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THE EVALUATION OF E-PARTICIPATION IN THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN MALAYSIA: A CASE STUDY AT ALOR SETAR CITY COUNCIL (MBAS) KEDAH

NUR RUSYDINA KHADZALI

Universiti Utara Malaysia

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
UNIVERSITI UTARA MALAYSIA
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THE EVALUATION OF E-PARTICIPATION IN THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN MALAYSIA: A CASE STUDY AT ALOR SETAR CITY COUNCIL (MBAS) KEDAH

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A thesis submitted to the Ghazali Shafie Graduate School of Government in fulfilment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy Universiti Utara Malaysia

Kolej Undang-Undang, Kerajaan dan Pengajian Antarabangsa
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ABSTRACT

The importance of public participation in governmental decision-making and policy development has gained widespread acceptance and increasingly attracted the interest of academicians, researchers, and policymakers. However, the traditional public participatory method may have limitations that could limit its effectiveness in encouraging public participation. Therefore, the integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in public participation platforms has been proposed as a way to overcome these limitations. This approach, known as e-participation, can enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the public participation process. Nonetheless, there is still debate surrounding the extent of public participation in local governments through online platforms. The current study has revealed a scarcity of case-based evidence and comprehensive empirical evaluations of e-participation practices in Malaysia. Moreover, little is known about e-participation, especially within the context of local governments. The aim of this study is to evaluate the implementation of e-participation in local governments in Malaysia using a logic model, with reference to Alor Setar City Council as a case study. Qualitative techniques were employed to conduct semi-structured interviews involving the public and local authorities. The obtained data were analysed using ATLAS.ti, a computer-assisted software for qualitative data analysis. The findings show that the level of implementation of e-participation at the Alor Setar City Council was deemed fair, with opportunities for improvement. Despite adequate awareness among the public and facilities for e-participation, their experience in using the e-participation platform was significantly lacking. There are several challenges associated with the effective implementation of e-participation, including the lack of support and involvement from local authority staff, insufficient promotion of e-participation activities, as well as inadequate collaboration between local governments and the public. The lack of monitoring and evaluation of the e-participation system had also hindered its effective implementation. Based on the modified logic model, this study provides various recommendations for the successful implementation of e-participation.

Keywords: E-participation, Public participation, Local government, Logic model, Alor Setar City Council

ABSTRAK

Kepentingan penyertaan awam dalam pembuatan keputusan dan pembangunan dasar kerajaan telah mendapat penerimaan meluas dan semakin menarik minat ahli akademik, penyelidik dan pembuat dasar. Walau bagaimanapun, kaedah tradisional penyertaan awam mungkin mempunyai kekangan yang boleh mengehadkan keberkesanannya dalam menggalakkan penyertaan golongan awam. Justeru itu, integrasi Teknologi Maklumat dan Komunikasi (ICT) dalam platform penyertaan awam telah dicadangkan sebagai satu cara untuk mengatasi kekangan kaedah tradisional ini. Pendekatan ini, yang dikenali sebagai e-penyertaan, boleh meningkatkan keberkesanan dan kecekapan proses penyertaan awam. Walau bagaimanapun, masih terdapat perdebatan mengenai sejauh mana penyertaan awam di dalam kerajaan tempatan melalui platfom atas talian. Kajian yang sedia ada telah mendedahkan kekurangan bukti berasaskan kes dan penilaian empirikal yang komprehensif terhadap amalan e-penyertaan di Malaysia. Di samping itu, e-penyertaan, terutamanya dalam konteks kerajaan tempatan, kurang diketahui. Matlamat kajian ini adalah untuk menilai pelaksanaan e-penyertaan dalam kerajaan tempatan di Malaysia menggunakan model logik, dengan merujuk kepada Majlis Bandaraya Alor Setar sebagai kajian kes. Teknik kualitatif digunakan untuk menjalankan temu bual separa berstruktur yang melibatkan orang awam dan pihak berkuasa tempatan. Data yang diperolehi dianalisis menggunakan ATLAS.ti, sebuah perisian bantuan komputer untuk analisis data kualitatif. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan keberkesanan pelaksanaan penyertaan elektronik di Majlis Bandaraya Alor Setar berada di tahap sederhana, dengan peluang untuk penambahbaikan. Walaupun terdapat kesedaran di kalangan orang awam dan kemudahan e-penyertaan yang mencukupi, pengalaman mereka di dalam menggunakan platform e-penyertaan adalah amat kurang. Terdapat beberapa cabaran yang dikaitkan dengan pelaksanaan e-penyertaan yang berkesan, termasuk kekurangan sokongan dan penglibatan daripada kakitangan pihak berkuasa tempatan, promosi aktiviti e-penyertaan yang tidak mencukupi, serta kekurangan kerjasama antara kerajaan tempatan dan orang ramai. Kekurangan pemantauan dan penilaian terhadap sistem e-penyertaan juga telah menghalang pelaksanaannya secara berkesan. Berdasarkan pengubahsuaian model logik, kajian ini memberikan pelbagai cadangan bagi menjayakan pelaksanaan e-penyertaan.

Kata Kunci: Penyertaan elektronik, Penyertaan rakyat, Kerajaan Tempatan, Model logik, Majlis Bandaraya Alor Setar

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CBO	Community-Based Organisation
EG	Electronic Government
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IT	Information Technology
MAMPU	Malaysian Administrative Modernization and Planning Unit
MSC	Multimedia Super Corridor
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
QAS	Quality Assurance Service
SIRIM	Standard and Industrial Research Institute of Malaysia Quality

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Government and people are inseparable in the development. Participation is one of the subject matters in political analysis that enables them to relate their lives to the systems that govern them and through which they may hope to govern themselves (Hague & Loader, 1999). Public participation occurs in practically every aspect of our lives, whether we are aware of it. People created their own beliefs, norms, and institutions due to their community's shared obligations, roles, and responsibilities. The concept of citizenship and governance takes on a new meaning in public engagement. Citizens used to be the ones who were governed in the past. As good citizens, they were required to follow the regulations and fulfil specific responsibilities to the rulers. In exchange, people in power must protect, serve, support, and assist citizens in improving and providing a better life by protecting, serving, and assisting them in overcoming any challenges (Ahmad Jailani, 2006).

In classic managerial model, public participation is one of the managerial process' inputs, which treated as a raw material used in manufacturing process rather than as a component of the machinery that creates the public or civic good. In a different sense, public engagement is seen as a tool for production, or a component of the system that

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generates civic or public good. For citizen-based-governance scholars, public participation, on the other hand, is not a raw material or input to the already existing machinery, but rather an integral component of the machinery that produces governance. In achieve this level of public participation, the government must change not just the way it govern itself, but also the administrative process and organisational structures to make public participation possible (King, 2007).

Public participation offers a new way of thinking about sustainable development. It represents the idea that citizens can help themselves, express their own needs and find the solution, actively participate rather than passive recipients of the development process. Therefore, that development works better for them if done by a bottom-up approach rather than a top-down approach. Furthermore, development is not something that begins or ends with producing goods. But it starts with the people and the useable resources known as human capital, such as motivation, creativity, initiative and organizational discipline. Without all this, all resources will remain potential, unused, and to the extent, useless. Public participation proposes that the public can manage themselves through their opinion and pressure to influence the government's decisions that affect their lives and community. Indeed, governments rule them but not in a way that governs them ultimately without question (Ahmad Jailani, 2006).

In public participation aspects, the closest governments that play the important role is the local government. According to Gupta (2013), the local government refers to all administrative bodies in jurisdictions less than a state. Every country has a certain type of local government, which will vary from those of other countries, and it normally operates within the boundaries of the authority granted to it by laws or directives of

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the higher levels of government. Despite the limited authority provided by the law, the local government or local authority has a significant obligation to ensure the sustainability and wellbeing of the local society within their administrative territory by effectively completing the tasks of planning, implementing, and controlling as well as providing an equal and fair services (Hamzah & Habibah, 2009).

The development of local government in Malaysia was corresponded with the expansion of British influence across the region. It first started in Peninsular Malaysia and then extended to Sabah and Sarawak. Local government in Malaysia functions on the principle of ultra-vires which mean, the local authority may carry out those tasks that are clearly listed in its numerous acts and by-laws. Any actions taken by the local authority that are outside of its authority are ultra vires and are not permitted. government (Nik Hashim & Mohd. Yahya, 1984). Traditionally the local government administration has been split into five categories: environment, public health and cleanliness, enforcement and licencing, public facilities, social services and development (Phang, 1997).

Specifically, there are mandatory and discretionary function of local government. Mandatory functions refers to all essential functions that must be completed to protect public health such as waste collection, street lighting and public health related activities. Discretionary functions, on the other hand, are optional and include all development functions such as providing amenities, recreational parks housing and preparation of various plans. In general, the mandatory functions are considered housekeeping in nature, whereas discretionary functions are developmental (Nik Hashim & Mohd. Yahya, 1984).

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The primary source of reference for local government is the Local Government Act of 1976 (Act 171). However, this act govern the local authority in the West Malaysia. Meanwhile, the East Malaysia which comprises of Sabah and Sarawak rules under own ordinance (Federal Constitution, 2014). Sabah and Sarawak is governed by the Local Government Ordinance 1961 and the Local Authority Ordinance 1966 respectively (Mohammad, Nor Syafa'ah, Ahmad Fuzi & Yusfida, 2016). The Local Government Act of 1976 (Act 171) explicitly underlined on the authority and services of the local government (Kamarudin & Jamaludin, 2013). This act had provided the local authority in Malaysia with the most comprehensive role, functions and responsibilities to be fulfilled. All the functions underlined in sixteen main part with 166 section in this act.

Even though it is the lowest tier of government, the local government has a significant duty to the community. Mullen (2012) emphasised that the local government function is important to the social wellbeing. Mullen accentuated further that, in addition to a healthy economic and political environment, it is essential to have an accountable local government that engaged in the targeted delivery of social service at the local level, where the interventions have the most potential to improve people's lives. The local government which is the third tier in the Malaysian federal structure, is one of the debated aspects of Malaysian public administration because it directly affects the lives of the people it serves (Norris, 1980). In most nations, the local government have a substantial impact on the people's live at a number of critical junctures such as health, education, environmental cleanliness, housing, provision of basic services and the ability to improve people's standard of living (Nik Hashim & Mohd. Yahya, 1984).

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According to Nik Hashim and Mohd. Yahya (1984), the future of local government in the country depend on several interrelated factors. Some of them may be seen as supportive aspects, such as the social context in which the institution operates, while others seem to be difficulties and issues that must be rectified for the local authority to function more effectively as development tools. People's attitudes, expectations, and the overall social environment of the particular locality are of utmost importance because the local government system was created to promote and facilitate the practise of democracy and public participation in the management of local affairs. There is no alternative to guarantee the viability of the local government system in Malaysia given the country's multiracial society and its numerous socioeconomic difficulties except through effective and meaningful public participation. Being the smallest unit of government, the local government future thus lies with the people.

As people is the future of the local government, therefore public participation is one of the critical aspect in the local government. There is a growing recognition on the importance of public participation in contributing to an effective choice of decision in the government (King, Feltey and Susel, 1998). Meanwhile, Ho and Coates (2002) point out that public involvement allow the local government to identify performance indicators that frequently disregard, such as the quality of customer service, which strengthen the reliability of performance measurement. Consequently, public participation transform performance management into a system that fosters more effective resource allocation and operational management, resulting in a more responsive government (Dusenbury, Liner, & Vinson, 2000).

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Overall, the expansion of local governments is equally as essential as the federal and state governments. The needs and well-being of the society are, nevertheless, the primary concerns of local government, as compared to those of higher levels of government, because it is closely connected to the community. Consequently, public participation is important in transforming the local government by fostering a strong ties between the local government and the people, and establishing a local government that is both successful and resilient. As the decision without public participation is ineffective, therefore the public's input is essential to check and balance the local government performance.

The significance of local government is growing resulted from two major trends, which continue to this day and in many ways, reflect the times we live in. Among these trends, first, the desire to strengthen and expand representative democracy, which many people believe is too superficial and constrained. Second, the relentless advancement of globalisation, which has disrupted traditional democracy and as a result, affected the government administration (Alonso, 2009). Accordingly, in the era of globalization, liberalization and the revolution of the information technology, the role of local government is expanding (Gupta, 2013). Therefore, it is crucial for the local authority to be in line with the dynamics of the development process as the revolutionary of the technology also widening the scope of public participation. Consequently, e-participation is one of the aspect that should be considered as tools for the people to actively and closely involve with the local government for the well-being of the people.

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1.2 Background of Study

In the discussion of public participation, there are some concepts that is linkages each other. Democracy, social capital and public service reform are core components to be discussed in relation to public participation.

1.2.1 Democracy

Throughout our lives, we are members of different groups, from families, neighbourhoods, clubs and work units to nations and states. From the smallest to the largest, decisions about goals, rules, responsibilities, and benefits must be taken in all associations. These can be called collective decisions, in contrast to people's individual decisions on their behalf alone. Democracy belongs to this sphere of collaborative decision-making. It embodies the idea that such decision, affecting an association, should be taken by all its members, and they should each have equal right to take part in such decision (Beetham & Boyle, 1995).

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In the world's political system, democracy offers citizens the opportunities to participate in their governance. People could elect their leader, speak in the assembly and petition their governors to redress their grievances. However, in every democracy, there are always two types of people; people who utilize the opportunity to take part and people who neglect the opportunity (Rosenstone & Hansen, 2003). Democracy means the government by the people. It requires more than broad and lively participation in a complex set of an organisation that makes up civil and political society (Rueschemeyer, 1998). Nowadays, with the advancement of technology, various new forms of participation improve citizen participation. It has also been regarded as the engine of democracy (Barber, 2001). However, not all participation is

democratic because there will be a trade-off between the technologies' efficacy and democracy (Laird, 1993).

