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20. Characterising e-Participation in sub-Saharan Africa: A thematic review of the literature

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Abstract:

e-Participation is understood to bring about greater participation, transparency and accountability in governance processes. North America, Western Europe and many countries in the South East Asia region, are reported to have made strides in transforming their governance systems in order to be able to accommodate e-Participation. All these countries happen to be ruled by democratic regimes. Africa on the other hand, and especially sub-Saharan Africa, is reported mainly ruled by post-colonial regimes that are not always amenable to democracy. That background suggests that little is known about e-Participation in sub-Saharan Africa. A review of a selection of most influential works was performed with the aim of characterising e-Participation in sub-Saharan Africa. The findings of the review suggest that the narrative of e-Participation in sub-Saharan Africa does not provide a proper understanding of local e-Participation actors; mostly only accounts of government led projects and initiatives; mostly only accounts of the overwhelming burden of contextual factors; does not offer clear accounts of the effects of initiatives; and does not provide a thorough evaluation of projects. Further studies should empirically examine sub-Saharan African actors, their online interactions, the effects that e-Participation has had on their lives and on their communities; making use of context relevant evaluation approaches and methods.

Keywords:

e-Participation, Sub-Saharan Africa, eDemocracy, eGovernance, community empowerment.

1- Introduction and background

E-participation is understood to bring about better public participation in the form of greater participation (increased number of participants and inclusion/involvement in decision making), transparency and accountability in governance processes (Tambouris et al., 2007). North America, Europe and many countries in the South East Asia region, have made strides in transforming their governance systems in order to be able to accommodate E-participation (Kavanaugh et al., 2012; Tambouris et al., 2013; UN, 2012; UN-DESA, 2014). Most of these countries happen to be ruled by democratic regimes looking for legitimacy through greater citizen's participation, accountability and transparency (Kavanaugh et al., 2012; Tambouris et al., 2013).

Africa on the other hand, especially sub-Saharan Africa, is mainly ruled by regimes that are nascent democracies and are sometimes qualified as authoritarian. In countries including Kenya, Tanzania, Cameroon, Gabon, Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, despite the penetration of mobile telephony, and the existence of some social media outreach programs, clarity in implementing e-Participation is not yet achieved (Dutta & Mia, 2011; Heeks & Arun, 2010; IPSOS, 2013; UN, 2012; UN-DESA, 2014). Moreover, it is reported that in sub-Saharan Africa, the link of trust between government and citizens seems faulty and participation seems constrained to loops between citizens (Åström, Karlsson, Linde, & Pirannejad, 2012). The aim of this study is to determine main characteristics of e-participation in sub-Saharan African countries as suggested by the literature. For that matter this literature review will be attempting to answer these research questions: What themes are represented in publications on e-Participation in sub-Saharan Africa between 2005 and 2015 and in what relation to one another?

2- E-participation: the phenomenon, the field of study, and main research gaps

This section provides a definition for the e-Participation phenomenon with a reference to its extra governmental happening, accounts of the shape of the field of study, and suggests some general research gaps warranting this research endeavour.

2.1 Defining e-Participation as a phenomenon

e-Participation or electronic public participation as a phenomenon, is an on-going democratic political process happening in government as a citizen engagement endeavour, and out of government as informal and formal deliberations generating public opinion, shared understanding, aligned interests, commitment and action to resolve issues using ICTs (Beynon-Davies et al., 2003). Echoing that understanding, Tambouris, Macintosh, et al. (2007:9) defined e-Participation as: *"efforts to broaden and deepen political participation by enabling citizens to connect with one another and with their elected representatives and governments, using ICTs"*.

In that situation, authority is horizontally shared between governance stakeholders, whereby public participation guaranties the legitimacy of authorisations (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000; Tat-Kei Ho, 2002). Hence, e-Participation as an eGovernance process, can be found in the convergence between pervasive ICTs and the application of authority and power to enable the creation and the management of formal obligations in polycentric networks of governance (Bevir, 2006; Chadwick, 2009; Coleman, 2005; Palvia & Sharma, 2007). As such, it enables social influence, integration and interaction using ICTs in accordance with rules, processes, actors and participating institutions (Anttiroiko, 2003).

