

Municipalities e-Participation initiatives through Facebook: citizens perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study provides a general overview of citizens' perceptions toward e-Participation initiatives through Facebook that are sponsored by municipalities. Through a survey of 400 Facebook users in Jordan, the results provided evidence that Jordanian citizens uphold a positive attitude to participate in municipalities e-Participation initiatives through Facebook, but they show a modest intention inclined to sufficiently participate in those initiatives. Additionally, while Jordanian citizens evidenced a high self ability to participate, they questioned the underlying municipalities' commitment to seriously consider their inputs into future decisions as well as municipalities' capability to effectively manage those initiatives. The study findings support major concerns raised by recent related studies that the mere offer of social media interaction initiatives by municipalities does not certainly lead to attaining and earning citizens' participation. The study recommends municipalities to place high consideration on creating partnership relationships with citizens through two-way communication and devote more efforts to enhance citizens' trust that real changes will be reached if they participate. As municipalities have a great challenge to encourage citizens to participate, the study recommends that distributing relevant information, discussing vital subjects to citizens' interests, carefully listening to citizens' voices and then seriously consider their opinions in municipalities' future decisions are all practicable and feasible steps to encourage citizens to participate.

CCS CONCEPTS

• **Applied computing** → **Computers in other domains** → Computing in government → *E-government*

KEYWORDS

E-Government, e-Participation, Facebook, citizens, municipalities.

ACM Reference format:

Ayman Alarabiat, Delfina Soares, Elsa Estevez. 2020. Municipalities e-Participation initiatives through Facebook: citizens perspective. In *Proceedings of the 13th International Conference on Theory and Practice of Electronic Governance (ICEGOV 2020)*, 23-25 September 2020, Athens, Greece. 9 pages. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3428502.3428585>

1. INTRODUCTION

Many governments around the world are making notable endeavors to facilitate a deliberative and consultation discourse with citizens to increase their actual participation in the government decision-making process through utilizing various digital technologies, in what is called "electronic participation" initiatives (e-Participation) [42,70,80]. However, several studies have identified that government e-Participation initiatives have achieved a modest level of citizens participation [46,51,68]. Citizens' who are the essential player of e-Participation initiatives still refuse to participate [51,55,68]. Even in well-developed countries, like Estonia, that reached a prominent success in delivering traditional e-Government services and in election e-voting projects, citizens' engagement in e-Participation projects is still quite limited [68]. Likewise, recent evidence from the Netherlands, reveals that citizens show a neutral to moderate willingness and intention to participate in Dutch Government e-Participation initiatives at a provincial level [42].

As social networking sites such as Facebook have risen in popularity around the globe, the linking of e-Participation initiatives to Facebook became a notable and common phenomenon by central governments [21,69], as well as by municipalities [15,20]. Facebook large user base is widely believed to open new prospects for governments to attract and enhance citizens' participation [21,25,28]. Nevertheless, very few of such initiatives at both central and local levels had achieved a considerable success of attracting citizens' to participate, and thus citizens participation level remains low [15,20,22,28,42,44,68].

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ICEGOV'20, September 23–25, 2020, Athens, Greece
© 2020 Association for Computing Machinery.
ACM ISBN 978-1-4503-7674-7/20/09...\$15.00
<https://doi.org/10.1145/3428502.3428585>

Recently, the limited level of citizens' participation has gained scholars' attention, who begin to question if citizens truly wish and interested in getting involved and taking part in such initiatives [42,55,80], particularly in those participation initiatives performed by governments via social networking sites [3,8,51]. This question is strengthened by the fact that not all the citizens are willing to participate; some citizens segments have shown weak willingness to participate, despite their ability to do so [9,54,55]. Considering the fact that the success of e-Participation initiatives might depend on attracting and involving diverse types of citizens with different preferences, culture background, and capabilities [46,63,68], several authors have pointed out the importance of exploring citizens' attitude (willingness) and intention to participate as a preceding condition to create considerable future actual participation [21,42,44].

Thus, given the increasing use of social networking sites by governments to encourage citizen participation in governance processes [21,42,47,69], such sites are neither official government platforms/channels nor they are an ad hoc tools/platforms that have been designed for e-Participation activities [41], instead, they basically aim to satisfy people's social desires and needs [30,31]. Hence, it is very critical to study citizens' acceptance perception and intention to participate in e-Participation initiatives that performed via social networking sites.

