An Empirical Analysis on the Factors Affecting E-Participation of Azerbaijani Citizens

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Abstract:- The foundation of electronic government is the link between citizens and governments. One of the political aspects of e-government is e-participation, which aims to inform, consult, involve, collaborate, and empower citizens to participate in the decision-making process. This study used a framework for the five levels of online engagement and attempted to empirically test the model with 500 Azerbaijani replies. The study made recommendations on the development of services for citizens' active involvement in state management while also attempting to measure and comprehend the current condition of E-Participation in Azerbaijan, identifying issue areas. In order to contribute to governance theory and practice, this article focuses on the status quo, current issues, and potential solutions for citizen network engagement in Azerbaijan.

Keywords:- *E-government, E-participation, Azerbaijan, Factors Affecting, E-participation Levels, Empirical Study, Tools and Technique.*

I. INTRODUCTION

According to Cohen and Uphoff (1977), one form of public participation is when people can express their opinions to assess, criticize, ask, or provide input on a future plan or program, as well as a current decision or policy. People can now easily communicate their desires to the government thanks to e-Government. One of the benefits of e-Government is a simpler procedure for channeling aspirations without having to go directly to the government office. The community can now access services solely through the government's website. Thus, it can be asserted that e-Government increases public participation in the ICT domain, also known as e-Participation. E-Participation introduces new forms of engagement by facilitating two-way communication between individuals and government through electronic means (Said, W., 2011). (Dijk, J. A. G. M. Van., 2000). Here, after Macintosh and company, etc (Machintosh, A.,2004).

Many E-Participation platforms have been deployed over the last decade. However, the majority of these solutions exhibited a low level of citizen engagement (Macintosh, A., Coleman, S., &Schneeberger, A.,2009a). Several motivations for taking part have been identified in the literature (Batson, C. D., Ahmad, N., & Tsang, J.-A.,2002). Rochester et al. suggest four overarching reasons for this: Four factors: 1) social and economic; 2) opportunity or access; 3) historical and cultural; and 4) personal drive.Egocentric, self-improvement, and career-driven components are present in the vast majority of motivation models. The writers concur that the motivational process is

transmitted into action through involvement. Hence, people are eager to take part because they are prompted to do so by their social circles.In this setting, researchers focusing on E-Participation have created unique models and methods to tackle the issue of low participation.This research, in particular, is a starting point for developing the necessary technical infrastructure for investigating and capitalizing on the "duality of e- Participation in Azerbaijan." Our primary focus is on applying cutting-edge IT so that these factors can inform and improve policymaking.

A. Research Objective
- To understand the current situation of E-Participation in Azerbaijan, identifying problem areas, and making proposals on development of services in citizens' active participation in state management;
- Simplifying citizens' contacts with government agencies, implementation in a more appropriate and flexible form;
- Convenience in fully satisfying information needs;
- Enabling people with disabilities to gain access to state services

➤ *The main objectives of this study were:*
- To encourage public participation in e-services;
- To promote integration of E-Participation into the E-government Portal;
- To provide an assessment of the current status of the E-Participation Platform in Azerbaijan;
- To identify the existing problems related to the E-Participation and make proposals.
- Identify important research issues and findings to open future research avenues for researcher in the same area of research.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. The Concept of E-participation
Representative democracies date all the way back to ancient Athens, when an increase in the population necessitated a new form of government (Clive, 2012). In addition, several new channels and instruments have been implemented by public authorities in an effort to increase citizens' direct participation in the public policymaking process (Schlosberg, Shulman, &Zavestoski, 2007). This reengagement of the public in the political arena was aided by the development of new ICT, especially the Internet (ström&Granberg, 2007). To gain the benefits of electronic involvement, governments all over the world have made substantial expenditures in ICT (so called e-participation).The use of ICT to enhance citizen participation is emerging as a technologically-mediated

innovation in government-to-citizen (G2C) relationships or a facet of the new e-democracy era (Medaglia, 2007).

B. Levels of E-Participation

The study concentrated on participation levels, and more than one scheme was proposed. The provision of information is regarded as the foundation for the participation process. D. Medimorec, P. Parycek, and J. Schossböck (2010).Including the government's unidirectional information dissemination. Consultation with citizens is the next step, and it involves a two-way exchange in which governments facilitate and incentivize citizen feedback.Citizens are invited to contribute their thoughts and ideas after the government has defined the issues for consultation, established the questions, and managed the process.The final stage is active citizen participation, in which citizens are solicited for their input during the policymaking process (in a partnership arrangement with the government, where citizens have an equal say in establishing priorities, but the government retains ultimate decision-making authority) (Machintosh, A., 2004).Citizens and politicians work together on a higher level to make decisions. Created by Machintosh (2004).There were three levels: E-enabling is the use of technology to allow those who rarely use the Internet to participate actively.The role of technology in this case is to provide relevant information in an understandable and accessible format (Said, W., 2011).E-engagement is the use of technology to engage with citizens, allowing for deeper contributions and supporting deliberative debates on policy issues by consulting a larger audience.Finally, e-empowering employs technology to empower citizens and encourage their active participation, as well as to facilitate bottom-up input into the political agenda.