1.2.2 Social Capital

Current democratic theory and recent international policy initiatives reveal an intense interest in the relationship between social capital and democracy. This interest is the most recent alternative of a long theoretical tradition positing that a vibrant associational life is beneficial for the creation and maintenance of democracy. When citizens interact, join groups and trust each other, their relationships aid democratization by organizing opposition to a non-democratic regime. Once democracy is established, these relationships expand citizen access to information and political ideas, which increases governmental accountability (Paxton, 2002). This social network principle generated by such sociability patterns constitutes a necessary social capital. They increase individuals' trust towards others and enhance their capacity to join in collective action to resolve common problems or ensure the government addresses such issues. Higher levels of social capital have been associated with many outcomes, ranging from crime prevention to higher economic growth rates. Still, the most significant contentions bear on the functioning of democracy. Social capital facilitates practical politics, implements public policy, and generalises support for the political system (Hall, 1999).

Putnam has initially constructed this theory of social capital. In *Making Democracy Work* (1993), Putnam finds social capital critical in explaining why northern Italy was governed more effectively than southern Italy. Putnam's study finds that social capital is critically linked to political participation and effective governance. Drawing on ideas

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from Bourdieu and Coleman, Putnam claims that civic involvement in voluntary associations, predominantly horizontal or non-hierarchical associations, teaches the norms of reciprocity and promotes the building of mutual trust and cooperation. These factors, then, contribute to the process of democratization. Putnam's comparative study of regions in Italy shows that areas generate greater collaboration with trust and denser foundations of horizontal networks (Lee, 2008). In other words, social connectedness and civic engagement, such as membership in associations, are essential components of social capital because they represent the ability to mobilise a diverse set of personal contacts necessary for the improvement and effective functioning of one's social and political life (Freitag, 2003).

1.2.3 Public Service Reform: E-Government to E-Participation

There is an increase in demand in expanding the role of the public in the process of administrative decision-making in the government (King et. al., 1998). Like other countries in the world transform their public service, Malaysia also experienced the shift. Malaysian public sector aimed to transform its services into an efficient, vibrant and market-driven administration. The economic and political contexts of the past decades made it imperative that public administration in Malaysia adapts itself to the changing situation to play its new and emerging roles effectively. Thus, the government of Malaysia has followed the global trend of managerialism and consequently introduced significant reforms in various spheres of public bureaucracy and its management (Noore Alam, 2006).

Though reforms are nothing new in the Malaysian context, sustained efforts have been made, especially since the mid-1980s when market forces have come to be recognized

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as the engines for growth and development. Since then, the role and boundary of the public service have been redefined. Consequently, many pro-market values such as efficiency, productivity and cost-evaluation have been adopted in the business of the government. With the launching of the NDP and the Vision 2020 reforms gaining fresh momentum, the two documents have provided the direction for the nation's future to be a developed country and set new challenges for the public service (Noore Alam, 2006).

The government has initiated various reforms, including the Malaysia incorporated policy, downsizing the civil service, service process reengineering, personnel and financial management reforms, client's charter and public accountability, quality and productivity improvement drives, and IT culture e-government. Among all these reforms, a significant element of governmental drives to improve public services' quality, efficiency, and evaluation is the use of ICT in service provision (Noore Alam, 2006). Most governments make every effort to provide the best services to their people. As a result, the government uses the internet to interact with its citizens. Web-based internet technology in government operations is recognized as electronic government (Harris, 2002).

The electronic government started in the United States of America in the early 1990s. Later, the idea was copied by the European Union. The electronic government is usually presented to provide easy access to government information and services to the citizens and businesses, increase the quality of services, increase speed, completeness, process efficiency, and others, and give the citizens opportunities to participate in democratic processes different kinds. The focus is typically on external

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services, but one important idea is to make internal operations more efficient (Gronlund, 2002).

Currently, most governments have started to adopt the idea of electronic government or e-government to transform the way government works both internally and externally. Malaysia is also not excluded. E-government initiatives focused on two key elements, including the nature of human participation and the capabilities of ICT (Mohammed, Masitah & Nur Zuraifah, 2022). Malaysian government's initiative in enhancing the service quality of the public sector should be acknowledged since the government launched the Malaysian Electronic Government or Malaysian EG through the introduction of the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) in 1996 (Razlini, 2012). Malaysian EG is one of the MSC flagships applications that utilise the technologies to reinvent government functions (Norshita, Halimah & Tengku Mohammad, 2010).

According to Mohsin and Raha (2007), there are seven main projects under e-government applications which involve Generic Office Environment (GOE), Electronic Procurement (EP), Project Monitoring System (PMS), Human Resources Management Information System (HRMIS), Electronic Labour Exchange (ELX), Electronic Services Delivery (eServices) and E-Syariah. Table 1.1 below show the summarization of these projects and their functions:

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Table 1.1
Pilot Project under E-Government Flagships

Projects	Functions
Generic Office Environment (GOE)	Providing a new collaborative working environment by introducing a fully integrated, distributed and scalable office environment via multimedia information technology that enables an effective communication, interaction, collaboration across the agencies' workers and ensures the information reaches the right people promptly.
Electronic Procurement (EP)	Procurement projects such as central contract, tender and direct purchase are now available online. It allows suppliers to present their product through the internet, receive, manage and process purchase orders, and receive payment from government agencies. It would help increase transparency, save time and best value for money.
Project Monitoring System (PMS)	PMS is designed to provide a mechanism for monitoring the implementation of government projects. PMS also serves as a platform to exchange ideas and demonstrate the best information management and communication services practices.
Human Resources Management Information System (HRMIS)	The HRIMS project provides a single interface for government employees to perform human resources department functions effectively and efficiently in an integrated environment. It will help standardise all human resource processes for federal, state, local authority services, and statutory bodies.
Electronic Labour Exchange (ELX)	EXL aimed to improve the mobilization of human resources and optimize workforce utilization through systematically matching job seekers to job vacancies. It would enable the Ministry of Human Resources (MOHR) to be a one-stop centre for labour market information accessible to the public.
Electronic Services Delivery (eServices)	eService project permits Malaysian citizens to directly engage in government and utility payment transactions such as telephone and electricity bills, police summons, Road and Transportation (RTD) services, and electronic means, namely internet and kiosk machines.
e-Syariah	e-Syariah aimed to improve the quality of services in Syariah courts and eventually enhance the Islamic Affairs Department's evaluation through better monitoring and coordination of its agencies and improving the management of its102 Syariah courts. Via this system, Syariah judges can also access past cases and information that they need faster than before.

Source: Mohsin & Raha, 2007.

Besides these projects, the Malaysian government also launched My Government, a short form for the Malaysian Public Service Portal. It is an initiative undertaken by the Malaysian Administrative Modernization and Planning Unit (MAMPU), a unit within the Prime Minister's Department. With the idea of life events that is tailored to people's requirements, MyGovernment is a single gateway to all government online services. The mission of Government Gateway Online is to raise the standard of government service delivery in order to accomplish the following objectives: (i) boost customer satisfaction by consolidating public services under government initiative; (ii) meeting the citizen needs with more competent, competitive, and transparent government services; (iii) increasing the usability of online services to support the new century transformation of government services; and (iv) enhance the worldwide system for service delivery (MAMPU, 2021b).

Primarily, e-government initiative in Malaysia aims to enhance the speed, accuracy, and quality of government service delivery as well as information flows and processes to speed up policy development, coordination, and enforcement (Kamaruddin & Noor, 2017). As a result, there are five visions to achieve that goal, including transforming the government's administration process through the use of information technology, dramatically enhancing government performance, offering high-value administrative services at low cost to the public and business, utilising multimedia technology to promote an effective government, and attracting world's best multimedia web shapers to Malaysia (Mohamad Aizi, Shahizan, Mohd Farhan & Azizul, 2012).

However, looking back to Malaysian EG goals, projects, and applications, there is no statement regarding citizen participation. Specifically, no platform in Malaysian EG

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supports e-participation. Malaysia's EG visions are more concerned with the service delivery process to the public than they are with encouraging citizen engagement in government, notably in the creation of public policy (Mohamad Aizi et. al., 2012). In the meantime, even though one of the components in My Government portal namely E-Community Centre, which seeks for citizen involvement in the political process, the current status proves only the poll mechanism is successfully running. The average number of people involved in the poll is just 1000 people. This indicates a low level of citizen involvement in e-government (Mohamad Aizi, Shahizan & Mohamad Syakiran, 2011).

Therefore, it is clearly that the Malaysian government urgently needs a platform for online participation to enhance citizen participation in e-government operations. Recently, through the E-community Center the government has incorporated a few mechanisms to increase citizen participation in e-government programmes, including surveys, feedback and inquiry channels, and public complaints (Mohamad Aizi, Shahizan & Mohamad Syakiran, 2011). Mainly e-participation can serve as two-way communications between government and citizens, whereby the government can provide information to the citizens while citizens can incorporate input for decision-making through the internet (Maslin, Edith & Sabariyah, 2013).

Mohammed et. al. (2022) underscore that the level of e-participation which varies by generation, is a major determinant of the successful of e-government initiative. To identify exactly when e-participation first began to emerge in the realm of e-government services, though, can be challenging. However, Pirannejad, Janssen, and Rezaei (2019) reinforces that, the early 2000s remarked the birth of the phrase e-

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participation as a key concept in the fields of ICT and political science. In order to demonstrate this, therefore, shall we retracing our steps to the emergence of e-government. We recognise that the first generation of e-government, known as e-government 1.0, aimed to make it easier for the government to access information and data and to conduct business in the public sector. By disseminating information online, it aims to provide an electronic framework for conducting transactions between the government and stakeholders. Alternatively said, the communication occur in a single direction or web-based e-government (Chun, Shulman, Sandoval, & Hovy, 2010).

Meanwhile, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, the development of e-government 2.0 aims to increase the level of e-participation and alter the mode of participation by implementing web 2.0 technology, include social networking platforms and social media like Facebook and MySpace, content creation, sharing, wikis, weblogs, and microblogging tools like Twitter (Chun, et. al., 2010; Mergel, 2016), social voting such as IdeaFactory and IdeaStorm platform, as well as mashup and multimedia sharing for example YouTube and Flickr (Chun, et. al., 2010). Web 2.0 offers organic mechanisms for interaction and involvement, in contrast to the traditional content delivery established by web 1.0. Web 2.0 technology, in particular, encourages citizen participation in government interactions (Hubert, Estevez, Maguitman & Janowski, 2018).

The third generation e-government 3.0 (e-gov3.0) has arisen in conjunction with the quick development of technology. By utilising both current technologies and fresh revolutionary ones like artificial intelligence (AI), the internet of things (IoT) and big data analytics, this generation is primarily focused on supporting and advancing

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higher-level policy making and functions (Nielsen, 2017). With the use of semantic web technology, this generation wants to personalise two-way communication, which entails tailoring the services to the demands of the people (Nam, 2013). Overall, Mohammed et al. (2022) summarised the emergence of e-government generations across time in Figure 1.1. Briefly, similar to Pirannejad, Janssen and Rezaei, it is possible to conclude that the rise of e-participation in e-government services was began in the 2000s as the user driven governance was concentrated and supported through the growth of various technologies.

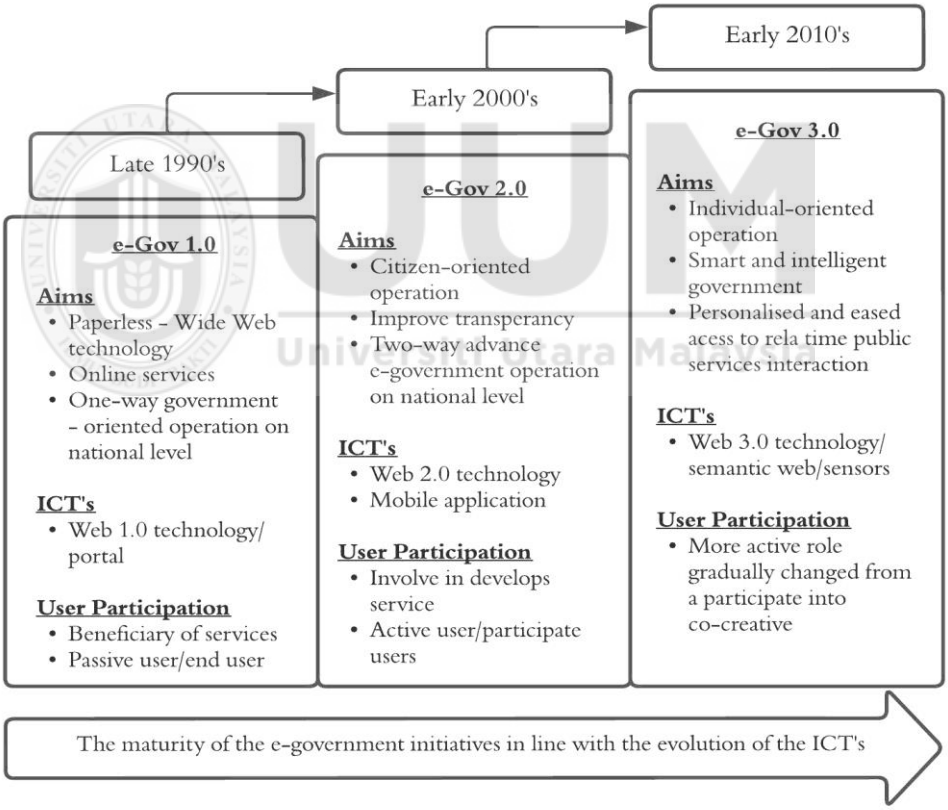

Figure 1.1 The emergence of e-government generations over the years
Source: Mohammed, Masitah & Nur Zuraifah, 2022.

1.2.4 The Role of MAMPU

In discussing on e-government and e-participation, it is inappropriate to avoid the acknowledgment of MAMPU, the accountable organisation behind these initiatives. Malaysian Administrative Modernisation and Management Planning Unit (MAMPU) is one of the prominent governing bodies in Malaysia. It was established in 1977 and is given a mammoth task of modernising and reforming the public sector. Essentially, among the main objective and functions of MAMPU are to conduct research in the area of public administration, to conduct research in the area of human resources, to formulate policy for the modernisation of the public sector and to periodically report to the cabinet and parliament (Jeong & Nor Fadzlina, 2012).

