (Sarpoulaki et al., 2008). In fact, Iranian leaders have started to realize the vital necessity of modernization in order to make improvements and strengthen and sustain their position in the global competition (Ahmadi et al., 1999). New business models are needed to replace the traditional ones, experiences of which could be traced in other e-Based technologies such as e-Government (Huggins, 1997).

Moreover, government and citizens’ private information and data are supposed to be secured and the quality of the government services given to citizen should be increased. For this, ICT is playing a critical role in the daily lives of citizens and functionalities of government in enhancing and revolutionizing the government services to government and citizens in doing businesses. ICT applications are made to promise to enhance the delivery of public goods and services to citizens not only by improving processes and management skills and style, but also by redefining and reforming the traditional style and concepts of citizenship and democracy (Sharifi and Zarei, 2004; Nikkhahan et al., 2009).

Nowadays, governments all over the world are embracing e-Government features to improve the public services and governmental tasks. Almost all countries and global and local governments are placing their critical information online and automating their processes so that the information would be fully available and reachable to citizens and governments (Chen, 2002). Also Iran as a developing country is now encouraging its government organizations to get more interaction with citizens and governments to improve businesses and citizen focus needs.

The advent of digital government or e-government has rapidly spread throughout the world leading to a constant stream of policy documents on e-government visions from national and supranational agencies. Canada and USA claimed to be among the most salient examples of nations that have implemented effective and efficient e-government (Holden et al., 2003). Malaysia and Singapore also say that they are leading in implementing effective e-government (Tan and Pan, 2003). Furthermore the Scandinavian countries are among the forerunners in e-government initiatives, plans, and implementation (Cap and Young, 2004; Henriksen and Damsgaard, 2007).

Common characteristic of all e-governments is citizen centric approach. This approach focuses on how governments are supported to adopt ICT