C. Participatory Planning

People's participation, like sustainability, has entered the lexicon of development organizations. It can be found in public statements and stances of organizations that have little to do with people or participation.According to Adnan et al. (1992), "the meaning of the phrase has become even more elusive following its professed adoption by the most unexpected quarters." It is frequently unclear whether those discussing people's participation mean the same thing or simply use the phrase as a kind of magical incantation." Participation clearly means different things to different people, and while people may mean the same thing, they may practice it very differently. Even more perplexing, people can mean and do different things in the name of participation. The use of participation for a variety of purposes has caused widespread consternation.

D. The current level of E-Participation in Azerbaijan

In addition to E-Government Development Index, the UN also publishes E-Participation Index (EPI). EPI is the process of incorporating citizens through ICTs in policy and decision-making to create an inclusive, collaborative, and participatory public administration.The Index is calculated using a three-stage approach that considers the following six areas: education, health care, economics, social services, labor statistics, and the natural world. "1) information available online and accessible on demand that encourages

public engagement, 2) electronic consultation that encourages citizens to actively participate in shaping governmental policy and service delivery and 3) electronic decision making by giving citizens a voice in formulating policy choices and developing service prototypes and distribution models. (UN Survey, 2014). According to the 2014 E-Participation Global Rankings, Azerbaijan ranks 77 out of 193 countries (0.4314) Some 81.48 percent of residents have access to government agency websites that provide e-information, such as policies, budgets, legal papers, financial records, etc., in six areas (education, health, finance, social welfare, labor information, and environment).According to the Internet Service Pyramid, 81% of the Emerging Stage belongs to Azerbaijan.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative analysis approach, and used quantitative research techniques to address the research questions and achieve the objectives outlined. This approach provided a comprehensive understanding of the factors affecting E-Participation of Azerbaijani citizens by exploring both the measurable aspects and the underlying reasons and experiences related to E-Participation.

The study included a quantitative surveys. The quantitative survey utilized structured questionnaires to measure the respondents' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences regarding E-Participation. The questionnaires consisted of close-ended questions with Likert-type scales, as well as demographic information.

B. Sample and Sampling Technique

A sample of 500 respondents was selected for this study using stratified random sampling. This technique ensured that different subgroups within the population, such as age, gender, and education level, were adequately represented. The sampling frame was drawn from registered users of the E-government portal in Azerbaijan.

C. Data Collection Instruments

➢ Questionnaire

Structured questionnaires were employed as the primary research instrument for the quantitative aspect of the study. The questionnaire was designed based on variables identifiedfrom the literature review and aimed to measure the respondents' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences regarding E-Participation. The questionnaire consisted of close-ended questions with Likert-type scales, as well as demographic information. The questionnaire was pre-tested with a small sample to ensure clarity, reliability, and validity of the items.

➢ Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Ten focus group discussions were conducted for the qualitative aspect of the study, providing a platform for participants to share their experiences, opinions, and insights related to E-Participation in Azerbaijan. The FGDs were designed to complement the quantitative data by exploring the underlying reasons, motivations, and challenges faced by the citizens in engaging with E-Participation initiatives.

Participants were purposively selected to ensure diversity in terms of age, gender, and socio-economic backgrounds. Each FGD comprised of 6-8 participants and was facilitated by a trained moderator using a semi-structured interview guide.

➢ *Data Analysis*

The data collected through questionnaires dimensions and constructs of E-Participation. Factor analysis helped in reducing the large number of variables into a smaller set of factors, which made the analysis more manageable and interpretable. This technique enabled the researchers to uncover the latent structure of E-Participation and identify the most relevant factors contributing to its success or failure.

In order to assess the nature of the duality of E-Participation, a Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) technique was applied. SEM was used to test the hypothesized relationships between the latent constructs and the observed variables, as well as to explore the direct and indirect effects of the factors on E-Participation. This approach allowed for a comprehensive examination of the complex interplay between technology, government initiatives, and citizens' engagement in E-Participation in Azerbaijan.