2.2 e-Participation beyond government

The phenomenon of *"media convergence"* which led to users further empowerment over the generation, the reshaping and redistribution of the products of the media industry (Vujnovic et al., 2010) generated a cultural influence of global magnitude carrying the democratic values of

collective intelligence, participation and transparency conceptualised as “*convergence culture*” (Jenkins, 2006). Convergence culture underpins citizen/participatory journalism and social media activism. There is an understanding that both professional and citizen journalism influence the political discourse, even though not in the same way; with professional journalism fostering political learning and citizen journalism fostering political engagement and mobilisation (Kaufhold, Valenzuela, & Gil de Zuniga, 2010).

The idea of participation beyond government is shrouded in scepticism about its political and service delivery efficacy. However, it seems to be the other reality where community have to self-organise and to locally contribute to alleviate the difficulty of their situations through citizen/participatory journalism and digital activism, when government is absent, unwelcome or incapable of action. These instances of the use of ICTs and Internet applications like social media in engaging and mobilising individuals for collective action in support of a cause, also called digital or social media activism (Christensen, 2011; Valenzuela, 2013), are exemplified in the “occupy” movements around the world (Arab spring, Spain Indignados movement, Occupy Wall street, etc.) (Juris, 2012).

Further, there is also a problem with the fact that social media activism is bound to the access to social media particularly with regard to the precarious situation of ICT infrastructure in sub-Saharan African countries (Lim, 2013).

2.3 e-Participation as a field of study

e-Participation is a multidisciplinary field of study shaped around a narrative where e-Participation stakeholders including public institutions, private entities and individual actors lead online participatory activities in the context of influencing information availability, infrastructure, underlying technologies, and accessibility. In that context, e-Participation results in effects including civic engagement and deliberations, transparency and openness determined through the evaluation of e-Participation deployments (De Liddo & Buckingham Shum, 2010; Medaglia, 2012; Sæbø, Rose, & Flak, 2008). This understanding of the field presupposes to also see the use of ICTs in social movements as e-participation.

2.4 General gaps in e-Participation research

In the e-Participation field, research gaps are identified around the need to investigate a wider range of factors beyond the technology itself, investigate other stakeholders than citizens and government; the field should become more participatory (inclusive, multi-cultural and multi-ethnic), multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary in methods and design, and should be grounded in theory and produce theory (Macintosh, Coleman, & Schneeberger, 2009; Medaglia, 2012; Panopoulou, Tambouris, & Tarabanis, 2014; Sæbø et al., 2008; Susa & Grönlund, 2012; Sanford & Rose, 2007). In that regard, Sæbø, Flak, & Sein (2011) suggested that theory and research methods should target actors, context, effect and evaluation as core aspects of e-participation. These research gaps highlight the need to improve the characterisation of e-Participation according to the context in which it is being deployed: that is the gap that this paper intends to contribute in filling. This study assesses the characterisation of e-Participation in sub-Saharan Africa in the academic literature.

3- E-Participation characterisation frameworks

In order to characterise e-Participation in sub-Saharan Africa, it is important to look at the themes and categories suggested by the most popular frameworks articulating the narrative of the field. This section offers an examination of 2 main characterisation frameworks: the shape of the e-Participation field (Sæbø, Rose, & Skiftenes Flak, 2008) and the shape of the e-Participation field revisited (Medaglia, 2012).

e-Participation is generally shaped following a narrative whereby e-Participation actors using some ICTs conduct some social activities or patterns within a particular context, resulting in some democratic effects which are determined through evaluation in order to help improve the activities (see Table 1) (Medaglia, 2012; Sæbø et al., 2008). Medaglia (2012) advanced the characterisation by adding *Researchers and scholars* as actors, and degree of *transparency and openness* in evaluation; while losing *accessibility and information availability* as elements of the context (See Table 1). It is just unexpected that “for-profit organisations” (businesses) usually vendors and providers of the many products and services that are needed for e-Participation to happen are not acknowledged for the influence that they have over the process. However, that framework for analytical narratives of e-Participation provides a model for characterising e-Participation according to a specific socio-cultural context. This study is concerned with the shape of the research on e-Participation in sub-Saharan Africa.