MAMPU is the leading organisation for modernising administration and transforming the public service delivery system. As the key player in the innovation, advancement and transformation of the public service delivery system, MAMPU serve six major roles including: i) as leader and catalyst for change in administrative and management services in the public sector; ii) as leader and planner in developing ICT for the public service sector: iii) as consultants in management organization and ICT for the public service sector; iv) as facilitator in the implementation of modernization and transformation programs in the public sector delivery system; v) as researcher in administrative modernization and management planning for the public sector; and vi) as promoter of government services to the public (MAMPU, 2021a).

Other equally important objectives and functions of MAMPU are: to strengthen the administrative structure and human resources planning at the federal, state and local government levels; to upgrade and modernise the administrative system and its

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operation through the study of the system and its operation, especially in accelerating the implementation of development; to introduce new and innovative techniques in the government administrative sectors and improve the efficiency material management systems, resources, and programmes at all government levels; to introduce a more effective in human resources planning and development, so as to correctly predict the current and future demands and needs of human resources for economic development; and to control and coordinate purchases and usage of equipment by various government agencies (Jeong, 2007).

MAMPU is generally divided into six divisions: Task System Division; Productivity Enhancement Division; Finance Management Division; Information Technology Division; Task Force and Administrative Division; and Management Policy Analysis and Organisation Research Division (Jeong & Nor Fadzlina, 2012). The State Development Administration Committees (SDAC) was established as MAMPU's right wing to help with its strategic tasks. Under the direction of MAMPU, the SDAC primarily responsible for conducting research in the fields of human resources and public sector modernization, developing policy for such modernization, reporting to the cabinet or parliament on its success or failure, and providing advice, coordination, and assistance to government agencies on matters related to administrative reform and modernization (Abdullah Sanusi, Norma & Abdul Kuddus, 2003).

Briefly, MAMPU play a crucial role in supporting various government organisations at the federal, state, and local levels with issues related to the modernization and reformation of the public sector and public administration, particularly with regard to administrative reforms. As a result, MAMPU can be considered the top authority in

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Malaysia for determining standards and policies related to the growth, modernization, and reform of the public sector and public administration (Jeong & Nor Fadzlina, 2012).

1.3 Problem Statement

Malaysian had introduced the electronic government or Malaysian EG back in 1996 (Razlini, 2012). As the time evolve, the development of technology witnessed the emergence of e-participation. E-participation in e-government services could be trace in the 2000s as the user driven governance was concentrated and supported through the growth of various technologies (Mohammed, Masitah & Nur Zuraifah, 2022). However, in the e-participation index across the countries shown that Malaysia in the 47 ranked among 193 countries in 2022. This ranked shown that Malaysia had decreased the performance in e-participation as compare in 2020, Malaysia had performed much better by placing in rank 29 (United Nations, 2023)

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Align with the development of ICT, the government urge to improve the service delivery to the people through online. However, the Malaysian Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC) has evaluated governmental websites through the Provider-Based Evaluation (ProBE) assessment from 2016, and it reveals that of the 622 participating websites from federal and local government departments and agencies, the item of e-decision-making in publish outcomes of citizen feedback on services, national strategy or policy ranked last among the 64 items assessed. Only 5% of the 622 websites complied with this item (MDEC, 2017). In the meantime, the local government is required by the minister to improve performance through the star rating, Thus, the e-PBT star ratings were introduced in 2008 through the adoption of online

e-PBT to motivate local governments to strive for better management and service delivery. However, a study on 108 Malaysian local council websites had shown that, 70 councils or 64.8% samples did not have stakeholder's engagement information in their internal goals and 49 councils or 45.4% samples were found not to have e-community platform which support the interactive two-way communication (Mariam, Joseph & Nafsiah, 2016).

Based on the above study and statistic, the practices of e-participation in our context could be assume as less efficient. Relatively, few scholarly studies in Malaysia have evaluated e-participation (Lim & Yigitcanlar, 2022). While considerable research has been devoted to the various subject matter in e-participation such as tools, techniques, framework, process and prospects (Mohamad Aizi et al., 2012, 2011; Tambouris et al., 2010; Phang & Kankanhalli, 2008; Macintosh, 2004), challenges, benefits, evaluation and impact of the implementation (Kim & Lee, 2012; Macintosh, 2004), as well as initiatives and adoption by local authorities (Panopoulou, Tambouris, Nielsen, Zotou & Tabaranis, 2011; Sobaci, 2010; Nachmias, & Rotem, 2007), however less attention has been paid to exploring the public perspective itself (Gauld, Goldfinch, & Horsburgh, 2010). In the meantime, there is a lack of studies that can understand the appropriate level of public participation effort initiated by the government's authorities and other external stakeholders (Yang & Callahan, 2007). As a result, little is known regarding this subject matter, especially in the Malaysian context. As there is a growing use of e-participation in the planning systems of developed countries, its application in developing countries has remained very limited (Shahab, Bagheri & Potts, 2020).

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Various existing research may contribute to a better understanding of e-participation and future research direction. However, the divergence and complexity in e-participation may cause misinterpretation. Understanding such an emerging field is complex because there is no generally agreed-upon definition, no clear overview of the research disciplines or methods it draws upon, and the field's boundaries are undecided (Sæbø et al., 2008). Simultaneously, different approaches have emerged in exploring this multidisciplinary field from multiple perspectives (Panopoulou, Tambouris & Tarabanis, 2014). As a result, the e-participation field still suffers from a diffuse and heterogeneous state of knowledge (Wirtz, Daiser & Binkowska, 2016). Furthermore, Mohamad Aizi and Shahizan (2011) verify that government organizations in Malaysia do not promote the e-participation concept and lack knowledge and collaboration effort.

Pratchett, Durose, Lowndes, Smith, Stoker and Wales (2009) contend that, among these emerging areas, an extensive existing literature on e-participation generally focuses on the normative discussion related to the potential and booster of the e-democracy descriptively than the example of the use of the internet for the policy deliberation practically. Consequently, the case-based evidence is quite limited. Kubicek and Aichholzer (2016) further assert that the existing evaluation on e-participation revealed that the comprehensive empirical evaluation practice is still lacking.

Above all, Malaysia performance in e-participation is fluctuated. In the meantime, as there is lack of study evaluated the e-participation, this study would be one of a kind in contributing a comprehensive understanding on e-participation in local context. The

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researcher believes this is the most important requirement to understand this phenomenon. Thus, this study aims to examine the evaluation of e-participation implementation in our context by taking Alor Setar City Council area as a case study.

1.4 Research Questions

In line with the background of the study and the research problem discussed in the previous section, many questions arise. However, the overarching question in this study is, how far is e-participation implementation at the Alor Setar City Council area? Thus, to answer this question, there are specific questions as follows:

1. To what extent is the awareness of e-participation among the public and providers at the Alor Setar City Council area?
2. How is the e-participation implementation at the Alor Setar City Council area?
3. What are the challenges facing the implementation of e-participation at the Alor Setar City Council area?
4. How to enhance the e-participation implementation at the Alor Setar City Council area?

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1.5 Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to analyse the e-participation implementation at the Alor Setar City Council area. Therefore, this study was implemented to analyse various elements related to conditions, input, output and outcome that play an essential role in shaping the evaluation of e-participation implementation from both perspectives, namely public and local authorities. To achieve the main goal of this study, several guided objectives have been identified:

1. To examine the awareness of e-participation among the public and providers at the Alor Setar City Council area.
2. To examine the implementation of e-participation at the Alor Setar City Council area. The real issues in e-participation implementation from the perspectives of the public as the users and the local authority as the provider of e-participation could be achieved.
3. To examine the challenges facing the implementation of e-participation at Alor Setar City Council.
4. To suggest the enhancement to the e-participation implementation at Alor Setar City Council through policy recommendation.

1.6 Definition of Terms

The definition of terms covered the essential elements in the study, and it is divided into conceptual and operational definitions, which include public participation, e-participation and evaluation.

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1.6.1 Public Participation

The public refers to the people constituting a community, state or nation, whereas that group of people shared a common interest and moved towards the same aim (Public definition, 2010). Meanwhile, Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary defines the public relates to all the people or the whole area of a nation or state and relates to people in general (Public, 2010). Therefore, the researcher would like to refer to the definition from the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary for this study. Thus, the public in this study refers to the general citizen or ordinary people who live in a nation or state regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, religion, status, or personal interest.

In the meantime, participation which originally the Latin word where *pars* and *capere* means part and to take, defined in most English dictionaries as taking part in something, being in a connection with other, participating in an activity with other, and interacting with people in a group (Dijkers, 2010). Following, Brager and Specht (1973) referred participation is the way by which people who are not elected or appointed to positions of authority within the government or inside agencies, are able to influence choices regarding the programmes and policies that have an impact on their lives. Meanwhile, Sidorenko (2006) put participation as a process of taking part in different spheres of societal life, namely political, economic, social, and cultural. Therefore, from these definitions, Brager and Specht s is much appropriate as the reference in this study since this study would like to see whether the public is used to take part in communicating and sharing their view regarding any government plans that matter to their lives.

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In the meantime, public participation can be defined as citizen involvement in making service delivery and management decisions (Langton, 1978). Besides, it also may be defined at a general level as the practices of consulting and involving public members in the agenda setting, decision making and policy informing activities of institutions responsible for policy development (Rowe & Frewer, 2005). Meanwhile, Arnstein (1969) defines public or citizen participation as the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future. However, for this study, the researcher sees that the definition from Zimmerman and Rappaport is more precise. Public participation is often defined as a citizen action that influences or seeks to influence policy decisions or as an action that incorporates the demands and values of citizens

into public administration service (Zimmerman and Rappaport, 1988). Thus, from this brief definition, public participation in this study refers to the opportunity of the public to participate in the local government and contribute in influencing the decision-making process that affects their lives and societies within the local government jurisdiction.

1.6.2 E-Participation

E-participation involves the extension and transformation of participation in societal democratic and consultative processes using the information and communication technologies (ICTs) which is the internet (Sæbø et al., 2008). Andersen, Henriksen, Secher and Medaglia (2007) simply defined e-participation as the engagements on democratic concerns between citizens, politicians, and officers that take place between elections, including consultation, area representation, and self-organization among citizens organisations. E-participation supports public participation in all government processes through direct participation that enables governments to dialogue with their citizens. By enhancing the government's ability to request, receive and incorporate feedback from constituents, policy measures can be better tailored to meet the needs and priorities of citizens (United Nations, 2008).

Additionally, Macintosh, Coleman and Lalljee (2005) highlighted that e-participation involves the IT-driven tools that enable citizens to participate. These IT-driven e-Participation tools consist of chat rooms, discussion forums or boards, decision-making games, virtual communities, online surgeries, e-panels, e-petitioning, e-deliberative polling, e-consultation, e-voting and suggestion tools for formal planning procedures. From various definitions, the definition of Macintosh is much more

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complex. Therefore, this study will not focus on measuring the various tools in e-participation. However, this study attempts to measure the evaluation of e-participation in the local government as the tool that helps the public participate through the internet. Therefore, the definition from Saebo, Rose and Flak are much more suitable to be used in this study.

1.6.3 Local Government

As was stated before in this chapter, the local government refers to all administrative bodies in jurisdictions less than a state (Gupta, 2013). Every country has a certain type of local government, which will vary from those of other countries, and it normally operates within the boundaries of the authority granted to it by laws or directives of the higher levels of government. (Hamzah & Habibah, 2009). Despites the lowest rank, it directly affects the lives of the people it serves (Norris, 1980). In most nations, the local government have a substantial impact on the people's life at a number of critical junctures such as health, education, environmental cleanliness, housing, provision of basic services and the ability to improve people's standard of living (Nik Hashim & Mohd. Yahya, 1984). Thus, in this study, the local government refer to lowest tier of government either city, municipal or district council which basically serve the day to day services which essential to the well-being and quality living of the people.

1.6.4 Effectiveness

Steven and Shafritz (1994) defined effectiveness as an organization's ability to satisfy diverse human interests. The effectiveness is not relying on one or two elements. Still, it exists in different forms in the minds of various people, groups, and cultures directly affected by the organization, including customers, shareholders, employees, clients,

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directors, legislators, and retirees. Meanwhile, Steers (1975) declared effectiveness as a goals-attainment approach where the organizational goals and objectives had been accomplished. Additionally, Salancik and Pfeffer (1977) explain that effectiveness is the ability of an organization to allocate the resources to the most critical-powerful units and thereby maximize the ability to adapt to the external environment.

In another perspective, Yuchtman and Seashore (1967) describe that effectiveness is achieved when the organization successfully acquires, transforms, and disposes of the resources economically. In other definitions, Georgopoulos and Tannenbaum (1957) proposed that effectiveness occurs when an interaction of productivity and human resource flexibility without any internal problem. On the other hand, Pérez-Espés, Wimmer and Moreno-Jiménez (2014) asserted that effectiveness is associated with strategic planning or long-term behaviour, which evaluates the aspects relevant to the problem's resolution. In simple terms, effectiveness means doing the right thing or doing what is right.

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Effectiveness is defined differently from different scholarly perspectives. Even though most of the definitions involve various elements that have been perceived as essential in achieving evaluation, all these perspectives uphold a strong positive value towards the organisation's success, called effectiveness. Although these definitions focus on organizational effectiveness, this study believes they can measure the effectiveness of e-participation programmes. The description by Steven and Shafritz (1994) and Salancik and Pfeffer (1977) is suitable in this study. The effectiveness of e-participation at the local government depends on various groups of people, especially the local authority as the provider and the public as the user.

The effectiveness of e-participation also depends on how the available resources are utilised and how the external environment affects the process. Resources in this study refers to all the importance element that support the e-participation implementation such as human resources, activities and programmes, as well as facilities and infrastructures. Meanwhile, this study also measure the e-participation effectiveness from the public in term of knowledge and skills as well as adoption and participation. Additionally, considering the definition by Pérez-Espés et al. (2014), perhaps this study could examine the current context and the ideal of e-participation implementation to understand what is the best necessary measure should be taken.