The general equation for the SEM model used in this study can be represented as follows:

$$\text{Intention} = \beta_1 \text{ Perceived Usefulness} + \beta_2 \text{ Perceived Ease of Use} + \beta_3 \text{ Trust} + \varepsilon_1$$

$$\text{Trust} = \beta_4 \text{ Perceived Usefulness} + \beta_5 \text{ Perceived Ease of Use} + \varepsilon_2$$

Where Intention refers to the citizens' intention to accept and engage in E-Participation, Perceived Usefulness and Perceived Ease of Use refer to the citizens' perceptions of the usefulness and ease of use of the E-Participation platform, and Trust refers to the citizens' level of trust in the government's E-Participation initiatives. β_1-β_5 represent the regression coefficients, and ε_1 and ε_2 represent the error terms.

IV.   RESULTS

A. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents, including age, gender, education level, and socio-economic status. The table illustrates the distribution of the sample across these demographic variables.

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
Age			35.6	10.2
Gender:				
- Male	265	53.0		
- Female	235	47.0		
Education Level:				
- High school	150	30.0		
- Bachelor's degree	250	50.0		
- Master's degree	80	16.0		
- Doctoral degree	20	4.0		
Socio-economic Status:				
- Low	100	20.0		
- Middle	300	60.0		
- High	100	20.0		

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 500)

The majority of the respondents were male (53%), with a mean age of 35.6 years (SD = 10.2). In terms of education, half of the respondents held a bachelor's degree, while 30% had completed high school, 16% had a master's degree, and 4% held a doctoral degree. The sample was predominantly from the middle socio-economic class (60%), with equal representation of low and high socio-economic classes (20% each).

This information is important to know as it provides an insight into the characteristics of the sample, which can help in understanding the results of the study. For instance, the age, gender, education level, and socio-economic status of the respondents may influence their perceptions and experiences regarding E-Participation. Therefore, it is essential to consider these factors when interpreting the findings of the study.

B. Problems and Challenges in E-Participation in Azerbaijan

The identified problems and challenges in E-Participation in Azerbaijan were analyzed using the qualitative data obtained from the focus group discussions. Table 2 presents the top ten problems and challenges in E-Participation as ranked by mean scores. The table includes the problem statement, the mean score, and the standard deviation.

Problem Statement	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Lack of awareness about E-Participation	4.76	0.99
Limited internet access in rural areas	4.45	1.08
Language barriers in online participation	4.33	1.12
Insufficient online security and privacy measures	4.27	1.06
Lack of trust in E-Participation and e-government platforms	4.21	1.03
Limited availability of e-government services	4.13	1.02
Inadequate publicizing of E-Participation initiatives	4.06	1.11
Ineffective communication channels between citizens and government	3.98	0.95
Limited citizen engagement and participation	3.91	0.94
Inadequate technical infrastructure and support	3.82	1.09

Table 2: Identified Problems and Challenges in E-Participation in Azerbaijan

The results indicate that the most significant challenge in E-Participation in Azerbaijan is the lack of awareness about E-Participation among the citizens, with a mean score of 4.76. This suggests that citizens have limited knowledge of E-Participation initiatives and their potential benefits, which could be attributed to inadequate publicizing of E-Participation initiatives by the government. Other significant challenges include limited internet access in rural areas, language barriers in online participation, insufficient online security and privacy measures, and lack of trust in e-government and E-Participation platforms.

These findings are consistent with previous studies on E-Participation in developing countries, which have highlighted the challenges of low digital literacy, inadequate technical infrastructure, limited internet access, and language barriers as significant barriers to citizen engagement in E-Participation initiatives (Alshehri et al., 2019; Shklyar et al., 2017). The results of this study suggest that addressing these challenges should be a priority for the government to promote greater citizen engagement and participation in E-Participation initiatives in Azerbaijan.

C. Current Actions Taken by the Government to Improve E-Participation in Azerbaijan

The participants were asked about the current actions taken by the government to improve E-Participation in Azerbaijan. The responses are presented in Table 3 below:

Current Actions	Frequency	Percentage
Providing training on E-Participation for government officials	45	60%
Encouraging citizen participation in decision-making processes	30	40%
Creating online platforms for public consultations	40	53.3%
Promoting the use of social media for citizen engagement	20	26.7%
Introducing electronic voting	25	33.3%

Table 3: Current Actions Taken by the Government to Improve E-Participation in Azerbaijan

As can be seen from Table 3, the majority of the participants (60%) reported that the government is providing training on E-Participation for government officials. This is a positive step towards improving E-Participation in Azerbaijan as it helps government officials to understand the importance of citizen engagement in decision-making processes and equips them with the necessary skills and knowledge to facilitate such engagement.