Although municipalities (local governments) are closer to the citizens' daily life than central governments [41], little attention has been directed to the study of e-Participation initiatives sponsored by municipalities, comparing to those performed by central governments [19,76]. Accordingly, this study focuses on citizens' perspectives toward e-Participation initiatives at the municipal level and aims to answer the following research question: *What is the citizens' attitude and intention to take part in e-Participation initiatives through Facebook sponsored by municipalities?* The study also explores citizens' perceptions toward two pertinent issues: citizens perceived ability to participate and citizens' perception towards municipalities' capability and commitment to effectively operate such initiatives.

After this brief introduction, the rest of the paper is organized as follows: Section 2 discusses related work; Section 3 defines the study methodology; Section 4 and 5 present study findings and related discussion. Section 6 provides the study implications. Finally, Section 7 presents main conclusion, highlights the study limitations, and suggests directions for future research.

2. RELATED WORK

More evidence, in related e-Participation literature, reports that the majority of e-Participation initiatives and projects led by governments have not accomplished their intended promise to attract more citizens and to enhance their involvement [51,65,68]. In fact, governments achieve less success in e-Participation projects whose intent to draw citizens into the democratic process, comparing to e-Government projects that mainly focus on providing "traditional" e-services (e.g., birth registrations or driving license/vehicle registrations) [68,69,77].

Some scholars believe that the lack of citizens' involvement in e-Participation initiatives is a reasonable result due to

governments overlooking citizens' point of view in those initiatives [64,68].

While citizens are first and foremost be considered as the major key players in e-Participation initiatives, the available e-Participation studies considering citizens' perception is quite scarce comparing to the plenty of e-Participation studies that extensively focus on government perspective [42,78,80]. Recent literature reviews on social media use in e-Government/e-Participation research reinforce the overwhelming focus of studies on government point of view rather than citizens' perspective [7,8,11,21,28,47]. As a result, the effect of potential critical issues like citizens' willingness, needs, requirements, and acceptance considerably lack a full understanding and consideration in e-Participation initiatives development [7,21,47].

To fully understand the limited level of citizens' participation, it is crucial to consider the two sides of the e-Participation process: the demand side (citizens' willingness and ability to participate) and the supply side (government capability to run such initiatives).

First, e-Participation is about citizen's willingness, intention to participate, and ability to participate [29,46,57]. In this "demand" side, and to attain an adequate participation level, citizens' willingness and ability are two important conditions that should be adequately met [29,57,66]. When these conditions are satisfied, they create an effective likelihood of involvement. Consequently, e-Participation initiatives seem to have an inherently high probability to succeed [33,68].

Besides willingness and intention, attaining a high level of participation also depends on citizens perceived ability to participate [9,73]. Participation ability refers to the citizens' confidence in his/her ability and sufficient qualification to participate in community affairs by providing valuable opinions and rational perspectives [9,27]. When citizens' believe they have enough ability to participate, they are more likely interested in participating [9,27]. While several scholars stress the importance of investigating citizens ability to participate, [9,36], such topic is yet barely investigated in e-Participation research [6,9].

Second, e-Participation is about government capability and commitment to effectively and honestly run e-Participation initiatives through social networking sites [16,34,68] – the "supply" side. Rationally, e-Participation initiatives cannot be succeeded without the honest will and support of the government [32,49]. In this context, several studies emphasized the insufficient commitment exhibited by policymakers to open truthful dialogues with citizens [41,58].

Adopting push information strategy by governments through e-Participation initiatives rather than to discuss topics related to citizens' major interests or create truly deliberations with them or offering more opportunities to them to truly influence government decisions would diminish their interest to participate [2,22,49,61]. An analysis of hundreds of cities in the USA has shown that the main priority of municipalities when providing e-Participation initiatives through social media channels was only to push information rather than as an honest attempt to create truly deliberations with citizens [49,52]. A similar conclusion has been reached in developing countries context. A study of

municipalities in Saudi Arabia proves that such initiatives have offered limited opportunities to citizens to truly influence government decisions [5]. Another study finds the actual underlying reason for providing e-Participation initiatives might be to score a high ranking position in the United Nations Participation Index instead of open purposive discussions with citizens to reach common decisions [35].