1.7 Significance of the Study

The advancement of the ICT particularly the internet is no longer just a medium, but has become a significant resources and a part of everyday life for a substantial proportion of the population. In the meantime, through the internet, the e-participation had been widely recognise in most nations including Malaysia. Despite the tremendous potential and benefits that e-participation offers, the real perspective regarding one of these technological advances especially among Malaysian local users remains untapped. Therefore, this study is crucial in having a good understanding and clear picture on how e-participation perceived in our current context. Additionally, unlike most earlier studies, this study included in-depth interviews with the people. Besides, utilising the logic model as a guide and included the standpoints from the government authorities, this study gathered on the awareness and understanding, as well as in term the availability of facilities, experience and challenges among the people. As a result, this study stands out from others in its field since it considers a variety of essential

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components that support the peoples, who are the primary consumers of e-participation.

Overall, this study contribute theoretically and practically to public participation and e-participation. Theoretically, e-participation seems to be a great tool in enhancing public participation in the government. But practically, little is known about it. Therefore, this study attempts to seek the perception from two key players in e-participation: the local authority as the provider and the public itself as the users. Relatively, limited research especially in the Malaysian context, that contributed to seeking public opinion about Malaysia's current scenario on public awareness and understanding of e-participation. Thus, this study distinctly supports the government to understand public perspective and put it into practice.

The identification on the current status and level of e-participation is valuable in contributing to a new finding, knowledge and reference to today's government. As e-participation comprises complex socio technical setting, the successful of e-participation not depend on single factors, but various connected factors. Therefore, through identification of e-participation level, the local government would recognise the performance of e-participation systematically and comprehensively, towards supporting the best participation approach for the public. In the meantime, the local authorities could make the necessary improvement to address the implementation-related issues and challenges in e-participation. Additionally, both the local government in particular and the government in general could continuously enhance their capacity in terms of human capital, technology, and strategy in e-participation implementation. As a result, participation's quality could be enhanced, resulting in a

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positive impact on society, the economy, and the country's sustainability and well-being.

1.8 Scope and Limitation of the Study

The scope of this study focuses on the evaluation of e-participation practices in Malaysian local government. In general, e-participation in this study does not refer to any particular system or innovative platforms. This study, on the other hand, focused at e-participation as a space and opportunity that inclusive to all the people, in which reflection, consultation and engagement with the local authorities are made possible, through online without any restrictions. Meanwhile, the scope of this study is limited on the public and local government administrators within the area of Alor Setar City Council. Consequently, this study cannot be generalized to the bigger scope or other populations as the results might vary. Furthermore, this study is also limited within the research framework covered. However, there might be various important elements in the public participation context that can be explored.

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1.9 Outline of the Chapter

This study comprises five chapters. Chapter one is an introductory chapter that focuses on the overview of the study, the gaps related to the area under investigation, research questions, research objectives, the scope of the study, significance and limitation of the study.

Chapter two recaps the literature related to the concept and theory of public participation and e-participation. This chapter also reviews the e-participation policy

and initiatives that have been implemented in Malaysia and other top leading countries as the best example and guidance to other countries.

Chapter three focuses on the methodological aspect of the research. The theoretical framework as well as method on how the primary and secondary data were obtained is discussed in this chapter. This chapter also highlights the history, background, objective, mission, vision, client charter, organisational chart and achievement of the Alor Setar City Council (MBAS) as the case study in this research.

Chapter four discusses the results of the analysis undertaken in this study. The evaluation of the e-participation in the research area is measured through an in-depth analysis. Thus, input from the provider and the public's perspectives was analysed in this chapter.

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Finally, chapter five summarises the overall findings, concludes the study, presents the implication and recommendation, and proposes future research in the subject matter.

1.10 Conclusion

The e-participation in the local government in Malaysia would be one of the platforms that allow the local authorities and public to have effective communication that can contribute to various positive impacts. However, research on the evaluation of e-participation in Malaysia is still lacking. Therefore, it limits the knowledge and understanding regarding this matter. Thus, perhaps this study would contribute to the body of knowledge on the e-participation practices and evaluation in the local government in Malaysia.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Governance, Good Governance and Public Participation

The governance of the local administrative system is closely linked to civic participation. The governance concept itself is old as the human history concept. According to the World Bank (1994), governance is defined as how power is exercised to manage a country's economic and social resources. The World Bank, in the meantime, has identified three different aspects of governance: the form of political regime or administration; the process by which authority is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development; and the capacity of governments to design, formulate and implement policies and discharge its functions. In the meantime, the United Nations Development Programme or UNDP (1997) defined governance as the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs. It involves mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and group express their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate the differences.

Above all, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) (2009) put governance as the process of decision-making and how decisions are implemented or not implemented. Therefore, governance can be

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used in several contexts such as corporate governance, international governance and local governance. Since governance is the process of decision making and the process by which decisions are implemented, an analysis of governance focuses on the formal and informal actors involved in decision making with the formal and informal structures that have been set in place to arrive at and implement the decision. Usually, people seemed to be confused with governance and government. Specifically, governance refers to a process or way of governing various affairs in the country. But on the other hand, the government is one of the actors that play an important role in governance (Pettai & Illing, 2004). And the government is the crucial actor in the governance that usually leads the country to the good governance of bad governance (Weiss, 2000).

Good governance generally refers to the ability to perform efficiently, effectively and responsively, guided by feasible and desirable principles at all levels of society, not just at the political one ("Good Governance: The Concept," 2009). On the other hand, the United Nations Secretary for General Kofi Annan (Weiss, 2000) proposed that good governance guarantees that human rights and the rule of law are respected, that democracy is strengthened, that transparency is promoted, and that public capacity is administered. Good governance promotes good or better governance to create a better society.

Leftwich (2000) believes that the good governance concept first appears in the 1989 World Bank report on Africa, which argues that underlying the long list of complaints of Africa's development problem is a governance crisis. Then during the 1990s, western governments began to take an interest in good governance and include the

promotion of this concept as one of its stated principles aim. The concept of good governance emerged mainly because of the several problems which involve practices of bad governance, uncountable governments and lack of respect for human rights. Some of these problems are mostly having experienced by most of the country. Due to this, it had become increasingly dangerous, and the need to intervene in such cases had become urgent. Moreover, good governance has become an important element of the political and economic agenda. Meanwhile, better specified and good practices are created that consider the concept ("Good Governance: The Concept," 2009).

Good governance is one concept that covers a variety of contexts. Although the focus is on the public sector, where capacity building is called upon to strengthen and develop the social and economic situation, the concept applies to the private sector and the civil society ("Good Governance: The Concept," 2009). In the meantime, Oviasuyi (2006) describes that good governance as a normative rather than descriptive judgement term, which indicates a preferred relation that should ideally govern between state and society and between a government and the people. As Burke, an eighteenth-century British parliamentarian, once declared that to govern according to sense and agreeable to the people's interest is a great and glorious element of governance.

Furthermore, good governance incorporates the following attributes: accountability based on popular sovereignty and public choice. This legal framework guarantees the rule of law and due process based on political and social pluralism and freedom association based on the impersonality of office, uniform application of rules and rationality of organizational structure. Therefore, good governance refers to a situation

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where the greatest number of people living in a given political system is positively affected by government policies and programmes without leaving anybody worse-off (Oviasuyi, 2006).

There are various characteristics outlined in good governance. But different authors proposed different characteristics. Some of it is very narrow, and some tend to be very broad with a long list of its characteristics. For example, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific or UNESCAP (2009) highlighted eight major characteristics of good governance. It involves participatory, consensus-oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and the rule of law. On the other hand, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) proposed nine characteristics by adding strategic vision as one of the characteristics of good governance. Below are some brief explanations of each of the characteristics of good governance.

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First and foremost is participation. Participation by both men and women is a key cornerstone of good governance. Participation could be either direct or through legitimate intermediate institutions or representatives. It is important to point out that representative democracy does not necessarily mean that the concerns of the most vulnerable in society would be considered in decision-making. Furthermore, participation needs to be informed and organized, which means freedom of association and expression on the one hand and an organized civil society on the other hand. However, public participation is not just in terms of decision making, association or speech but also must be ensured in terms of access to information. Thus, public involvement is important to uphold the concept of good governance. Moreover,

government processes also can be improved through this element (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2009).

The second is the rule of law. Good governance requires fair legal frameworks that are enforced impartially. It also requires full protection of human rights, particularly those of minorities. Impartial enforcement of laws requires an independent judiciary and an impartial and incorruptible police force. The third characteristic is transparency. Transparency means that decisions are taken, and their enforcement is made to follow the rules and regulations. It also means that information must be freely available and directly accessible to those affected by such decisions and their enforcement. It also means that enough information is provided and that it is provided in easily understandable forms and media. Fourth is responsiveness. Good governance requires institutions and processes to serve or respond to all stakeholders within a reasonable timeframe (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2009).

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Fifth is consensus oriented. Good governance requires mediation of the different interests in society to reach a broad consensus on what is in the best interest of the whole community and how this can be achieved. It also requires a broad and long-term perspective on what is needed for sustainable human development and how to achieve such development goals. It can only result from understanding a given society or community's historical, cultural, and social contexts. Meanwhile, sixth is equity and inclusiveness. A society’s well-being depends on ensuring that all its members feel that they have an opportunity in it and do not feel excluded from the mainstream of society. Thus, it requires all groups, but particularly the most vulnerable, to have

opportunities to improve or maintain their well-being. The seventh characteristic is evaluation and efficiency. Good governance means that processes and institutions produce results that meet the needs of society while making the best use of resources at their disposal. The concept of efficiency in good governance also covers the sustainable use of natural resources while ensuring the protection of the environment (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2009).

In addition, the eighth characteristic is accountability. Accountability also is one of the key requirements of good governance. Governmental institutions, the private sector, and civil society organizations must be accountable to the public and institutional stakeholders. Who is accountable to who varies depending on whether decisions or actions taken are internal or external to an organization or institution? In general, an organization or an institution is accountable to those affected by its decisions or actions. However, it must be remembered that accountability cannot be enforced without transparency and the rule of law (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2009)

Last but not least is the ninth characteristic, strategic vision. Strategic vision requires all the leaders and the public to have a long-term perspective on good governance and human development and a sense of needed development. There is also an understanding of that perspective's historical, cultural, and social complexities. Thus, all these nine characteristics are very important in upholding the concept of good governance (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2009).

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Public participation is necessary for sustainable development (Sobol, 2015). For the last 20 years, sustainable development has become one of the most important aspects of local governments' planning development. Sustainable development emphasizes the role of a community. Therefore, one of the key prerequisites of this process is participation from the public. Nevertheless, the traditional way of managing cities does not work very well in public engagement. Sustainable development requires governance mechanisms introduced by the local authorities and the public's positive reaction. To work towards sustainable development, the local government has been progressing towards Local Agenda 21, signed at the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992. Local authorities have a particularly important role in delivering sustainable development since they are the closest level of the government to the people. They are responsible for educating, motivating and responding to the public to promote sustainable development. At this point, public participation is an essential part of Local Agenda 21 (Carter & Darlow, 1997).

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2.2 Development of Good Governance in Malaysia

There is no consensus on what constitutes good governance. Good governance involves much more than just efficient management of economic and social resources or improved delivery of public services. But it essentially relates to the quality of the relationship between the government and the governed. Besides, it also involves the relationships and cooperation among the public sector, private agencies and civil society in the policy processes and the services delivery. A country will be credited with good governance if its government is legitimate, its operations are open and transparent, it remains accountable to the public and has an intelligent administration system that is reasonably free from corruption and mismanagement. If we go through

this framework, reforms effort in Malaysia also have supported this key element of good governance, which involves accountability, transparency, combating corruption, participatory administration, and the administrative system's competence to deliver services efficiently since there a lot of problems occur in term of this matters. However, Malaysia had experienced various problems in the governance, such as a lack of transparency and openness in the governmental operations since the financial and economic decisions were made based on secrecy. Besides, negotiations were a preferred option rather than open tenders, and privatization projects were handed on a platter without competitive bidding (Noore Alam & Mohd Zin, 2007). Thus, Malaysia has started promoting the reform towards good governance practices in all government operations from these problems.

It is not clearly stated when the good governance concept had emerged in Malaysia. However, we believed that our government began to stress this concept after the independence when the riot occurred on May 13, 1969. Because of this, New Economic Polity has been introduced to reduce the economic disparities among different races. Moreover, as time passed by, our government tended to increase and put a lot of reform efforts in promoting good governance concept, which involves providing customer-oriented service by introducing the Client Charter and increasing the counter services, improving the system and work process by revising the service delivery systems and processes, strengthening public, private cooperation by promoting the privatization, enhancing accountability and integrity by strengthening the Anti-Corruption Agency and introducing Meet Client Programme or as known as *Hari Bertemu Pelanggan*, and last of all, inculcating values of excellence in the public service by the adoption of MS ISO 9000 series, Total Quality Management and

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benchmarking. All these are some of our government efforts in promoting good government.

2.3 History of Public Participation in Malaysia, Britain and the US

Public participation has been discussed as the key element in good governance. Therefore, the value of public participation was acknowledged. However, public participation is not new. It is an old concept and has long been a subject of active discussion in many fields, particularly in political and administrative science. This concept appeared and emerged a long time ago. Before this, the public lacks concern about the government's involvement. However, looking back to history, public participation started prominent around the 1960s and 1970s in the United States. At that time, the public became aware and asked for a greater function in the government. The demand to be involved and giving input in the governing process at every level of the government resulted in a huge range of approaches that the public would use to take part in the government appeared (Burgess & Malek, 2005). In the United Kingdom and elsewhere, the public participation issue increasingly catches the academics, practitioners, regulators, and government's interest (Leach and Wingfield, 1999).