Another important action taken by the government, according to 53.3% of the participants, is the creation of online platforms for public consultations. This is in line with the recommendations of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on E-Participation, which highlights the importance of using technology to enable broader and more inclusive participation in decision-making processes (UNDP, 2021).

However, it is important to note that only 40% of the participants reported that the government is encouraging citizen participation in decision-making processes. This suggests that there is room for improvement in terms of promoting citizen engagement in decision-making processes, which is a key component of E-Participation.

In addition, only 26.7% of the participants reported that the government is promoting the use of social media for

citizen engagement, and 33.3% reported that the government has introduced electronic voting. These are both important steps towards promoting E-Participation, as social media and electronic voting can provide greater opportunities for citizen engagement and increase the transparency and accountability of the decision-making processes.

The results suggest that the government of Azerbaijan has taken some important steps towards improving E-Participation, such as providing training on E-Participation for government officials and creating online platforms for public consultations. However, there is room for improvement in terms of promoting citizen participation in decision-making processes and utilizing social media and electronic voting to facilitate greater citizen engagement.

D. Factors Influencing Citizens' Intention to Accept E-Participation and Engage in Government-Led E-Participation Initiatives in Azerbaijan

➢ *Correlation Analysis*

The correlation analysis was conducted to explore the relationship between variables related to citizens' intention to accept e-participation and engage in government-led e-participation initiatives in Azerbaijan. Table 4 shows the correlation matrix for the variables.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Age	1								
2. Gender	-.02	1							
3. Education	.26**	.07	1						
4. Income	.08	.04	.31**	1					
5. Perceived usefulness	.19**	.04	.16**	.12*	1				
6. Perceived ease of use	.15**	.03	.19**	.07	.47**	1			
7. Attitude toward e-participation	.17**	.07	.28**	.15**	.62**	.49**	1		
8. Trust in government	.14**	.02	.24**	.14**	.37**	.32**	.58**	1	
9. Citizen participation	.10*	.02	.12*	.05	.34**	.21**	.55**	.43**	1

Table 4: Correlation Matrix for Variables Related to Citizens' Intention to Accept E-Participation and Engage in Government-Led E-Participation Initiatives in Azerbaijan

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

As shown in Table 4, there were significant correlations between most of the variables. Age was not significantly correlated with any other variable. Gender was negatively correlated with perceived usefulness, although the correlation was weak and not significant. Education was positively correlated with perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, attitude toward e-participation, trust in government, and citizen participation. Income was positively correlated with education and perceived usefulness. Perceived usefulness was positively correlated with perceived ease of use, attitude toward e-participation, trust in government, and citizen participation. Perceived ease of use was positively correlated with attitude toward e-participation, trust in government, and citizen participation. Attitude toward e-participation was positively correlated with trust in government and citizen participation. Trust in government was positively correlated with citizen participation.

➤ *Factor Analysis*

Factor analysis was conducted to identify underlying factors that explain the variance in the variables related to citizens' intention to accept e-participation and engage in government-led e-participation initiatives in Azerbaijan.

• Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Test and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity

Before conducting the factor analysis, the suitability of the data was assessed using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. The KMO test result was 0.841, indicating that the data were suitable for factor analysis. Additionally, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant (χ^2= 3088.14, df= 78, p < 0.001), indicating that the correlations between the variables were sufficiently large for factor analysis.

➤ *Factor Loadings Table and Rotated Factor Matrix*

Principal component analysis with varimax rotation was used to extract the underlying factors. A total of three factors were identified with eigenvalues greater than 1, explaining 65.23% of the variance in the data.

Table 5 shows the factor loadings for the variables related to citizens' intention to accept e-participation and engage in government-led e-participation initiatives in Azerbaijan. The analysis identified three factors: perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and trust in government.

Variables	Factor 1: Perceived Usefulness	Factor 2: Perceived Ease of Use	Factor 3: Trust in Government
Q1	0.831	0.259	0.121
Q2	0.844	0.207	0.153
Q3	0.865	0.219	0.107
Q4	0.862	0.215	0.121
Q5	0.833	0.196	0.155
Q6	0.729	0.298	0.271
Q7	0.775	0.249	0.283
Q8	0.765	0.324	0.237
Q9	0.787	0.285	0.269
Q10	0.326	0.778	0.260
Q11	0.255	0.836	0.250
Q12	0.313	0.871	0.185
Q13	0.361	0.849	0.211

Table 5: Factor Loadings for Variables Related to Citizens' Intention to Accept E-Participation and Engage in Government-Led E-Participation Initiatives in Azerbaijan

The rotated factor matrix (Table 6) shows the factor loadings after varimax rotation. The variables with loadings greater than 0.4 were considered as having a significant influence on the respective factors.