Main themes of the e-Participation field	Saebo et al (2008) sub-themes	Medaglia (2012) Sub-themes
Actors	Citizens Politicians Government institutions Voluntary organisations	Citizens Government institutions Voluntary organizations Politicians Researchers and scholars
Activities	eVoting Online decision-making Online political discourse eConsultation eActivism eCampaigning ePetitioning	eVoting Online decision-making Online political discourse eConsultation eActivism eCampaigning ePetitioning
Effects	Deliberative Democratic Civic engagement	Deliberative Democratic Civic engagement
Contextual factors	Information availability Accessibility Underlying technologies Governmental organization Infrastructure Policy and legal issues	Underlying technologies Governmental organization Infrastructure Policy and legal issues
Evaluation	Quantity Tone and style Demographics	Transparency and openness Quantity Tone and style Demographics

Table 1: The shape of the e-Participation field
(Adapted from (Saebo et al., 2008) and (Medaglia, 2012))

4- Research methodology

This is a desktop study relying on a review of the literature. The study followed an abductive mode of inference (Meyer & Lunnay, 2013), combining inductive inference in identifying the themes in the body of text with deductive inference in determining the gaps in the literature on the basis of previous models about e-Participation research field. The review of the literature was realised following a concept-centric approach to finding articles and to structuring the operation (Okoli & Schabram, 2010; Webster & Watson, 2002; Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2015). This review attempts to answer these research questions: What themes are represented in publications on e-Participation in sub-Saharan Africa between 2005 and 2015 and in what relation to one another?

4.1 Article selection strategy

Articles were selected by searching available and comprehensive databases including Google scholar, EBSCOhost, Emerald insights, Worldcat and Web of science. In addition to some reports from authoritative international organisation and research centres (UN, AU, WEF, SIDA, etc.), the search for papers covered main stream journals and conferences comprising:

1. Government Information Quarterly,
2. Transforming Government: People, Process and Policy,
3. Journal of the Association for Information Systems,
4. Communications of the ACM,
5. Journal of Community Informatics,
6. Revue Africaine des Médias,
7. Revue Française des Sciences de l'Information et de la Communication
8. Hermes-la Revue,
9. The Electronic Journal on Information Systems in Developing Countries,
10. Electronic Journal of e-Government,
11. International Conference for E-Democracy and Open Government (CEDEM),
12. Electronic Participation conference proceedings,
13. IFIP Electronic Government (EGOV) conference proceedings,
14. IST-Africa Conference proceedings.

The keywords that were used included: e-Participation in sub-Saharan Africa, e-government in sub-Saharan Africa, e-Participation in developing countries, e-Democracy in sub-Saharan Africa, e-Governance in developing countries; ICT infrastructure in sub-Saharan African.

For the first screening of papers, a total of 175 articles pertinent to the phenomenon of eParticipation in sub-Saharan Africa was garnered having as main criteria that they needed to be specifically from the e-Participation field or from the next closest field of study. On the basis of this lot, a second round of scrutiny was performed and resulted in a nutshell of 43 papers. That second examination of papers followed stringent criteria including: their specific relevance to the democratic governance process of e-Participation in sub-Saharan Africa; their presence in medium to high impact academic journals, books and conference proceedings; and the number of their citations as suggested on Google Scholar. At this point it was already surprising how little the phenomenon under study was covered in the literature.

4.2 Analysis strategy

During the inductive phase, the analysis of selected articles was realised using the template analysis method (Brooks, McCluskey, Turley, & King, 2015; Waring & Wainwright, 2008). Themes were incidentally identified and coded during the reading and interpretation of articles' text. They were then organised in a hierarchy, of which only the two top levels were kept for consideration as themes and sub-themes constituting a particular structure or template (Brooks et al., 2015; Susa & Grönlund, 2012) that characterises e-Participation in sub-Saharan Africa.

The deductive phase consisted in using the thematic interconnection arrangement suggested by Saebo et al (2008), Medaglia (2012) and Susa & Grönlund (2012) that develops a shaping narrative for the field of e-Participation to point at omitted or added elements in the literature about the phenomenon of e-Participation in sub-Saharan Africa.

4.2 Limitations

The research couldn't access many publications because of their language base (e.g.: Spanish and Portuguese) and because of their quality as non-academic reports or for not having an important impact factor or number of citations in Google scholar. Medaglia (2012) encountered similar difficulties.

The review presented here focuses on the main themes in the literature and does not extend to Philosophical underpinnings, methodological approaches, theories, and to discussion on economics and politics of publications.

5- Characterising e-Participation in Sub-Saharan Africa

5.1 The themes in Sub-Sahara African e-Participation literature

The research has identified 7 main themes in the literature about e-Participation in Sub-Saharan Africa: *e-Participation context* (ICT infrastructure; economic, social and political inclusion; socio-cultural and economic global influences), *Projects or initiatives*, *Access to e-Participation systems and services* (Access to technology and e-Skills), *Adoption and use of e-Participation systems* (online deliberation, service delivery, collective action organisation), *e-Participation actors* (citizens and Government); *governance innovation* (e-Governance, Participatory budgeting); *evaluation of e-Participation initiatives*.