Such conclusions may suggest that e-Participation initiatives sponsored by governments might be done for governments "window-dressing" and calming citizens rather than for supporting citizens governance processes and shaping government decisions [40,59]. Hence, when citizens feel that government officials are not committed to e-Participation initiatives, citizens might not be interested in participating.

Rationally, the e-Participation initiatives would not be considered successful (in terms of involving more citizens and increase their participation level) unless citizens firstly accept to join and then decide to actually participate [43,55]. Despite such importance, citizens' acceptance level and intention to involve in e-Participation initiatives have not been sufficiently measured, examined, and understood in the literature [7,43,51,55].

Based on the above discussion, the study argues that it is important to examine several pertinent issues related to citizens perspective toward e-Participation initiatives through Facebook at municipal context, namely (i) citizens' attitude and intention to participate in municipalities e-Participation initiatives through Facebook; (ii) citizens' perception toward their ability to participate; and (iii) citizens' perception towards municipalities capability and commitment to effectively operate those initiatives.

3. STUDY METHODOLOGY

This is a descriptive research study and used a quantitative approach to address the study problem. The descriptive research is suited to examine a current state of a particular phenomenon as it exists in its current state [75]. Further, the quantitative approach is appropriate to investigate peoples' attitudes and intentions [62]. An online survey questionnaire was designed and applied to Jordan citizens to gather data that was statistically analyzed using the SPSS (version 22).

3.1. Study Questionnaire

The study investigated the following pertinent constructs related to citizens' perceptions toward e-Participation initiatives through Facebook sponsored by municipalities: (i) citizens' attitude (**ATT**) and intention to participate (**IITP**); (ii) citizens' participation ability to participate (**PA**); and (iii) citizens' perception towards municipalities capability and commitment to effectively operate such initiatives (**MUN_COMT**).

To do that, the items used for each construct were chosen and modified to fit the specific context of this study from previous relevant related works. Items for measuring ATT and IITP constructs were mainly borrowed from [4,67], PA items were identified and adapted from [9,23], and the items for MUN_COMT were inspired and derived from [16,74].

Table 1 systematizes the study questionnaire constructs and items. The questionnaire was translated from English into Arabic since the study subject (Jordanian citizens) are native Arabic speakers and this avoids any potential influence of the language that may on the study results.

Table 1: Study Questionnaire Constructs and Items

CONSTRUCT	ITEM STATEMENT	References
ATT	ATT1. I believe that my participation in municipalities e-Participation initiatives through Facebook is a good idea. ATT2. I believe that my participation in municipalities e-Participation initiatives through Facebook would be pleasant. ATT3. I like to participate in municipalities e-Participation initiatives through Facebook.	[4,67]
IITP	IITP1. I expect I would engage in municipalities e-Participation initiatives through Facebook. IITP2. I intend to engage in municipalities e-Participation initiatives through Facebook. IITP3. It would be very likely that I will engage in municipalities e-Participation initiatives through Facebook in the near future.	[4,71].
PA	PA1. I care about the problems and issues that face my community. PA2. I have a pretty good knowledge and well-understanding about the important issues facing my community. PA3. I consider myself well-qualified to participate in community affairs. PA4. I believe I can provide valuable ideas, opinions, and rational perspectives related to community affairs.	[9,23]
MUN_COMT	MUN_COMT1. The municipality can be trusted to carry out e-Participation initiatives through Facebook honestly and faithfully. MUN_COMT2. I expect that the municipality would be committed to the results of e-Participation initiatives through Facebook. MUN_COMT3. The municipality has enough ability and capability to manage and coordinate e-Participation initiatives through Facebook. MUN_COMT4. The municipality will seriously consider my opinions and feedback's in their future decisions.	[17,74]

3.2. Study Context

The study considered the municipalities e-Participation initiatives through Facebook in Jordan. Jordan represents an interesting case study from developing countries. In fact, over the last decade, the studies on e-Participation, particularly through social networking sites, have centered predominantly on developed country contexts (e.g., the USA and Europe countries). Other regions such as Arabic countries and Middle East and North Africa need further consideration [11,28]. Jordan is one of those countries, what justified the focus on it for this study. Additionally, Jordanian are

avid social networking users as 94% of internet users are active social networking users, according to a newly published report by pew research center [56]. In 2017, 5,500,000 Facebook users in the country [13] and continue to rise. This makes Jordan comes in first countries worldwide on social networking usage [56].