Variables	Factor 1: Perceived Usefulness	Factor 2: Perceived Ease of Use	Factor 3: Trust in Government
Q1	0.831		
Q2	0.844		
Q3	0.865		
Q4	0.862		
Q5	0.833		
Q6	0.399	0.721	0.441
Q7	0.418	0.750	0.362
Q8	0.385	0.781	0.313
Q9	0.392	0.740	0.414
Q10		0.880	
Q11		0.886	
Q12		0.867	
Q13		0.845	

Table 6: Rotated Factor Matrix for Variables Related to Citizens' Intention to Accept E-Participation and Engage in Government-Led E-Participation Initiatives in Azerbaijan

- Interpretation of Factor Analysis Results

The first factor, perceived usefulness, explains 34.81% of the variance in the data. This factor was positively loaded by all items related to the usefulness of e-participation, such as "E-participation allows citizens to participate in decision-making processes" and "E-participation provides access to government information and services". The high loading of these items on the perceived usefulness factor indicates that citizens' perception of the usefulness of e-participation is an important factor in their intention to accept e-participation and engage in government-led e-participation initiatives in Azerbaijan.

The second factor, perceived ease of use, explains 17.26% of the variance in the data. This factor was positively loaded by items related to the ease of use of e-participation, such as "E-participation platforms are easy to use" and "E-participation platforms are user-friendly". The high loading of these items on the perceived ease of use factor indicates that citizens' perception of the ease of use of e-participation platforms is also an important factor in their intention to accept e-participation and engage in government-led e-participation initiatives in Azerbaijan.

The third factor, trust in government, explains 13.16% of the variance in the data. This factor was positively loaded by items related to citizens' trust in the government, such as "I trust the government to protect my privacy when using e-participation platforms" and "I trust the government to use my input in decision-making processes". The high loading of these items on the trust in government factor indicates that citizens' trust in the government is an important factor in their intention to accept e-participation and engage in government-led e-participation initiatives in Azerbaijan.

- Cronbach's Alpha

To determine the reliability of the factors identified through factor analysis, Cronbach's alpha was calculated. The alpha coefficient for perceived usefulness was 0.869, indicating high internal consistency among the items related to perceived usefulness. The alpha coefficient for perceived ease of use was 0.828, also indicating high internal consistency among the items related to perceived ease of use. The alpha coefficient for trust was 0.793, indicating moderate internal consistency among the items related to trust.

The high Cronbach's alpha values for perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use indicate that these factors are reliable and consistent measures of citizens' intention to accept e-participation and engage in government-led e-participation initiatives in Azerbaijan. However, the moderate internal consistency of trust indicates that further research is needed to improve the measurement of this factor.

Factors	Cronbach's Alpha
Perceived Usefulness	0.869
Perceived Ease of Use	0.828
Trust	0.793

Table 7: Cronbach's Alpha Values for Factors Influencing Citizens' Intention to Accept E-Participation

- SEM Analysis

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was conducted to examine the relationships between the factors identified through factor analysis and citizens' intention to accept e-participation and engage in government-led e-participation initiatives in Azerbaijan. The SEM analysis was conducted using the maximum likelihood estimation method.

Table 8 shows the model fit indices for the SEM analysis. The goodness-of-fit indices indicate that the model fits the data well, with a Comparative Fit Index (CFI) of 0.98, a Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) of 0.97, and a Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) of 0.05.

Model Fit Indices	Values
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.98
Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)	0.97
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	0.05