The idea of public participation demonstrated the democratic system in the planning with the hope that planning decisions that have been made protect individual and public rights. Martin (2007) affirms that public participation is recognised as the important aspect in democratic government; as the way to improve the quality of the environmental decisions; and as to foster social legitimacy through building public trust or the sense of ownership in the decision-making process and through the

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reducing conflicts among the stakeholders. The discussion on public participation mostly takes place in urban planning. Public participation in urban planning has begun in the past 30 years. For example, in the United States of America, the opportunity for the public to object to the plans prepared by the government was stated in the Housing Act 1949 under the section of the public hearing or public objection. In the early 50s, another act concerned with public participation was the Housing Act 1954. In this act, public participation has been claimed by the federal government as one of the requirements to gain financial aid from the federal in any programme or project, for example, the Urban Renewal Programme (Stenberg, 1972).

In 1964, The Economic Opportunity Act 1964 was drafted to implement the Community Action Programme. In implementing this programme, the Community Action Agency has been established. This agency is responsible for three main aspects: service delivery, moving all the resources from the community and private sector and achieving maximum public participation. Meanwhile, in 1966, another programme was established under the Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act 1966 that replaced the Community Action Programme. However, the programme under this act, known as the Model Cities Programme, is not much different from the previous programme. Besides, it also provides a clear and complete guideline regarding public participation. Every state must have its administrative machinery and expand public participation to gain federal aid (Stenberg, 1972).

Meanwhile, in Britain, the Town and Country Planning Act 1968 is the official tool for public participation in the planning process. The Ministry of Housing and Local Government of London posits that this act requires every individual who wants to

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represent the Local Planning Authority to prepare the structure and local plan is given an adequate and fair opportunity. It is expected that through this method, every individual that interested in the planning process could get together involved. Following this act, one Royal Commission has been established purposely to conduct the research and prepare the report on the effective public participation practices in the urban planning process. This commission was called as Skeffington Committee in 1969. In 1971, The Town and Country Planning Act 1968 was replaced with the Town and Country Planning Act 1971 with the recommendation that has been made by the Skeffington Report on public participation (Damer & Hague, 1971).

In most the local government, the public allows participation in the development plan within their area. Public participation in Malaysia is not an alternative, but it is a requirement in Act 172 or the Town and Country Planning Act (1976). According to this act, the public has a right to take part in preparing the Structure Plan and Local Plan within their area. This process is called SERANTA. It is believed that SERANTA is the most efficient way to educate and support the public to be involved in the local government. However, the researcher found out that not all the public involve during the process. By the time that local government started to develop the area, then it raises a lot of issues from the public (Zulkifli Yaacob, personal communication, October 3, 2013; Radzie Iszuan Jamadi, personal communication, October 6, 2013; Mazulika Mahmud, personal communication, October 8, 2013; Azizah Abd. Hamid, personal communication, October 9, 2013; Zubaidah Hanoom Yusof, personal communication, October 24, 2013; & Zainal Abidin Muhamad, personal communication, November 10, 2013).

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A study by Kamariah and Dolbani (2006) declared the process of SERANTA must be publicized in the local newspaper for at least two as stated in the Town and Country Planning Act (1976). In Malaysian practices, SERANTA has been announced in four local newspapers, namely Malay, Tamil, Mandarin and English. The publicity of SERANTA also has been made through posters and radio. Besides these conventional ways, the local authorities use another advanced method, including comprehensive information, photos and images, graphs and charts, and draft plans and outlining. All these must be presented easily for all the public to understand. It is also supported by conferences, talks and discussions, electronic mail, and newspaper feedback. This wide range of methods is necessary to support the value of good communication between both public and local authorities. The responsibility to announce and attract the public to participate in the process was held under the department in the local government (Kamariah & Dolbani, 2006).

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The publicity process was implemented purposely to allow the public to respond to the proposed plans. Moreover, it is also one of the ways to show that the government always be transparent to the public. The implemented publicity is subject to the control of the development. The public can accept, or they can also reject the proposed project that has been planned in their area within the time given. Additionally, when the public participates in this process, the local authority could attain the necessary information on the existing issues and the upcoming vision within their responsibility area (Kamariah & Dolbani, 2006).

As we know, in the process of SERANTA, the public can either accept or reject the proposed project planned in their area within the time given. But, before they can

accept or reject the proposal, the public can take the opportunity to examine the plan to understand it better closely. Then, they also can propose their request and idea upon their disapproval to the Public Hearing Committee. Then, the committee will announce the result in the given amount of time. However, the public's acceptance or rejection is not necessarily considered by the local authority in the planning unit because it is not compulsory. But, on the other hand, this unit has given the power stipulated in Act 172 to act according to the needs (Kamariah & Dolbani, 2006).

This process proves that government is serious in allowing the public to participate. However, the past study stressed that public participation, especially in the planning process still very low (Kamariah & Dolbani, 2006). The result for the research on the publicity that has been done by the Department of Town and Country Planning in 2001 showed that only 1 to 12 per cent of the residents participated during the presentation of the Draft Local Plan whereas only 1 to 8 per cent during the Draft Structure Plan (Hassan, 2012; Kamariah & Dolbani, 2006). The study also identified that most public is not involved in the SERANTA. In the meantime, the public that could participate is not because of their will but because of the professional needs (Kamariah & Dolbani, 2006).

Besides, in one of the studies carried out in the Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) from 2001 to 2006, the public lacks knowledge about SERANTA. The lack of knowledge within the public will then create another issue. The public will always be pleased with all the government's plans. In the meantime, public participation will not be one of the most important elements because they will find it unnecessary. Finally, the worse is that the public does not even understand their right and the government's plan.

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Therefore, at this point, the responsible authorities should start to work on increasing the public knowledge and understanding to make them a part of the process. The public should be educated and informed that they have the right (Kamariah & Dolbani, 2006).

Above and beyond, the public participation practices vary across the council. However, all societies have equal opportunities to participate in the local plan involving the community's development project. But in most councils, not much of the public is involved. People in Alor Setar, for example, are much more participative and supportive in the local government activities. However, in Kubang Pasu, people are not interested in participating in the programme, such as gotong-royong activities. The officer believes that people who are willing to participate always come from those who can afford the time and are close to the council. On the other hand, low participation is also due to the public's apathy. Therefore, even though the officer agrees that public participation is one of the best mediums for the public and council itself, public participation might be a problem in executing the local government development programme or project because it consumes much of the time. Pelzer, Geertman, Heijden and Rouwette (2014) found that, initiatives like e-participation are seen as a hassle that makes the delivery of urban projects more time-consuming or difficult. So then, it might be a challenge in public participation.

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2.4 Historical, concepts and theories of public participation

Even though this study focuses on e-participation, we cannot neglect the necessity to recognize the concept of public participation to have a secure grounding for knowledge and understanding. Alonso (2009) revealed that most citizens had little exposure to any traditional instruments of citizen participation. In addition, Zikri, Tarmiji and Aziz

(2015) highlighted that the public is still confused and lacks understanding about the public participation concept. Azizan (2015) further asserts that lack of knowledge about public participation and low education among the public contribute to public exclusion. Therefore, this chapter begins by embracing part of the public participation concept.

Public participation is a practice that concerns public involvement in various governing processes such as in the decision, agenda, and policy-making process (Rowe & Frewer, 2005). Public participation seems like one of the best ways to involve the citizens in the government. This concept became a great concern and was highly discussed worldwide as time went by. Public participation holds its own story in shaping society. In the past, it has appeared the inspiration that the public should be allowed to influence decisions that may affect their lives. From the fifth century and beyond, in the old institution of Athens, each of the people in Athens was given the right to participate and contribute to the community and administration through participatory democracy. By this time, people can start to participate after the principle on the ownership of property for the government position was eliminated (Edmundson, 1997).

As the world moved forward, the essential to public participation arose when social and economic segments failed to perform. Due to that, the demand for public participation became one of the main issues that have been discussed during the war and revolution era. Public participation evolution was begun in the United States of America in the early 1960s due to racial and wealth discrimination. Due to the weak relationship between the government and the people, the government failed to resolve

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the people's objection towards their dreadful services. The government also failed to deal with the conflict in different classes, especially when the lower-income black people fought against white people's bureaucracy (Kamarudin, 1991).

These circumstances had caused black people's planning and public services system to be governed by black people personally. They believe that black people should solve black people's problems in the black community. Therefore, most of the development plan, such as improving the services and facilities, was rendered only to the white middle-class people. These different situations led to one phase of the development where demand for public participation increased. Meanwhile, Britain's demand for public participation took place after public participation in the United States of America (Kamarudin, 1991).

On the other hand, there is a lack of discussion on the commencement of public participation in Malaysian history. Thus, little has been known regarding this subject matter. However, looking back on history, Malaysia has also experienced public demand and participation. In the 1940s, people in Malaysia started to protest on the street due to specific demands from the government. The protest saw Malay women breaking the tradition by joining the marches in Malaya's anti-colonial movement against the Malayan Union (Kheng, 2007; Josiah, 2017). Accordingly, protest is not new to civil society in Malaysia. Still, street protest is not included in most public participation definitions. Nevertheless, the street protest brings along the theme of democracy, civil rights, and freedom of speech and assembly that uphold the key to public participation itself. Nowadays, street protests have become one of the most popular approaches to expressing political ideology.

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According to Terchek (1974) protest is a source of bargaining that allows the ordinary people who do not possess any political control to assemble and convey unconstructive critics to the people who control the decision. Generally, street protests happen in most parts of other countries, including Malaysia. While Malaysia takes up the streets, some strongly condemn street rallies by saying that public demonstration is not part of Malaysia's political culture. However, in one other way or another, public protest played an important role in shaping the country.

Street protests in Malaysian history include The Malayan Union Rallies (1946), Baling Incident (1974), Reformasi Movement (1998), BERSIH or Coalition of Free and Fair Elections (2006), HINDRAFF Rally (2007), BERSIH 2.1 (2010), BERSIH 3.0 (2012) and BERSIH 4.0 (2015). Looking back on each of these protests, it tried to convey the message to the government. Public protest might not be our culture, but it is important to understand why people behave differently. For example, in the 1940s public might not have a proper channel to communicate with the ruling elites. But as we move forward with technological advancement, Malaysia still takes up the street. Thus, this study believes that public participation is not about a specific parameter or approach but the benefit that the public gains from it.

2.4.1 Forms of Public Participation

Public participation definition based on citizen-centred analysis without mention on the government side as an umbrella term that describes the activity by which people's concerns, needs, interests, and values are incorporated into decisions and actions on public matters and issues. Public participation can be divided into direct and indirect participation. Direct participation is where the public can personally and dynamically

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engage in giving opinions, making decisions, and solving problems. In comparison, the indirect form allows the public to influence the decision by voting for the representative or contributing the money to their favoured candidate. Direct participation happens in different manners and circumstances between these forms of participation. In addition, the public that is actively involved and supports the activities may also have their reason and interest. But, in the last two decades, these forms of participation have been combined and then divided into a major form of participation, namely thick, thin and conventional participation, whereby each encompasses various processes and activities within the specified characteristics (Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015).

2.4.1.1 Thick Participation

A thick form of participation allows the public to work together in a group. It consists minimum of five and up to fifteen people maximum in a group. Through this method, people will discuss and exchange their opinions, gain collective decisions, and act on the issue. Compared with other forms of participation, this form is mainly dominant and significantly contributes to the greater impact. However, it is rarely used because it is most intensive and time-consuming. Thick participation is about empowering the small group to share opinions and reflect. Thick participation occurs either through face-to-face processes or online platforms and tools. The face-to-face process involves 21st Century Town Meetings, Appreciative Inquiry, Citizen Assemblies, Citizen Juries, National Issues Forums, Open Space, Participatory Budgeting, Planning Charrettes, Serious Games, Study Circles, Sustained Dialogue and World Cafe. In the meantime, thick participation through an online platform involves Dialogue App, Zilino,

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MetroQuest, Engagement HQ and Common Ground for Action (Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015).

2.4.1.2 Thin Participation

On the other hand, a thin form of participation does not happen in a grouping setting. Through this form, the public can personally involve in sharing thoughts. It focuses on empowering individuals through confrontation, phone and online. This form is the fastest, easiest and most convenient form of direct participation but doesn't always require people to absorb information or listen to others. Signing a petition and filling out the survey on the internet was frequently used in this form (Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015).

At this time, anything can be done through the online platform. The public can convey concern by transferring the message across the preferred website and links. The public can also sign the petition online, like the other user's status on Facebook, to show support, repost other people's content or opinion, and restructure the thought crowdsourcing activities. Afterwards, within a little amount of time, others may be bringing out their suggestion into the map, contributing the fund to the plan, or responding to the issues faced by the public. As an online platform is based on individual participation, hence people that will utilize the chance to participate always be the ones who feel that they are a part of that motion for the grounds. Even though it is based on an individual basis, this form of participation will contribute to the huge outcome when the number of people involved is as much as necessary (Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015). Here are some of the examples of thin participation through online and digital applications:

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Table 2.1
Online and Digital Applications for Thin Participation

General Purpose	Examples
Crowd Sourcing & Ideation	1. MindMixer 2. IdeaScale 3. OpenTownHall 4. SpigitEngage 5. Peak Democracy 6. Granicus 7. Codigital
Data Gathering & Feedback	1. SeeClickFix 2. FixMyStreet 3. PublicStuff 4. Waze 5. NoiseTube
Crowdfunding	1. Citizinvestor 2. Neighbor.ly 3. Kickstarter
Petitions	1. Change.org 2. e-Petition
Games	1. Community PlanIt 2. City Creator 3. Super City
Mapping & Wikis	1. LocalWik 2. Wikiplanning 3. MapIt 4. Mapumental 5. OpenStreetMap
Indicating Preferences	1. Facebook 2. Twitter 3. LinkedIn

Source: Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015.

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2.4.1.3 Conventional Participation

Meanwhile, conventional participation allows individuals to channel their concerns or dissatisfaction to the public authorities in face-to-face settings. Conventional participation is the oldest form of participation and is mainly the most well-known in the direct form of participation, and often the least liked. This participation was built up to support the law, responsibility and accountability, whereby the public could have the opportunity to validate the power of the government, and it was mandated and prescribed by law. Below are the examples of conventional participation, Notice and Comment Periods, Public Meetings or Town Hall Meetings, Public Hearings, Advisory Committees or Commissions and other participation opportunities provided by governmental departments, including School Boards, Planning and Zoning Commissions, City Councils, Congressional Representatives and Government Agencies (Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015).