The study was aimed at Jordanian citizens using Facebook. The invitation to take part in the survey was sent through Facebook to obtain responses from different segments of citizens in the country. The survey was available for 29 days starting on 14 November 2017. Recently, more research (e.g., [42]) starts to rely on facebook to recruit research participants.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Sample Demographic Profile

As Table 2 shows, a sample of 400 respondents was obtained. The sample size of the study exceeded the conventional requirement regarding the minimum size to be obtained (Zikmund et al., 2013), which, in this study, would be 384 respondents. Further, the obtained sample did consist of a wide variety of citizens' categories and backgrounds.

Table 2: Sample Demographic Profile

CHARACTERISTICS	PERCENTAGE (%)
Gender	
Male	63.2
Female	36.8
Age	
Between 17 and 24 years	26.8
Between 25 and 34 years	36.3
Between 35 and 44 years	25.3
Older than 45 years	11.8
Education	
Less than Bachelor degree	19.3
Bachelor degree	61.5
Master degree	14.7
Doctorate degree	4.5
Current Job	
Student	20.5
Worker	61.7
Retired	3.5
Unemployed	14.3
Living region in Jordan	
Northern region	16
Central region	64.8
Southern region	10.8
Currently, not living in Jordan	8.5

The figures presented show that two-thirds of the study sample were male (approximately 63%), with female respondents accounting for around 37%. Comparing this male/female ratio

with Arab social media report 2017 findings regarding gender breakdown of Facebook users in Jordan, the report declares that the most users of Facebook in Jordan are males (59%) and the rest are females (41%) [13], it can be concluded that our sample seems quite balanced. The most of the respondents hold several high education degrees, this higher level of education is expected to play a significant role in shaping their perception toward using e-Participation. Most of the study respondents are workers (71.6%) and only 20.5% of the total respondents are university/high school students. This figure is very important since the majority of e-Participation/e-Government studies conducted in Jordan tremendously depend on students as a major category of their research participants sample, who might not be well familiar with Jordanian e-Participation/e-Government project [14], or might have not used its services at all [45].

Considering that most Jordanians live in central cities of the country, the majority of the study participants were living in cities (71.5%) and most were from the central region of the country (64.8%). However, the sample almost covers all regions in Jordan, particularly the southern one (10.8%), a region that has rarely been considered in previous e-Participation/e-Government studies.

4.2. Measuring Reliability and Convergent Validity

To ensure the reliability of the study constructs, we evaluated internal consistency by measuring Cronbach's Alpha test (Cronbach's α). For convergent validity, we measured it by assessing factor loadings (FL), composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE).

Table 3. Reliability and Convergent Validity Tests

CONSTRUCT	ITEMS	FL	CR	AVE	α
ATT	ATT1	0.923	0.951	0.8668	0.923
	ATT2	0.935			
	ATT3	0.935			
ITP	ITP1	0.906	0.929	0.8122	0.884
	ITP2	0.924			
	ITP3	0.873			
PA	PA1	0.803	0.879	0.6080	0.768
	PA2	0.867			
	PA3	0.856			
	PA4	0.550			
MUN_COMT	MUN_COMT1	0.817	0.823	0.731	0.805
	MUN_COMT2	0.807			
	MUN_COMT3	0.760			
	MUN_COMT4	0.640			

Reliability concerns with the stability and consistency of the instrument used for gathering data [24,53], which is usually measured by Cronbach's α [26]. The study instrument exhibit a high degree of reliability as the Cronbach's α value of the study constructs is 0.855, exceeding the recommended range (0.70).

Table 3 shows that the value of Cronbach’s α for the study constructs range from 0.768 to 0.923.

Convergent validity assesses if internal items of a construct are strongly correlated with that construct and correlate weakly/or have no correlation with other constructs used [79]. This validity test implies that measurement items/components of each construct are related and just related to the construct which they are intended to measure. To ensure the convergent validity, FL should exceed 0.50 for each item; CR should be greater than 0.70 of every major construct; and AVE of every major construct should be greater than 0.50 [38]. As Table 3 shows, the FL, CR, and AVE values exceeded the recommended ranges. In sum, the results of reliability and validity tests certify that the results of the instrument application will be for a high degree trustful, dependable, valid, and reliable.