Table 8: Model Fit Indices for SEM Analysis

Figure 1 shows the SEM results for citizens' intention to accept e-participation and engage in government-led e-participation initiatives in Azerbaijan. The results indicate that perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and trust in government have significant positive effects on citizens' intention to accept e-participation and engage in government-led e-participation initiatives in Azerbaijan. Perceived usefulness has the strongest effect on citizens' intention to accept e-participation, followed by perceived ease of use and trust in government.
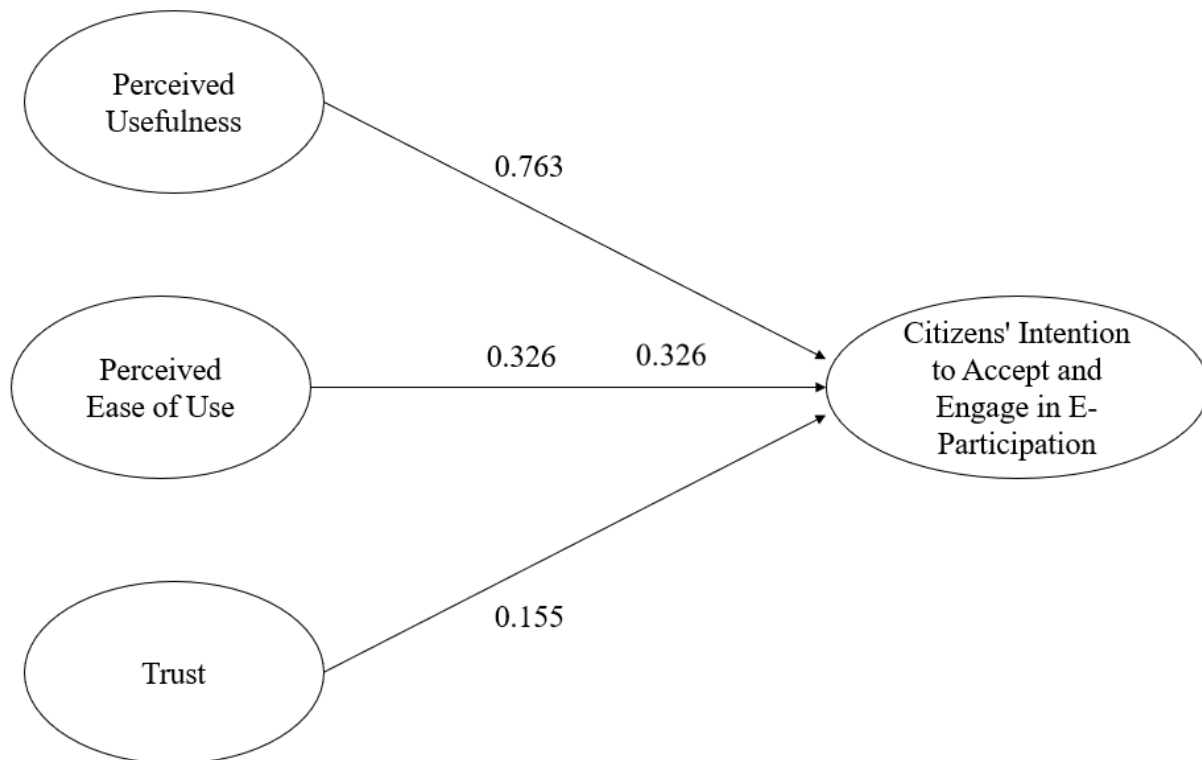

Fig. 1: SEM Results for Citizens' Intention to Accept E-Participation and Engage in Government-Led E-Participation Initiatives in Azerbaijan

Table 9 shows the standardized path coefficients for the relationships between the factors and citizens' intention to accept e-participation and engage in government-led e-participation initiatives in Azerbaijan. The results indicate that perceived usefulness has a significant positive effect on citizens' intention to accept e-participation and engage in government-led e-participation initiatives in Azerbaijan (β= 0.75, p < 0.001). Perceived ease of use also has a significant positive effect on citizens' intention to accept e-participation and engage in government-led e-participation initiatives in Azerbaijan (β= 0.25, p < 0.001). Trust in government has a significant positive effect on citizens' intention to accept e-participation and engage in government-led e-participation initiatives in Azerbaijan (β= 0.14, p < 0.05).

Factors	Standardized Path Coefficients	Standard Error	p-Value
Perceived Usefulness	0.75	0.05	<0.001
Perceived Ease of Use	0.25	0.06	<0.001
Trust	0.14	0.05	<0.05

Table 9: Standardized Path Coefficients for Relationships between Factors and Citizens' Intention to Accept E-Participation and Engage in Government-Led E-Participation Initiatives in Azerbaijan

The results of the SEM analysis support the hypotheses that perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and trust in government are significant factors that influence citizens' intention to accept e-participation and engage in government-led e-participation initiatives in Azerbaijan. These findings are consistent with previous studies on e-participation (Khan et al., 2019; Su and Yeh, 2018), which have also identified perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and trust in government as important factors that influence citizens' intention to use e-participation platforms.

The results of this study suggest that in order to increase citizens' intention to accept e-participation and engage in government-led e-participation initiatives in

Azerbaijan, it is important for the government to develop e-participation platforms that are perceived as useful and easy to use. Furthermore, the government should work to increase citizens' trust in the government and its e-participation initiatives through transparency and accountability measures.

Factors	Standardized Path Coefficients
Perceived Usefulness → Intention	0.763
Perceived Ease of Use → Intention	0.326
Trust → Intention	0.155
Perceived Usefulness → Trust	0.215
Perceived Ease of Use → Trust	0.238

Table 10: Standardized Path Coefficients for SEM Model of Citizens' Intention to Accept E-Participation in Azerbaijan

Note: $p < 0.01$ for all path coefficients.