According to Burgess and Malek (2005), the most frequently used form of public participation is not guaranteed to be the most effective one. For example, the Public Hearings. At this point, the government's spokesperson will first present the necessary information on the predetermined plan to the public. Then, in the next phase public will be allowed to respond and give their feedback on the proposed plan. Generally, there is merely critique received in most of the hearings. Even though this approach helps the authority gain and experience the degree of disagreement from the public, it is hard to understand why the public acts in a certain way. Thus, it is impossible to generalise the opinions of the public during the process. Consequently, the problem will not be solved, and common not contribute effectively to problem-solving or mutual cooperation.

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Additionally, another approach involves the Advisory Committee. This conventional form of participation significantly supports the government in getting the participants' necessary information. But this approach consumes a lot of time and money. This approach aimed to evaluate the opinion of the public efficiently. This approach requires all the members to commit fully, which is hard to achieve. On the other hand, the high numbers of committee members with diverse values compared to the professional and proficient members contributed to the internal conflict that will gradually reduce the committee's strength (Burgess & Malek, 2005).

Above and beyond, the vote is one of the common forms of participation. In the last decade and until this moment, vote or ballot is increasingly recognized and very popular in the United States. The right of the public to vote is legitimately stipulated by law. The vote provides the public with the huge authority to decide and perform as a part of the governing body. As the voting initiative enlarges, high numbers of people come out to vote even though on the cause that they are not recognised (Burgess & Malek, 2005).

Additionally, the public votes on the generalised issues without evaluating according to main concern and priority. The government, for example, needs to carefully allocate the money to different aspects such as education, health care, law enforcement, and other important aspects. However, the public will vote based on one aspect they feel is significant without knowing that the funds might come from the other much more important allocation (Burgess & Malek, 2005). Above all these approaches, other approaches are available for the public to participate. However, it is hard to determine

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which approach is best for effective and successful public participation because the success factor also depends on how the government empowers this concept.

2.4.2 Definition based on the Types of Participation

Pateman (1970) stated four types of participation: pseudo participation, partial participation, lower level full participation, and higher-level full participation. According to these authors, pseudo participation is only the creation of a feeling of participation through adopting a certain approach or style by the leaders or supervisors. The leader uses the group to persuade or induce acceptance of goals. Or, in simple words, no participation occurs. Partial participation is a consultative model characterized by formal and informal arrangements designed to enable subordinates to affect their hierarchic leaders' decisions. The subordinates have some influence, but the final power of decision rests with management. For the time being, lower level full participation is where all group members have equal status and decide how work will be allocated and carried out. Finally, higher-level full participation is where all organizations members have a right to full participation at the highest policy level. At this level, democracy is upheld, and the public can be actively involved in administrative decision-making. All these definitions imply that the concept of public participation varies widely (Pateman, 1970).

2.4.3 Public Participation Training

As public participation has become the main concern nowadays, thus there is an initiative from the group in educating the public on how they can play their role effectively in the decision-making process. For example, there is a workshop on public participation given by the Perspectives Group. This group, based in Alexandria,

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Virginia, is a firm that is concerned about public involvement. This group educates the public that their opinion is very important to make a better decision. This group believes that the public is not necessarily involved in the technical process of decision-making. But the public can be involved in a much easier process, such as the social issue closer to them. This effort shows that this concept is getting so much attention since a formal workshop and training were held to teach the public how effective public participation may be applied (International Linear Collider, 2005).

2.4.4 Standards for Public Participation

To have effective public participation, the International Association for Public Participation had come out with certain standards for public participation, which involve seven standards. First, the public should have a say in decisions about actions that affect their lives. Second, public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision. Third, the process communicates the interests and meets the process needs of all participants. Fourth, the process seeks out and facilitates people potentially affected by the proposed decision. Fifth, the process involves participants defining how they will participate and how it will be structured. Sixth, the public participation process provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way. And seventh, the public participation process communicates to participants how their input affected the decision (Burgess & Malek, 2005).

2.4.5 Reason for Participation

The public starts to participate or become involved in the government for various reasons. It includes external pressure from stakeholders and internal demand from

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administrators. Besides, the size of bureaucracy is one of the reasons why public demand for participation. The public wants to be involved in the government because the government's insecurity expands to a larger bureaucracy that will make the public lose their functions (Creighton, 2005). Or in other words, the public becomes aware and tends to participate as the size of the government happens to large and extend. People are scared that this large bureaucracy will favour their interest compared to the people's interest. It happens now at our governments today's whereas the personal interest and hidden agenda be in the first place and make the public interest turns to be at the second place. Accordingly, the public needs to encourage the government to be accountable to society.

2.4.6 Impact of Participation

Public participation will lead to various impacts. However, Wang (2001) stated that there are likely three impacts of participation to the government. First, participation leads to satisfying the needs of the public. Public needs are not automatically served by a bureaucracy whose main motivation is to maximise its financial inputs. Thus, the design of representative democracy allows special interest groups to influence governmental decision-making, and the needs of the general public are further compromised. Public participation guides bureaucratic production and a balance to the influence of powerful interest groups. Through participation from the public, both public and government can communicate in a much better way. The public participation process helps the government learn and understand the need and demands of the public. Consistent citizen involvement also provides the government with an opportunity to monitor and respond to the changes in public needs effectively. A good

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understanding of and prompt responses to public needs results in citizen satisfaction, who are also government customers, instead the most important customer to be served.

Second, participation also helps to build consensus on organizational goals, service priorities, good performance, and fiscal commitment. Stakeholder demands of government vary. As a result, many governmental agencies have multiple and sometimes contradictory goals. Therefore, through public participation, the opinion from the public will direct the government to the public's needs. On the other hand, the government can expand these needs through the government's vision and action. In addition, because there are often no standards for good performance in the public sector due to the lack of market evaluation and the nature of public goods, involving the public in decision making provides a mechanism with which to develop standards and expectations for performance (Wang, 2001).

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Participation leads to stakeholder acceptance of organizational goals, performance standards, and decisions. One enduring task in public management is to resolve the tension between public demands and management reality. Political conflict, resources availability, management complexity, and impact uncertainty bound governments' capacities to fulfil all public demands. Hence, participation allows the public to re-evaluate its demands and better understand these management limitations. It is expected that consensus is built on a mutual understanding between the public and government (Wang, 2001). Finally, participation help to improve public trust in the governmental decision making. There has been continuous criticism that government is ineffective in service production, dishonest in decision making, and unfair in service delivery. One reason for this mistrust is the lack of mechanisms with which the public

can monitor governmental operations. Consequently, the public becomes alienated. Cases of government mismanagement and efforts to cover it up only heighten public concerns. Therefore, public participation may lend a hand in reducing this sense of alienation. A more open and accountable decision-making process may better understand government and improve public trust in the government (Wang, 2001).

2.4.7 Theory of Public Participation

The researcher believes that knowing the theory will help us better understand the subject matter. In terms of public participation, there are a lot of theories that would be very helpful for the public to understand the structure that holds the decision-making process. According to DeSario and Langton (1987), the government's decision is very much influenced by technology. Accordingly, they identified two comprehensive approaches involving technocratic and democratic approaches in the decision-making structures.

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The technocratic approach refers to the practical aspect of the knowledge in solving the problem. This approach strongly upholds skills, proficiency, process and procedure. The technocratic approach is one of the approaches to the decision making process. Strong arguments can be made in favour of a technocratic decision approach. A key argument is that trained staff experts are best suited to complex technical decisions. Experts are increasingly becoming a part of our decision-making structures, either public or private. However, that scientific and technocratic approach failed to solve social problems and often contributed to them. The notion that the cure is often worse than the disease becomes more and more important as the technology provides alternative solutions to public policy issues (DeSario & Langton, 1987).

As the skilled people on the field have made decisions based on the specific facts, processes, and procedures, it would be the most efficient and powerful decision based on different principles and beliefs. There are different kinds of decisions in the policy-making which involve: first, the technical decisions that have to be supported only by the facts and logical evidence; second, which is called value decisions that are based on the particular rules or behaviour that govern the society; as well as third, the decisions that combined the practical aspects with the value aspects which is called mixed decisions. This approach is not easy because society's problems are extremely complex. The success rate is very low since it requires the experts that used to decide based on facts and scientific information. Moreover, to assume and make their judgment based on technical aspects and a custom value that might make them not understand (Kantrowitz, 1975).

The Americans now are not convinced of the technological and expertise aspects. As a result, they asked for a better opportunity to participate in the practical decision (DeSario & Langton, 1987). Nowadays, with advanced technology, the public has become more aware, and they can scrutinize every aspect of the government. It is where the shortage of technology and the experts are questioned. In addition, with the combination of both technocratic and democratic approaches that are mostly used to manage natural resources, it contributes nothing more than just disappointment from the public and the government (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989). It is realized that various issues and causes are interrelated, making the decision-making process complex. Due to that, it became necessary for the public to cooperate with an expert in government agencies at all levels of government. Moreover, the public is now more demanding for their right because they crave an excellent government and know that they can achieve

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that goal. However, this model assumes that political participation must be held down, at least temporarily, to promote economic development (Huntington & Nelson, 1976). Meanwhile, the democratic type is opposed to the technocratic type of decision-making. This approach gives all the people affected by the action taken by the authority to participate in the process. In this form, the public can give their opinion either through direct involvement or public representatives. Therefore, criteria for evaluating policies in a democratic process are the accessibility of the process and the responsiveness of the policy to those who are affected by it, rather than the efficiency or rationality of the decision (Kweit & Kweit, 2007).

Gilley (2017) in his work had extended the discussion regarding this approach. According to Gilley, technocratic domination argument is simply about using the procedures of technocracy which involve embodying logic, rationality, and evidence-based reason-giving rather than those of democracy which embodying political equality and public control. As a result, the aspect of justice could not be weighted in either of these approaches when determining which is the best approach to public policy. Indeed, technocracy and democracy do exist in independent domains with occasionally divergent logics. Moreover, there is often no right public policy. Gilley had compares both of these approaches to public policy in detail, as seen in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2
Comparing Democratic and Technocratic Approaches to Public Policy

	Democracy	Technocracy
Values emphasized	Fairness and liberty	Authority and loyalty
Strengths in policy	Responsiveness, context	Effectiveness, efficiency
Language of domination	Progressive, popular	Evidence-based, expert
Policy situations to be used	Pluralism, ambiguity	Complexity, risk

Source: Gilley, 2016.

Gilley (2017) concludes that, either technocratic or democratic approach, there always trade-off. However, democratic sovereignty and technocratic expertise must coexist. The justice of each must be kept apart in order that it fulfil its role. Yet, they must also coexist as necessary conditions for the other. A healthy democracy requires a healthy technocracy and vice versa. These spheres of justice are separate but complementary, and either without the other is a big problem for contemporary policy-making.

Overall, this study concluded that either democracy or technocracy, both are the solution for each other. Both are crucial to the success of governmental policies. Indeed, the government need to function effectively. Effectiveness, however, depends on how the government provide and protect its people. Likewise, an effective e-participation implementation required a space and opportunity from the government. In the meantime, an effective e-participation implementation also depend within the cooperative and responsiveness of the people. Briefly, the e-participation without government or public would not be effective.

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2.4.8 The Ladder of Public Participation

There is quite a number in terms of public participation theory. One of the important theories that can be referred to is the theory from Arnstein called the ladder of public participation. As shown in Figure 2.1, this theory essentially highlights the hierarchy of power within the society and how the public interacts. This concept appeared in the 1960s in America. At that time, the concept of the hierarchical society implemented in America was still not acknowledged and disregarded in other parts of the country. It is even worse when the people responsible for representing the public's opinions are

ignored on the underlying principles of the concept. Although this is an old concept, it is still valuable to guide people interested in public participation (Arnstein, 1969).

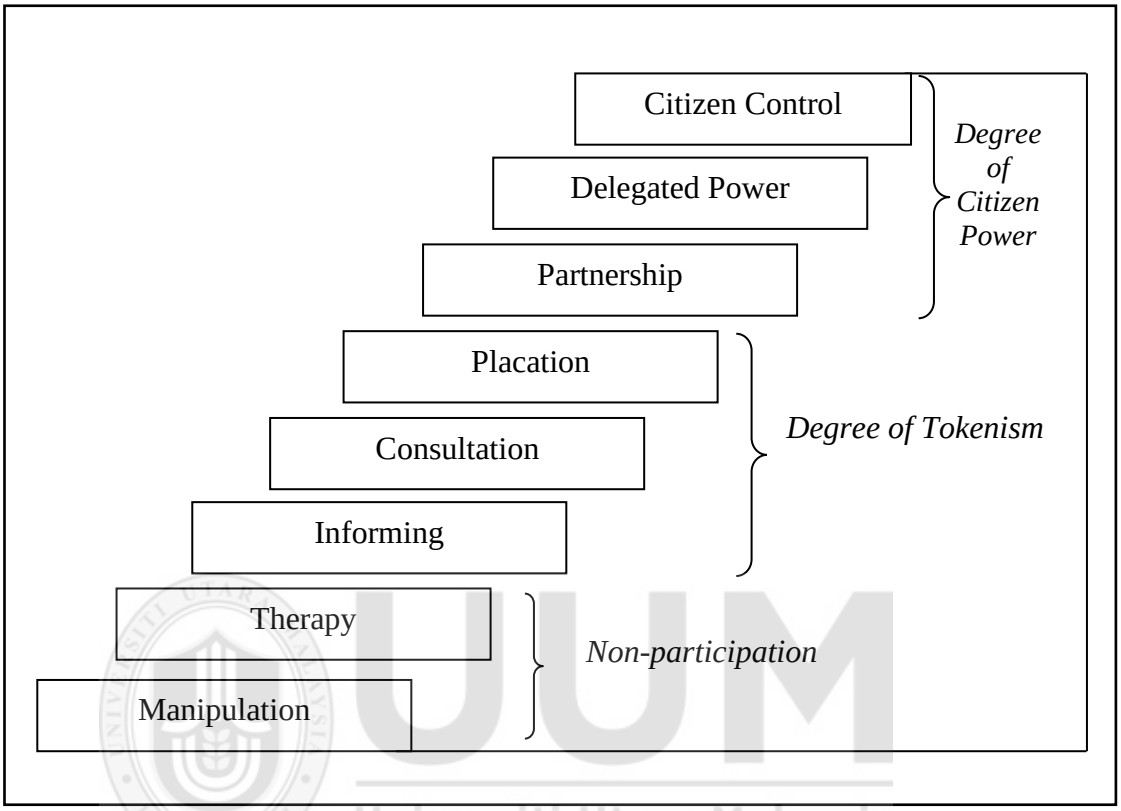

Figure 2.1 The Ladder of Citizen Participation
Source: Arnstein, 1969.