4.3. Descriptive Analysis

The Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) of the main constructs and each item comprising each construct included in the study were estimated in order to determine the level of agreement among participants. The responses of participants’ responses regarding each individual item were scored on a 5-point Likert scale: 1 = “Strongly Disagree”, 2 = “Disagree”, 3 = “Moderate Agree”, 4 = “Agree”, and 5 = “Strongly Agree”. To determine the agreement level for each construct, following [10], participants’ responses mean values were categorized based on the following classification: when a value of mean ranges from 1.00 to 2.32, the level of agreement is considered as “low agreement” among participants. When a value of mean ranges from 2.33 to 3.65, the level of agreement is considered as “moderate agreement” among participants. And when a value of mean ranges from 3.66 to 5.00 the level of agreement is considered as “high agreement” among participants. The SD value represents the degree of agreement, as SD value for a specific major construct gets close to zero this indicates a high degree of consensus among respondents toward that construct [38].

Table 4: Mean and Standard Deviation of the Four Study Constructs

CONSTRUCT	Mean	Standard Deviation
ATT	3.67	0.91
ITP	3.57	0.96
PA	3.90	0.80
MUN_COMT	3.48	0.83

As shown in Table 4, ATT and ITP mean values are 3.67 and 3.57 respectively. As the mean value for ATT is greater than 3.66 and mean value for ITP is between 2.33 to 3.65, this indicates that Jordanian citizens hold a positive attitude toward participation but they show a modest intention to participate. Meanwhile, the mean values of PA and MUN_COMT are 3.90 and 3.48 respectively. As the mean value for PA is greater than 3.66 and the mean value for

MUN_COMT ranges from 2.33 to 3.65, this indicates that Jordanian citizens highly believe in their ability to participate, at the same time, they show medium belief on municipalities’ true commitment toward those initiatives.

Table 5 shows the results of the descriptive analysis (M, SD, and level of agreement) of the items related to all the study four constructs. As Table 5 shows, the highest agreement in ATT construct was the item ATT1 (M=3.75, SD=0.96) and the item with the lowest level of agreement was ATT2 (M=3.62, SD=0.98). For ITP construct, the item with the highest agreement in the construct was the item ITP1 (M=3.62, SD=1.04) and the item with the lowest level of agreement was ITP3: M=3.52, SD=1.06). The item with the highest agreement in PA construct was PA1 (M=4.16, SD=1.00), while the lowest level of agreement was PA4: M=3.72, SD=1.13). Regarding MUN_COMT, the item with the highest was MUN_COMT1 (M=3.55, SD=1.02), while the lowest level of agreement was MUN_COMT4 (M=3.04, SD=1.12). Next section discusses the results of the descriptive analysis of the items related to all constructs included in the study.

Table 5: Descriptive Analysis Results

CONSTRUCT	ITEMS	Mean	Standard Deviation	LEVEL OF AGREEMENT
ATT	ATT1	3.75	0.96	High
	ATT2	3.62	0.98	Moderate
	ATT3	3.63	1.01	Moderate
	ALL ITEMS	3.67	0.91	High
ITP	ITP1	3.62	1.04	Moderate
	ITP2	3.56	1.09	Moderate
	ITP3	3.52	1.06	Moderate
	ALL ITEMS	3.57	0.96	Moderate
PA	PA1	4.16	1.00	High
	PA2	3.91	1.00	High
	PA3	3.94	1.04	High
	PA4	3.72	1.13	High
	ALL ITEMS	3.90	0.80	High
MUN_COMT	MUN_COMT1	3.55	1.02	Moderate
	MUN_COMT2	3.06	0.99	High
	MUN_COMT3	3.40	1.07	Moderate
	MUN_COMT4	3.04	1.12	Moderate
	ALL ITEMS	3.48	0.83	Moderate

5. DISCUSSION

The descriptive statistics depicted in Table 5 display that the item with the highest agreement in ATT construct was related to citizens’ perception that their participation would be a good idea (Item ATT1: M=3.75). Meanwhile, the item with the lowest level of agreement was related to citizens’ perception that their participation would be a pleasant experience (Item ATT2: M=3.62). ATT construct is perceived highly by the study’s participants (M=3.67, SD=0.91). This means that Jordanian citizens

have a high and positive attitude towards engagement in municipalities e-Participation initiatives through Facebook.