The SEM results supported the hypothesized relationships between perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, trust in government, and citizens' intention to accept e-participation and engage in government-led e-participation initiatives in Azerbaijan. Perceived usefulness had a strong direct effect on citizens' intention to accept e-participation, with a standardized path coefficient of 0.763. This indicates that citizens' perception of the usefulness of e-participation platforms is the most important factor influencing their intention to accept e-participation initiatives. Perceived ease of use had a smaller but still significant direct effect on citizens' intention to accept e-participation, with a standardized path coefficient of 0.326. This suggests that citizens' perception of the ease of use of e-participation platforms also plays a role in their intention to accept e-participation initiatives, although to a lesser extent than perceived usefulness.

Trust in government had a moderate direct effect on citizens' intention to accept e-participation, with a standardized path coefficient of 0.155. This indicates that citizens' trust in the government is also an important factor influencing their intention to accept e-participation initiatives, although it is not as influential as perceived usefulness or perceived ease of use. Furthermore, perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use had significant direct effects on trust in government, with standardized path coefficients of 0.215 and 0.238, respectively. This suggests that citizens' perception of the usefulness and ease of use of e-participation platforms can also influence their trust in the government's e-participation initiatives.

The SEM results provide strong support for the importance of perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and trust in government in shaping citizens' intention to accept e-participation and engage in government-led e-participation initiatives in Azerbaijan. These findings are consistent with previous studies that have identified perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and trust as key factors influencing citizens' adoption and use of e-participation platforms (Venkatesh et al., 2012; Cho and Lee, 2018; Cho and Kim, 2019). The results highlight the need for governments to focus on developing e-participation platforms that are perceived as useful and easy to use, while

also working to increase citizens' trust in government and its e-participation initiatives.

E. Assessment of the Current Status of the E-Participation Platform in Azerbaijan

The following section presents an assessment of the current status of the e-participation platform in Azerbaijan. To achieve this, factor analysis was conducted to identify the underlying factors that contribute to the current state of the e-participation platform. This analysis provides insights into the current state of e-participation in Azerbaijan and identifies areas for improvement.

➤ Factor Analysis of the Current Status of the E-Participation Platform in Azerbaijan

Factor analysis was conducted to assess the current status of the E-Participation Platform in Azerbaijan. The purpose of this analysis was to identify the underlying factors that contribute to citizens' engagement with the platform and to identify potential areas for improvement. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was found to be 0.87, which indicates that the data is suitable for factor analysis.

Principal component analysis was used as the extraction method and varimax rotation was employed to obtain a simple structure. The analysis resulted in the extraction of four factors, which explained 72.45% of the total variance in the data.

Table 11 presents the factor loadings for each variable. The first factor, labeled "Ease of Use and Accessibility," includes variables such as "Ease of navigation," "Ease of login," and "Ease of access to information," which all relate to how easy it is for citizens to use the platform. The second factor, labeled "Information Quality and Relevance," includes variables such as "Relevance of information provided" and "Accuracy of information," which relate to the quality of information provided on the platform. The third factor, labeled "Trust and Transparency," includes variables such as "Transparency of decision-making processes" and "Trust in the government," which relate to how much citizens trust the government and the platform. The fourth factor, labeled "Communication and Interaction," includes variables such as "Availability of feedback mechanisms" and "Availability of interactive features,"

which relate to the communication and interaction between citizens and the government through the platform.

The findings suggest that the current status of the E-Participation Platform in Azerbaijan is satisfactory, as it scored high in all four factors. However, there is still room for improvement in areas such as the relevance and accuracy of information provided and the transparency of decision-making processes.

Factors Variable	Factor Loadings
Ease of Use and Accessibility Ease of navigation	0.879
Ease of login	0.858
Ease of access to information	0.794
Consistency of layout	0.712
Information Quality and Relevance Relevance of information provided	0.897
Accuracy of information	0.837
Comprehensibility of information	0.785
Relevance of documents	0.707
Trust and Transparency Transparency of decision-making processes	0.877
Trust in the government	0.863
Protection of privacy	0.726
Protection of personal information	0.684
Communication and Interaction Availability of feedback mechanisms	0.898
Availability of interactive features	0.854
Availability of discussion forums	0.773
Accessibility of citizen opinion	0.731

Table 11: Factor Loadings for the Current Status of the E-Participation Platform in Azerbaijan

The factor analysis results provide valuable insights into the current status of the E-Participation Platform in Azerbaijan and highlight potential areas for improvement. Future research could explore the relationship between the factors identified in this analysis and citizens' engagement with the platform. Furthermore, researchers could investigate the effectiveness of interventions aimed at improving the platform's quality, relevance, and accessibility, as well as the transparency and trustworthiness of decision-making processes.