Arnstein presents eight levels of participation divided into two types: non-participation level and participation level. The non-participation level involves the first two levels: manipulation and therapy. This non-participation level substitutes for genuine participation. The real objective is not to enable people to participate in the planning or conducting programmes but to enable powerholders to educate or cure the participants. Meanwhile, in the third and fourth levels, which is informing and consultation, its progress to levels of tokenism that allow the have-nots to hear and have a voice. Power holders offer them the total extent of participation; citizens may hear and be heard. But under these conditions, they lack the power to ensure that the

powerful will heed their views. When participation is restricted to these levels, there is no assurance of changing the status quo (Arnstein, 1969).

Furthermore, the fifth level, the placation level, is simply a higher-level tokenism because the ground rules allow have-nots to advise but retain the continued right to decide for the power holders. Further up, the ladders refer to the participation level whereas levels of citizen power with increasing degrees of decision-making clout. Citizens can enter into the partnership level to negotiate and engage in trade-offs with traditional power holders. At the topmost, in delegated power and citizen control, have-not citizens start to obtain most decision-making seats or full managerial power (Arnstein, 1969). Overall, this ladder had clearly shown the different levels of public participation.

2.4.9 Techniques of Citizen Participation

The public can present their opinion through various approaches. It can be done either from the most basic approach like open discussion or the more refined approach through the Delphi Group Techniques and the Nominal Group Techniques. Cogan, Sharpe and Hertzberg (1986) states that the sophisticated process might not always be successful because several techniques can have a successful public involvement programme. Cogan et. al. provides five forms of public involvement, including publicity, public education, public input, public interaction, and public partnership. Cogan et. al. also ranges all these forms into passive and active citizen involvement.

The publicity technique was generated purposely to influence and gain public support as a passive consumer. Meanwhile, public education provides quite complete and

balanced information to the public so that by that information, the public can conclude on their own. While, in the phase of public input, the public was asked to provide the idea and opinion. It would be of much value if the public could be informed that their opinion has been considered in the decision made. While in the public interaction phase, the public, the expert people in the planning, and the government authority started to communicate and share the information. It would also be fully utilized when each of the participants could express their view or voice out their ideas and at the same time may also respond to other ideas and work together towards consensus (Cogan, et. al, 1986).

On the other hand, a public partnership offers the public a formal responsibility in helping to make the final decision. Above all, these various methods are inappropriate to all situations due to various objectives. Public meetings, for example, only support educating and making the public communicate with each other. Besides, the number of people who can participate also differs. Many people can participate in the public interaction phase but not in the public partnership phase because it restricts only a small number of people (Cogan, et. al., 1986).

As discussed, the illustration in Figure 2.2 is just the summary of the whole story. This figure clearly shows the range of public participation where in the first and second range, the public is still a passive consumer, as they need to be informed and educated. Thus, there is not much public involvement occur. While as we move to the third, fourth, and fifth ranges, the public gradually actively participates in government decision-making processes. They start to actively collect the information, give their

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opinion, uphold two-way communication with others, and they even acknowledge contributing shaping the ultimate decision.

Publicity	**Public Education**	**Public Input**	**Public Interaction**	**Public Partnership**
Building public support	Disseminating information	Collecting information	Two-way communication	Securing advice and consent
← **PASSIVE**		**ACTIVE**		→

Figure 2.2 Public Participation Range
Source: Cogan, Sharpe & Hertzberg, 1986.

2.5 E-Participation Context, Framework and Scope

Tambouris et al. (2010) demonstrate that as the governments worldwide realize the value of public participation, they are now strived to make the citizens take part in the political process to strengthen democracy. However, participation is not only about voting or campaigning, as most people always perceived (Nagel, 1995). In the meantime, citizens in various countries are not satisfied by voting only. Still, they also demand a more active role in the democratic process to support democracy. Therefore, unsurprisingly, professionals and experts have become increasingly concerned in researching public participation over the last years. As public participation became important in the 1960s, the first idea on digital democracy using ICT arose in the 1980s (Kim, 2008).

The digital media and the internet have enabled the e-democracy to arise (Beltrán, 2015). E-democracy is defined as the exploitation of the ICT in engaging the citizen to support the democratic decision-making process. Thus, e-participation is a subset of democracy (Macintosh, 2004). Online participation of the citizen in the decision-

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making process through active involvement based on interactive technologies is at the core of the e-democracy strategy. Likewise, network technologies break down the barriers between citizens and government authorities both at the central and local levels by overcoming traditional forms of connection and offering new areas of civil expression managed electronically. The electronic form of participation allows citizens to become actively involved in political life by sending in comments and suggestions and expressing opinions to the administrator (Maria & Rizzo, 2005).

The expansion of ICT enhances the e-democracy and e-participation through various e-tools, allowing the public participation process to meet the widest possible audience (Kukovic & Haček, 2014). The field of e-participation is currently a rapidly evolving one. In many cases, the main driving forces in e-participation are the advances in the technological area. However, if traditional participation is being replaced with e-participation, it is important to understand how the relevant supporting ICT tools would help enhance public participation (Tambouris et al., 2010). It is believed these technological means are essential tools for democracy which through it, millions of people can communicate with one another and their representatives (Etzioni, Laudon & Lipson, 1975).

Furthermore, social and political settings will not constantly remain because they change gradually. The democracy in the government also had changed when the public for a greater role in the government's decision-making process. Due to that, the importance of public participation in the government started to be recognized. Nowadays, the public demands to be a part of their previous system. The public wants to be heard by the government to influence the governing process. However, the

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conventional non-participatory technique in the planning process unsuccessfully attains public interest in implementing the development plan. Subsequently, it leads to conflicts such as disagreement and disruption of the plan (United Nations, as cited in Koekoek, 2010).

As time goes by, the method of public participation increases gradually align with the globalization era is necessary to cope with the changing need of society. This trend towards more interactive and participatory planning will major impact how planning is practised. Planning will become more complex and increasingly dependent on information technology instruments. The trend pressures governments to open their decision-making processes for citizens to participate over the Internet, in so-called e-participation. E-participation can establish more transparency in government by allowing citizens to use new channels of influence, reducing barriers to public participation in policymaking (United Nations, as cited in Koekoek, 2010).

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E-participation is the interaction on democratic issues between citizens, politicians, and officers between elections, including consultation, district representative, and self-organization among citizens groups. E-participation supports public participation in all the government processes through direct participation. E-participation also is one tool that enables governments to dialogue with their citizens. By enhancing the government's ability to request, receive and incorporate feedback from constituents, policy measures can be better tailored to meet the needs and priorities of citizens (United Nations, 2008).

Participation has evolved beyond the conventional approach. Although it is still possible to use the conventional public participation approach, the e-participation is more compatible and pertinent, particularly in the modern world with the development of ICT. Therefore, the researcher believe that the government could not skip the adoption of e-participation as an essential instrumental driver of democratic and socio-economic change and a fundamental way to empower the citizens. E-participation could help to reach inclusive and meaningful participation. However, e-participation also requires an honest, transparent and responsive government to function, just as traditional democracy does. Thus, the government has a significant responsibility to encourage the best implementation of e-participation for the public. In the meantime, for the benefit and long-term success of society as a whole, the public had a responsibility to participate actively in the government.

2.5.1 The Needs of E-Participation

E-participation is needed because the traditional modes of participation seem to have significant limitations. As we know, the public can participate through a variety of modes. Citizen committees, public hearings or town hall meetings, and focus group discussions are traditional modes that are still useful to engage citizens in government programmes and activities. There is nothing more effective than face-to-face interaction between citizens and public officials. These help to break down the stereotypes and mistrust and show each other that there can be a sincere and equal opportunity of participation in making the government more effective in meeting the community's needs. However, typically these modes only reach and involve a small number of citizens engaging in in-depth dialogues and exchanges of ideas (Ho, 2007).

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Indeed, the public has an opportunity to participate in the lower level of government. Nevertheless, the participation is not individual since there is often a representative representing the public opinion. Consequently, it is hard to ensure whether these representatives are there for the sake of the public or their interest (Ho, 2007). It is not easy to identify all interests that should be considered and find a suitable representative. Some citizens may consider themselves misrepresented by those who act as stakeholder representatives on behalf of their interests (Lourenco & Costa, 2007). Besides, the frequency and length of discussion are also constrained by the physical location and meeting place at the time schedules of the participants. Citizens who volunteer to participate in these meetings tend to be community activists or citizens who can afford the time. Hence, they may not be highly representative of the demographic profile of a community (Ho, 2007).

In addition, Nagel (1995) also stressed that most people want the right to participate, but no one consistently participates. Therefore, participation often serves the interest of the privileged. In such a climate, it is not surprising that administrators and citizens are often frustrated and disagree. Furthermore, the citizens believe there is a lack of accountability and transparency since the information they receive is managed, controlled, and manipulated to limit their participation capacity. Besides, citizens see the technique of participation such as public hearings, surveys or focus groups as designed, at best, to generate input and, at worst, to keep them on the outside of government. Furthermore, citizens are particularly sensitive to false participation efforts that they ask for because of the discount of the public input. Thus, this inauthentic process simply contributes to greater tension between administrators and citizens. Therefore, people would think it is better not to work with them than with

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false and purely instrumental. Administrators, for their part, know that citizen involvement is desirable, at best, but at worst, they find it is one of the complex instruments (King et al., 1998). Therefore, it is believed that elites use participatory devices to cover up their own manipulative rule (Nagel, 1995).

In the meantime, the traditional modes of participation are also perceived as time-consuming, costly and burdensome. Moreover, administrators are not necessarily trained or socialized to be good facilitators of participation and engagement. Indeed, there is an inherent conflict between values of citizen participation and engagement, the structure and the process of bureaucratic government, which creating significant obstacles for meaningful citizen engagement with government and no end of trouble for administrators who gave good intentions about direct participation (Callahan, 2002). We are, after all, is a representative democracy, not a direct democracy. Additionally, participatory efforts do not necessarily guarantee positive results or any results because sometimes they make a messy situation even messier (Berkshire, 2003). Above all, Wang (2001) asserts that we are still far from reaching genuine participation. Yet, there is still a way to achieve it.

Therefore, most developing countries strive to serve the citizens through ICT by implementing e-government. However, as discussed above, the e-government is not more than an information and resources provider. It is also more towards improving the public sector services rather than increasing the public participation quality. Above and beyond, e-participation is proposed due to the shortcoming of the traditional modes of participation and e-government implementation. On these ground, the e-participation is essential in the phase of fast changing world of ICT as a key element

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in the growth of participatory modern democracies. As e-participation bring about many changes in the relationship between the citizen and government, particularly by promoting an effective public participation in decision making without time restriction, it is a critical component of determining effective and inclusive governance at the local and national levels. Indeed, e-participation, indeed, is the core of holistic future development that contributes to enhanced the quality of life, which is the cornerstone of the sustainable development. In brief, e-participation is necessary in promoting a responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making process in every level of government.

2.5.2 The Motivation of E-Participation

Measuring the success factors of e-participation implementation across countries has gained considerable attention in various studies and literature. Yet, limited studies identified the factors that motivate the government to implement e-participation. Wirtz et al. (2016) identified several key targets of e-participation from various studies, which include increasing the overall participation; enhancing the information provided; improving the quality of public policies; strengthening the public trust; to improving and sharing the responsibility in the policy-making; and to increase the public awareness and understanding in the policy issues.

First of all, the e-participation mainly aimed to increase citizen participation in the decision-making process (Sanford & Rose, 2007; Macintosh 2004). The idea of e-participation is not only about creating or providing opportunities for the public, but it is concerned about maximising the public's opportunities to participate. Hence, through the ICT's support, the e-participation enables to reach a wider audience,

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deepen the deliberative process, and achieve a high degree of participation (Macintosh, 2004). Meanwhile, in terms of the democratic context, since e-participation strengthens the representative democracy and extends greater direct participation (Macintosh, 2004) thus, it has resulted in a better governmental decision. Therefore, it is legitimately beneficial to the majority of the average citizen (Milakovich, 2012). Largely, active participation through increasing access to innovative technology could promote a fair and efficient society (Sæbø et al., 2008).

Next, the e-participation implementation also aimed to enhance the information provision by making it more accessible and understandable to keep the public informed (Macintosh, 2004). Although the information provided is an essential aspect of e-participation and a requirement for participation (Sæbø et al., 2008), the quality of available information should not be discounted. Therefore, compared to the quantity, the high-quality content of the information is the main quality that should be concerned (Sobaci, 2010). Additionally, improving the quality of public policies is also one of the e-participation implementation factors. E-participation allows valuable input from the citizen during the agenda-setting phases, and, through appropriate ICT tools, it could encourage meaningful two-way communication between the government and citizens at various phases of the policymaking process (Phang & Kankanhalli, 2008). Moreover, public participation contributes to the quality of adopted public policy and its smooth implementation (Golubovic, 2010) and higher satisfaction with the policy outcome (Traber, 2013).