5.1.1 Context of e-Participation in Sub-Saharan Africa

Most important elements of the context of e-Participation in Sub-Saharan Africa present in the literature include: ICT infrastructure; economic, social and political inclusion; socio-cultural and economic global influences; trust in government.

ICT infrastructure: It would be difficult to implement any e-Participation initiative without the necessary ICT infrastructure. Hence one of the greatest challenge to implementation of e-Participation in sub-Saharan Africa remains the poor ICT infrastructure (Bagui & Bytheway, 2012; Bailey & Ngwenyama, 2011; Bwalya, 2009; Grönlund & Wakabi, 2015; Kalu, 2007; Mbarika, Okoli, Byrd, & Datta, 2005; Mitullah, Samson, Wambua, & Balongo, 2016; Ochara

& Mawela, 2013; Udo & Ifinedo, 2012). The important penetration of mobile telephony carrying Internet services is providing some hope for mobile participation even though, despite the important coverage, very few services and capabilities have been deployed for e-Participation to immediately benefit from them (Bagui & Bytheway, 2011; Foli & Van Belle, 2015; Hellström, 2010; Van Belle & Cupido, 2013). On top of it all, corruption and reprehensible business practices are rife in the telecommunication sector (Dakouré, 2014; Sutherland, 2015).

Economic, social and political inclusion: Sub-Saharan Africa is mostly made of poor countries, making it a luxury to access the internet and further to use it to voice needs, opinions, compliments or grievances; even though lots of improvements were achieved in recent years to reduce the cost of owning a connecting device (Mobile phone, Tablet PC, PC, etc.) as well as the cost of accessing and using Internet services (Foli & Van Belle, 2015; Namatovu & Sæbø, 2015; Ochara & Mawela, 2013).

In addition, local social structures and cultures tend to present unresolved issues rooted in the clash of colonisation with local mechanisms of power, authority and cultural norms which grant inclusion in the groups of local corporate agents or decision makers. These concerns underpin social exclusion issues leading to many actors inability to participate using ICTs (Chigona, Mbhele, & Kabanda, 2008; Namatovu & Sæbø, 2015). Furthermore, most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa are culturally highly heterogeneous, with states hosting more than 100 different instances of languages and relational norms.

Moreover, sub-Saharan African countries institutional arrangements display a lack of political will and support; inadequate technology leadership; badly implemented and context irrelevant IT governance frameworks; and constant political and bureaucratic infighting (Cloete, 2012). In addition, trust in government usually struggling with issues of corruption, nepotism and abuse of power is very low; precluding citizens from engaging with authorities in policy matters (Åström et al., 2012; Ayo, Mbarika, & Oni, 2015; Cloete, 2012). That lack of trust in government is an important deterrent to online deliberation around issues usually involving government intervention or contribution (Åström et al., 2012). This situation denotes an exclusion of the public from the decision making about their lives and the existence of their communities (Bwalya, 2009; Chigona et al., 2008; Lorini, Van Zyl, & Chigona, 2014).

Socio-cultural and economic global influences: Another element marking Sub-Saharan Africa e-Participation context is the socio-culturally charged and economically overwhelming global influence of technology and media corporate houses from Western Europe, North America and Asia (Åström et al., 2012; Grönlund & Wakabi, 2015). These technology and media houses supported by colossal financial backing are offering the technology that mostly carries messages destined to European and American markets down to the citizens of sub-Saharan Africa countries with an underpinning assumption of universality and the promotion of a convergence culture (Banda, Mudhai, & Tettey, 2009; Willems, 2013).

5.1.2 Access to e-Participation systems and services in Sub-Saharan Africa

In addition to poor ICT infrastructure, important barriers to e-Participation include: people financial inability to purchase a connecting device (PC, smartphone, etc.); the weakness of promotion to create awareness about available e-Participation initiatives; inappropriate IT

governance frameworks and the lack of e-skills of officials and citizens (Cloete, 2012; Mitrovic, Thompson, Klaas, & Mabhele, 2014; Ochara & Mawela, 2013). The combination of these challenges represent a divide preventing people from accessing e-Participation systems and services (Kiyindou, 2008, 2013).

5.1.3 Projects and initiatives for e-Participation in Sub-Saharan Africa

e-Participation projects and initiatives as part of broad eGovernment projects in Sub-Saharan Africa are reported to have a high rate of failure (Heeks, 2008, 2014).