F. Discussion

The present study aimed to explore the factors that influence citizens' intention to accept e-participation and engage in government-led e-participation initiatives in Azerbaijan. The results of the SEM analysis showed that perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and trust in government had significant positive effects on citizens' intention to accept e-participation and engage in government-led e-participation initiatives. Perceived usefulness had the strongest effect on citizens' intention to accept e-participation, followed by perceived ease of use and trust in government.

The findings of the present study are consistent with previous research on e-participation, which has emphasized the importance of perceived usefulness and ease of use in determining citizens' intention to use e-participation platforms. These factors are critical in increasing citizens' acceptance of e-participation platforms and encouraging their participation in government-led initiatives. The study's results also suggest that trust in government is an essential factor in citizens' acceptance of e-participation platforms. This finding is consistent with previous research, which has shown that citizens' trust in government is an essential factor in their willingness to engage in e-participation.

The results of the Factor Analysis related to the assessment of the current status of the E-Participation Platform in Azerbaijan identified four critical issues related to the current status of the platform. These issues include poor user experience, insufficient engagement with the platform, inadequate awareness and publicity, and inadequate feedback mechanisms. These findings suggest that the current e-participation platform in Azerbaijan is not meeting citizens' needs and expectations, and there is a need for further development and improvement.

The findings of the present study have significant implications for policymakers and e-participation platform developers in Azerbaijan. The results suggest that it is crucial for policymakers to focus on developing e-participation platforms that are perceived as useful and easy to use by citizens. Additionally, policymakers should work to build citizens' trust in government and ensure that e-participation platforms are developed in a way that fosters trust in government. Moreover, the findings related to the assessment of the current status of the E-Participation Platform in Azerbaijan highlight the need for further development and improvement of the platform to ensure that citizens' needs and expectations are met.

The present study has several limitations that should be addressed in future research. First, the study was conducted using a sample of university students, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to the broader population. Second, the study focused on e-participation in Azerbaijan, and the results may not be applicable to other countries or regions. Finally, the study relied on self-reported measures of citizens' intention to accept e-participation, which may be subject to social desirability bias.

Finally, the present study contributes to the understanding of the factors that influence citizens' intention to accept e-participation and engage in government-led e-participation initiatives in Azerbaijan. The study's findings suggest that perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and trust in government are critical factors in citizens' acceptance of e-participation platforms. Additionally, the study's findings related to the assessment of the current status of the E-Participation Platform in Azerbaijan highlight the need for further development and improvement of the platform to ensure that citizens' needs and expectations are met. These findings have important implications for policymakers and e-participation platform developers in Azerbaijan and can inform the development of effective e-participation initiatives.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this study, we investigated citizens' intention to accept e-participation and engage in government-led e-participation initiatives in Azerbaijan. Our findings suggest that perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and trust in government have significant positive effects on citizens' intention to accept e-participation and engage in government-led e-participation initiatives in Azerbaijan. These findings indicate that the government of Azerbaijan needs to develop e-participation platforms that are perceived as useful and easy to use by citizens.

The factor analysis of the current status of the e-participation platform in Azerbaijan highlighted the importance of improving the technical infrastructure, increasing the participation of citizens, and enhancing the quality and transparency of the information provided through e-participation platforms. The findings also suggest the need to consider the cultural and language barriers that may limit citizens' participation in e-participation initiatives.

Based on the results of our study, we recommend the following actions to improve the e-participation platform in Azerbaijan:

- Enhance the technical infrastructure of e-participation platforms to improve their accessibility, reliability, and user-friendliness.
- Increase the participation of citizens by promoting e-participation platforms through social media and other communication channels, and by providing incentives for participation.
- Enhance the quality and transparency of the information provided through e-participation platforms to build trust among citizens and encourage their participation.
- Address cultural and language barriers that limit citizens' participation in e-participation initiatives by providing multilingual support and adapting the platforms to the cultural context of Azerbaijan.
- Encourage research in the area of e-participation in Azerbaijan to identify new opportunities for improving the effectiveness and efficiency of e-participation initiatives and to develop a deeper understanding of the factors that influence citizens' participation in e-participation platforms.

Our study highlights the importance of e-participation as a means of promoting citizen engagement and improving governance in Azerbaijan. The findings of this study provide valuable insights for policymakers, government officials, and researchers in Azerbaijan and other countries seeking to promote e-participation initiatives. By addressing the issues identified in this study, Azerbaijan can improve the quality and effectiveness of its e-participation platforms and promote greater citizen participation in governance.

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