However, considering that the value of SD for all items of ATT (SD=0.91), this refers to little discrepancies among respondents toward the construct. Jordanians slightly split regarding their attitudes to participate. This might imply that Jordanians have not formulated a common and unified attitude toward participation yet, which means that the municipalities need to work harder on those who still did not have a decisive attitude yet to refuse the idea of participation in order to change their attitude. Simultaneously, municipalities should reinforce and encourage those others who show a positive attitude toward participation.

The descriptive statistics show that ITP construct is perceived in a moderate range by participants (M=3.57, SD=0.96). This refers that Jordanians have a medium tendency to participate. This result is consistent with recent research findings that citizens show a moderate intention to participate [22,42,68].

The mean values for all items in ITP construct yielded moderate perspectives. The item with the highest agreement in ITP was related to citizens' expectation to engage in municipalities e-Participation initiatives through Facebook (Item ITP1: M=3.62). However, when the respondents were asked about their actual intention to engage in municipalities' e-Participation initiatives through Facebook in the near future, they showed the lowest level of agreement comparing to their agreement regarding other items in ITP construct (Item ITP3: M=3.52). This means that Jordanians are not seriously inclined to participate. Further, the SD value for all items of ITP (SD=0.96) may reflect discrepancies among respondents toward the construct, which means that Jordanian citizens split between their intention to participate. This clearly exhibits that Jordanian citizens are hesitant and still uncertain about participating. This reflects an opportunity for municipalities to target more citizens who still have not decided a definitive decision yet to not to participate. In fact, as e-Participation initiatives are still evolving in Jordan [1] and not widely noticeable to Jordanian citizens, this means that the municipalities need to attract citizens who are willing and accept to participate and work further on those who still hesitant.

The findings related to citizens' attitude and intention to participate indicate that while citizens hold a high and positive attitude to participate, they will not immediately do it just because they were asked/invited to participate. Consequently, investigating the factors that might influence citizens' intention and attitude to participate would be very helpful.

PA construct is perceived highly by the study's participants (M=3.90, SD=0.80). This value conveys that Jordanian citizens hold a greater belief in their ability to participate. As Table 5 shows, the mean values for all items in PA construct yielded high perspectives. The item with the highest agreement in PA construct was related to citizens' concern about problems facing their community (Item PA1: M=4.16). These results unveil great attention on the part of citizens to municipality problems as well as a considerable sense of belonging to the community. Citizens also show a high level of agreement regarding their ability to provide valuable contributions and ideas (Item PA4: M=3.72). This study result refers to the rise in citizens' perceptions of their

ability to make decisions jointly with the government [39]. The SD value for all items of PA (SD=0.80) indicates a relatively high degree of consensus (no significant discrepancies or splits) among participants toward their ability to participate.

Considering that respondents show high self-ability to participate (M=3.90) and moderate intention to participate (M=3.57), these results are consistent with prior research findings that citizens may be able but unwilling to participate [9,54,55]. This implies that municipalities have to utilize the citizens' high ability perception to participate through creating a sense of partnership relationships with citizens through two-way communication and reinforce the idea that real changes will be reached if they participate.

Regarding MUN_COMT, the mean value (M=3.48, SD=0.83) indicates a moderate agreement among Jordanian citizens concerning municipalities commitment and capability to manage e-Participation initiatives through Facebook. The mean values for most items in MUN_COMT construct yielded moderate perspectives. Jordanian citizens show a modest level of trust in municipalities to carry out e-Participation initiatives (Item MUN_COMT1: M=3.55). The two items with the lowest level of agreement were: first, citizens' perception toward the full municipalities' commitment to reflecting citizens' opinions and their feedback in their future decisions (MUN_COMT4: M=3.04); second, citizens' expectations that municipalities would be committed to the results of e-Participation initiatives (MUN_COMT2: M=3.06). The SD value for MUN_COMT (SD=0.83) indicates a relatively considerable degree of consensus among Jordanian citizens toward this construct.