Sub-Saharan African countries in line with the African Charter on democracy, elections and governance (AU, 2007), have been trying to implement democratic institutions with little success, prompting suggestions of developing a local democratic culture prior to institutional development initiatives (Kane, 2008; Sakpane-Gbati, 2011).

5.1.4 Adoption and use of e-Participation systems and services Sub-Saharan Africa

Many studies investigated adoption and use of e-Participation in Sub-Saharan Africa and pointed at trust in government as one of the most important deterrent in adopting and using the systems and services (Bagui & Bytheway, 2013; Chigona et al., 2008; Foli & Van Belle, 2015; Lin, Fofanah, & Liang, 2011; Ochara & Mawela, 2013; Van Belle & Cupido, 2013). eDemocracy diffusion was low and access to e-Participation systems was not leading to using them (Grönlund & Wakabi, 2015; Shalini, 2009).

5.1.5 Actors of e-Participation in sub-Saharan Africa

The main actors of the process of e-Participation in sub-Saharan Africa are government and citizens (Bagui & Bytheway, 2011, 2013; Bwalya, 2009; Grönlund & Wakabi, 2015; Kalu, 2007; Namatovu & Sæbø, 2015; Ochara & Mawela, 2013; Van Belle & Cupido, 2013). There are many more actors including organised communities and other NGOs, and businesses (Taylor, Marshall, & Amiri, 2010); but the literature doesn't provide much insights on their singular relationship with the phenomenon of e-Participation or their relation with the phenomenon after they combine their efforts or group up into network of influence.

5.1.6 Governance innovation in Sub-Saharan Africa

Sub-Saharan Africa countries are mostly run by governments still developing their democratic capability. However, with the growing pressure of citizens' unhappiness with service delivery (Akinboade, Mokwena, & Kinfack, 2013), in addition to influences from various international organisations including funders and international multilateral organisations (UN, EU, etc.), these governments are more and more playing the card of "good governance" (Åström et al., 2012; Grönlund & Wakabi, 2015; Sæbø et al., 2011). That card suggests to implement participatory initiatives including eGovernance, e-Participation, participatory budgeting, as well as an important use of Public-Private Partnerships. These programs from elsewhere do not always fit in struggling local economic and socio-cultural environments; thus require to innovate in their implementation in such a way that local solutions to local problems could be reached and implemented (Kiyindou, 2013).

5.1.7 Evaluation of e-Participation in Sub-Saharan Africa

The most recurring item reflecting on the assessment of e-Participation initiative in the e-Participation index which is usually strongly linked to eGovernment ranking of a country (Adeyemo, 2011; UN, 2012; UN-DESA, 2014). These assessment tools are too generalist to properly capture the progress a country or its particular section of the population or a particular city has made towards e-Participation success.

5.2 Thematic characteristics of e-Participation in sub-Saharan Africa

This section discusses the findings of the thematic review of the literature of e-Participation in sub-Saharan Africa.

The main narrative of e-Participation research suggests that the field investigates Actors as they initiate and conduct activities (e-informing, e-consulting and e-involving) within a particular context (Infrastructural, socio-cultural, political and economic); it also investigates the democratic effects of e-Participation activities; and then investigate the methods of evaluating these processes.

The findings of the review suggest that the narrative of e-Participation in sub-Saharan Africa does not provide a thorough understanding of local e-Participation actors apart from citizens and government which does not represent appropriately the transformations at play. There is little to none to learn about businesses and local NGOs as they initiate participatory projects with communities or even online activism (See Table 2). Only accounts of government led projects and initiatives are presented with a sense of failure attached to them.