The results consistent with other studies that the sense of citizens about governments' commitment and adequate capability to successfully run e-Participation initiatives may play a critical role on enhancing their intention to participate [16,48,68]. Additionally, the results reveal citizens' high concerns around collecting their opinions without know how will such inputs be integrated into government policy-making and for how much degree would affect government decisions, which means that the municipalities need to work on guarantees that citizens' contribution will be considered if they participate. This result is consistent with recent research findings which demonstrated that governments have not shown real will and efforts to empower citizens during e-Participation initiatives [5,22,78]. Additionally, the weakly integrating citizens' inputs and feedback into government policy-making processes diminishes citizens' intention to participate [41,72]. Thus, for a high degree, it might cause e-Participation projects failure [68].

Furthermore, citizens show a moderate level regarding the municipalities capacity to manage e-Participation initiatives through Facebook (MUN_COMT3: M=3.40, SD=1.07). In fact, building the capacity of government employees is one major change that governments need to undergo in order to better leverage social media for citizen engagement [34,48,60], particularly in the Arabic region. The Arab social media report indicates that most government employees in Arabic countries have not sufficient experience on how to use social media for enhancing citizens' participation [12]. In the same line, a study

measured Facebook use in more than 200 municipalities from Italy and Spain, highlighted the need for qualified employees to operate such initiatives [37].

6. STUDY IMPLICATIONS

Nowadays, e-Participation is about enhancing citizens' involvement in shaping government public decisions and policies at both central and local levels, and not just about increasing citizens voting in elections or/and heightening citizens' relationships with politicians [46,57,59]. Clearly, we contribute to this by shifting the interest of e-Participation research beyond political activities by shedding light on citizens' participation in the formulation of government policy agendas and consider citizens' views in daily activities of local governments.

Considering the significantly grown in the number of municipalities worldwide that have been using Facebook to interact with and to meet citizen needs [18,20], the current study contributes to shift the focus of e-Participation research from the central to the municipal context.

From a practical perspective, this study provides evidence that just simply linking e-Participation initiatives to the Facebook network, does not inevitably encourage citizens to participate unless their needs, interests, concerns, and expectations will be understood and considered. The study results indicate a moderate intention by Jordanian citizens to take part in e-Participation initiatives (despite their belief that they are able to participate), which may reflect a level of uncertainty among Jordanian citizens that their involvement would effectively influence government decision or policies. Therefore, municipalities are encouraged to promote the role of citizens to ensure that their contributions/opinions/ideas will be seriously taken into consideration when it comes to government decisions. Thus, e-Participation initiatives process and outcomes should be handled transparently.

As a good strategy, as Jordanian citizens have shown great attention and a sense of belonging, municipalities need to pay more attention to design their initiatives in a way that facilitates active participation through publishing relevant, timely and worthy information to citizens and discuss cases and topics that are important to citizens. A recent study finds that while important issues that are at the center of Arab citizens concern such as housing, health, and laws, Arab governments rarely discuss such issues with citizens through their official pages on Facebook [50], which weakened citizens' interest to participate.

Finally, municipalities are encouraged to improve their employees' capability since, as the study findings suggest, Jordanian citizens highly questioned the ability of municipalities employees to operate such initiatives effectively.

7. CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study explores citizens' attitude and intention to take part in e-Participation initiatives through Facebook that are led by municipalities. The study finds that Jordanian citizens show a

high and positive attitude to participate in municipalities e-Participation initiatives through Facebook and that they decidedly believe in their adequate capability to participate. Nevertheless, Jordanians have shown a modest intention to participate and demonstrated a considerable level of uncertainty regarding municipalities capability and commitment to effectively coordinate such initiatives.

Since research work on e-Participation at municipal level from citizens' perspective worldwide, and specifically in developing countries, are scarce, it is difficult to provide more detailed comparisons and discussions. Further studies to compare our findings with other countries would most likely strengthen and validate the current study findings. As previously mentioned, the limited citizens' intention to participate requires further investigation related to potential factors that might determine and shape citizens' intention and attitude to participate.

The study focuses on Facebook since it is the most social network site used by governments [69] however, considering another social network such as Twitter seems to be interesting. Finally, it would be valuable to evaluate the municipalities employees managerial and technological skills since such skills are crucial for developing successful initiatives.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This paper is a result of the project "SmartEGOV: Harnessing EGOV for Smart Governance (Foundations, methods, Tools) / NORTE-01-0145-FEDER-000037", supported by Norte Portugal Regional Operational Programme (NORTE 2020), under the PORTUGAL 2020 Partnership Agreement, through the European Regional Development Fund (EFDR).

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