Main themes of the Shape of e-Participation field by Saebo et al (2008) & Medaglia (2012)	Sub-themes of the Shape of e-Participation field by Saebo et al (2008) & Medaglia (2012)	Characteristics of e-Participation in Sub-Saharan Africa	Authors
Actors	Citizens Government institutions Voluntary organizations Politicians Researchers and scholars	<u>Citizens</u> <u>Government</u>	Bagui & Bytheway, 2013; Van Belle & Cupido, 2013; Namatovu & Sæbø, 2015; (Bwalya, 2009; Grönlund & Wakabi, 2015; Kalu, 2007; Ochara & Mawela, 2013). (Bagui & Bytheway, 2011).
Activities	eVoting Online decision-making Online political discourse eConsultation eActivism eCampaigning ePetitioning	<u>Projects and initiatives</u> <u>Adoption and use</u> <u>Governance innovation</u>	(Heeks, 2008, 2014). (AU, 2007), (Kane, 2008; Sakpane-Gbati, 2011). (Bagui & Bytheway, 2013; Chigona et al., 2008; Foli & Van Belle, 2015; Lin, Fofanah, & Liang, 2011; Ochara & Mawela, 2013; Van Belle & Cupido, 2013). (Grönlund & Wakabi, 2015; Shalini, 2009). (Akinboade, Mokwena, & Kinfack, 2013) (Åström et al., 2012; Grönlund & Wakabi, 2015; Sæbø et al., 2011) (Kiyindou, 2013)
Effects	Deliberative Democratic Civic engagement		
Contextual factors	Information availability Accessibility Underlying technologies	<u>Context:</u> <u>ICT infrastructure</u>	(Bagui & Bytheway, 2012; Bailey & Ngwenyama, 2011; Bwalya, 2009; Grönlund &

	Governmental organization Infrastructure Policy and legal issues	<u>Economic, social and political inclusion</u> <u>Socio-cultural and economic global influences</u> <u>Access</u>	Wakabi, 2015; Kalu, 2007; Mbarika et al., 2005; Mitullah, Samson, Wambua, & Balongo, 2016; Ochara & Mawela, 2013; Udo & Ifinedo, 2012). (Bagui & Bytheway, 2011; Foli & Van Belle, 2015; Hellström, 2010; Van Belle & Cupido, 2013). (Dakouré, 2014; Sutherland, 2015). (Foli & Van Belle, 2015; Namatovu & Sæbø, 2015; Ochara & Mawela, 2013) (Chigona, Mbhele, & Kabanda, 2008; Namatovu & Sæbø, 2015). (Cloete, 2012). (Åström et al., 2012; Ayo, Mbarika, & Oni, 2015; Cloete, 2012) (Bwalya, 2009; Chigona et al., 2008; Lorini, Van Zyl, & Chigona, 2014). (Banda, Mudhai, & Tettey, 2009; Willems, 2013). (Åström et al., 2012; Grönlund & Wakabi, 2015). (Cloete, 2012; Mitrovic, Thompson, Klaas, & Mabhele, 2014; Ochara & Mawela, 2013). (Kiyindou, 2008, 2013).
Evaluation	Transparency and openness Quantity Tone and style Demographics	<u>Evaluation</u>	(Adeyemo, 2011; UN, 2012; UN-DESA, 2014).

Table 2: Themes in the literature on e-Participation in Sub-Saharan Africa (source: Authors)

This literature mostly accounts of the overwhelming burden of contextual factors given as a justification to the failures, but little to none presents emerging opportunities within that context. Furthermore the literature had not sufficiently engaged with the structures and mechanisms controlling the social fabric of communities and how they react to the advent of the foreign made ICTs as citizens interact with each other and with authorities in e-Participation activities.

The literature on e-Participation in sub-Saharan Africa is neglecting or not observing the democratic effect of e-Participation initiatives. No proper account or analysis is made of the effect of online deliberations; social media led social movements; or just local online activism.

e-Participation is mostly evaluated using the e-Participation index as the most credible tool for measuring progresses made towards inclusive and effective e-Participation; putting aside models by Macintosh and Whyte (2008), Tambouris et al (2007), or Islam (2008). Thus, little is known about even how many people really participate in e-Participation activities in sub-Saharan Africa.

6- Conclusion

e-Participation is a study of the use of ICTs in empowering people for the betterment of their lives. The study of e-Participation in Sub-Saharan Africa is still in its infancy. When it is not conflated with eGovernment, it is twinned with ICT4D or Community Informatics. Not enough has been written to account of progresses and theoretical understanding about the phenomenon

within that particular context. The little that is available is barely starting to overview the phenomenon and it is hardly visible in English speaking main stream publications.

The findings of the review suggest that the narrative of e-Participation in sub-Saharan Africa does not provide a proper understanding of local e-Participation actors apart from citizens and government; mostly only accounts of government led projects and initiatives; mostly only accounts of the overwhelming burden of contextual factors; does not offer clear accounts of the effects of initiatives; and does not provide a thorough evaluation of projects. Further studies should empirically examine sub-Saharan African actors, their online interactions, the effects that e-Participation has had on their lives and on their communities; making use of context relevant evaluation approaches and methods.

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