In the meantime, strengthening the public trust in the government constitutes a further e-participation target (Kim & Lee, 2012). The lack of trust constitutes a major

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challenge than other technical changes (Milakovich, 2012). However, by recognising the critical role of trust in public policies, it could assist the governments in shaping a better policy, reform agendas, and improving outcomes for all (OECD, 2013). Thus, it is important to enhance public trust in the government by giving citizens an effective role in public decision-making. People are more likely to trust a decision influenced by ordinary people than one made solely by the government behind closed doors. In the meantime, for governments to encourage public trust, they must trust the public to be more directly involved in decision-making (OECD, 2020).

Lastly, e-participation is also targeted to improve and share the responsibility for policymaking (Kim & Lee, 2012; Sobaci, 2010) and raise public awareness and understanding for policy issues (Phang & Kankanhalli, 2008). Milakovich (2012) underlined that the internet opens up the communication channel to encourage and facilitate meaningful citizen participation even in the formal decision-making process by providing the citizen with the basic information on the right and responsibilities; guiding the citizen through the huge available information; informing and educating the citizen on various issues of public concern; and giving the citizen opportunities to analysing and deliberate on the draft laws, public issues and other complicated issues. E-participation also make government interventions more responsive to citizens' needs, and increase government accountability (Shahab, Bagheri & Potts, 2020Thus, citizen participation in real decision-making could be made possible (Milakovich, 2012).

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2.5.3 The Benefits of E-Participation

Edmundson (1997) further asserts that current developments in online computer technology could help citizens move towards genuine participatory democracy. For instance, Velikanov (2010) emphasises that the internet has made it possible to communicate, deliberate and collaborate easily. Therefore, participation through the internet and electronic medium or as known as e-participation, provide various advantages, includes help to gain public support, serve the public with a huge range of information, obtain and utilising the opinion from the public into the government's administration as well as help to penetrate the necessity and demand of the public.

In the meantime, Kearns, Bend and Stern (2002) posit that e-participation may have real potential to connect citizens with the political process between elections by facilitating, broadening and deepening participation in various ways. E-participation can encourage involvement by making it simpler and easier for the public to obtain information, follow the political process, scrutinize government and connect with the views and opinions of others. It can also make it easier for citizens to form groups of like-minded people and campaign on important issues. E-participation also helps broaden participation by creating new channels of democratic inclusion, making e-participation less intimidating and more inclusive of previously excluded or hard-to-reach groups. Besides, e-participation also helps expand public involvement in political processes by increasing the frequency and enriching the content of the dialogue between citizens, elected representatives and all levels of government (Kearns et al., 2002).

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Besides that, e-participation opens new possibilities to solicit public input to government decision-making conveniently. For example, instead of coming to a physical location or filling out a paper survey, the public now can visit a specific website to file complaints or services requests, report their dissatisfaction level with the government service and conduct a synchronous discussion with officials and other fellow citizens to find solutions and improve government performance (Ho, 2007).

Additionally, e-participation also help in improvising public involvement in the government as it provides a platform for both government and public to communicate, cooperate and learn in a meaningful way as well as offer the public with valuable knowledge regarding the underlying principle and intricacy of the government's policies implementation and authorized action (Coleman & Gøtze, 2001). Overall, among the benefits of e-participation, such as saving time, lowering cost, higher quality services and higher transparency, Zheng and Schachter (2016) conclude that public saving time is the key advantage that encourages the public to adopt e-participation rather than the traditional method of participation.

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2.5.4 E-Participation Ladder

There are several participation ladders could be found in prior studies. As stated earlier, Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation in 1969 is one of the famous work. Next, Connor's New Ladder of Citizen Participation in 1988 build on Arnstein's work (Krabina, 2016). However, the emergence of e-participation and open government had altered how people engage and what steps must be taken to create sustainable participation that has a real impact on how public services are provided. Therefore, as illustrates in Figure 2.3, Krabina suggested the E-Participation Ladder which focuses

on the issue of how policies, programmes and projects must be created in order to engage people more broadly, rather than just on political participation. This ladder focus on the elements missing to take the next step and on the key questions that should be answered in order to proceed to the next level (Krabina, 2016)

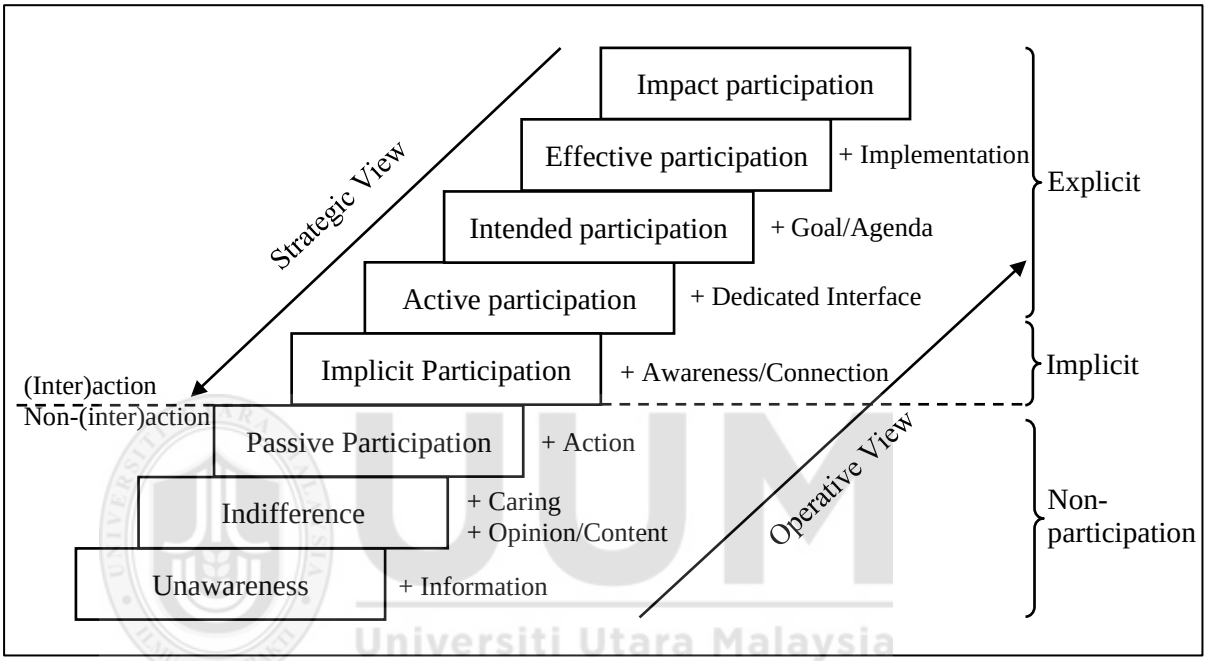

Figure 2.3 The E-Participation Ladder
Source: Krabina, 2016.

Unawareness is the first rung of the participation ladder. This rung indicates that people are merely uninformed about the subject in general or the opportunities for engagement at the. Simply said, they are illiterate, thus knowledge of a subject and opportunities for engagement are necessary to go to the next level. Information is the missing element. Therefore, the crucial question to ask are: How can I distribute the information to the various target groups? Who are the intended participants' target audiences? Who or where do they typically turn to for information? (Krabina, 2016).

The second is ***indifferent*** which indicates that people have access to the information at this point, but they are uninterested in it, either because they lack a personal opinion about it, lack content to share or contribute that is relevant to the topic, or simply because they are not interested enough in it to even consider having one or sharing content. The missing elements are caring about the information received, forming an opinion about a topic or adding a piece of content to the problem in discussion. Key questions to ask are: How can we find those among the informed who do care? How can we make people care about the topic? What additional information is needed for them to form their opinions and who can deliver it to them? What content could they provide that is relevant to and important for our discussion or problem solving? (Krabina, 2016).

In the third rung, the ***passive participation*** specifies that people actually care about the topic, they have an opinion about it or would have some content to share, but still take no action. They need additional motivation to trigger an action. Thus, the missing element in this rung is action. Key questions to ask are: How can people be motivated to take action. What possibilities do they have to take action? Is our service attractive and easy enough for them to use? (Krabina, 2016).

The ***implicit participation*** in the fourth rungs show that people are unaware that they are actually participating, but they take action by following certain media practices by simply using the systems they participate implicitly. By clicking on certain elements on a website such as video, people interact with the system. They view or read an item, share it or tag it, thus interacting with the system without necessarily being aware of participating. The missing elements are awareness of the participation process and

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connection to a participatory goal. How can we make people aware that participating is worth the effort? How can we connect the possibilities they have with a participatory goal? Additionally, we have to ask: How can we design our systems to make use of implicit participation? In implicit participation, a lot of valuable interaction can take place that can be useful to analyse (Krabina, 2016).

Fifth, in ***active participation***, people are taking deliberate action: they might join a group in a social network, rate an article, post a comment, share their views. They might use the interface of their choice whether or not this is intended by others. Contributions can be seen as trolling or abuse if the action does not take place in a dedicated interface, for example, a discussion forum where the post is off-topic or as general usage of social media such as creating a page or group in Facebook, or a personal tweet. If a dedicated participation interface exists, the aim is to channel user activity to these dedicated interfaces. The missing element is a dedicated interface. This does not mean that special systems have to be set up, it can simply mean that we want people to upload their content or contribute their discussion items in a tool or forum that we are aware of, instead of doing it somewhere without us noticing. In many cases though, specified interfaces will of course be provided for the relevant participation purpose. The key questions to ask are: How can we get people to use our dedicated interface? What alternatives do they have? How can we make our system easy to use for active participation? (Krabina, 2016).

Sixth, ***intended participation*** is the user activity that is supposed to happen according to the designers of the system such as people post their views, rate articles and other on the interface that is known or monitored or specifically designed by the organisers

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of participation. The missing elements now are a goal and an agenda. Participants should not contribute randomly, but they should know what is the goal of their participation, why they should participate and what is the agenda, for example what has happened so far and what will happen next. Key questions to ask are: How do we best communicate the goals of participation? What timeframe will people be willing to spend in the process? What timeframe do we need to get enough participation? What phases do we need, what will happen when? (Krabina, 2016).

Seventh, in ***effective participation*** users do not post comments or create content arbitrarily, but follow a defined and communicated goal or agenda. We now can talk about a successful participation project, but we have to care about people coming back the next time. The worst thing that can happen is that our users have climbed the ladder this far and after they have participated, nothing is going to happen with it. The missing element therefore is implementation. This does not mean implementing every idea, but it means that the output of the participation will be used, further discussed. Key questions are: How can we make sure that the output is taken, used, put into action? How can we communicate at the beginning what possible outcomes of the participation are? How can we communicate what has been done and what has changed after the participation phase? (Krabina, 2016).

The ***impact participation*** which is the last rungs specifies that the participation effort is sustainable. This means that for the participants it was worth it and for the managers of the process, valuable input was received and implemented. The result was a better public service, an improved program or project or a successful and sustainable initiative. Overall, Krabina emphasis that the proposed participation ladder is generic

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enough to be used for all kinds of participation projects, but at the same time remains easy enough to use. However, it is not yet grounded in empirical studies. Hence it must yet be proved whether it has any value at all from a theoretical as well as a practical viewpoint (Krabina , 2016). Krabina ladder seems to be very detail, yet a bit complex. This study would evaluate the e-participation implementation by referring to this ladder.

2.5.5 E-Participation Key Resources

Various studies are devoted to the e-participation framework and scope. We recognized that different scholars might indicate different perspectives of e-participation, including framework, scope, model, areas, dimensions, strategies, process, forms, mechanisms and technologies. However, each study contributes to understanding the complex layers in e-participation. Therefore, based on the previous study, we attempt to highlight the main aspects and layers of the e-participation field for better understanding. As e-participation allows the public to engage with the government through certain technology, Mohamad Aizi et al. (2011) conclude that there are three key resources in e-participation: citizen, process, and technology.

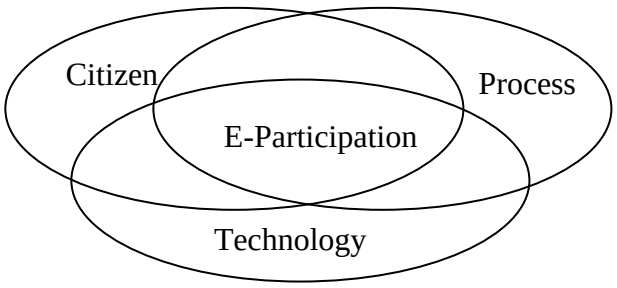

Figure 2.4 Keys of Realization of E-Participation
Source: Mohamad Aizi et al. (2011: 7)

As shown in Figure 2.3, all these resources are interrelated. Citizen is the key resources even though they do not play a role in managing the information. However, citizens' active role in e-participation depends on government initiatives through the structure of policies and training to assist the interaction through the e-participation application. E-participation initiatives also include the design that fosters professional cooperation by actively involving citizens at every level of society to share information and knowledge of their opinion and suggestions for improvement. It is proven that government with the developed e-participation initiative and the cooperation between citizens and government will produce an effective and excellent working style and improve the democratic process. Therefore Sæbø et al. (2008) also contend that citizen is the focal point in e-participation implementation because e-participation aims to increase citizens' ability to participate in digital governance.

The following key resources are the process. This resource indicates that the management process in any government organization, either formal or informal, requires a flow of information. The element of this process is in determining how to convey information by the government to the people and vice-versa. It also forms a connection between technologies and citizens and becomes a resource to sustain the relationship between citizens and government. This process will be crucial since it will demonstrate whether or not the government accepts the information provided and whether or not the government is transparent. It should serve as a link between the government and the people and as a tool for forming bonds between them. The procedures will aid in producing information required by the government and sharing that information for the public's benefit (Mohamad Aizi et al., 2011).

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E-participation is principally understood as technology-mediated interaction between civil society and government (Sæbø et al., 2008). Therefore, without technology as a key tool and resource, e-participation cannot be achieved. Mohamad Aizi et al. (2011) posits that an effective technology in designing e-participation initiatives will create an archive for the targeted citizen to exchange information with the government. In the meantime, several countries have employed mobile technology to make e-participation more successful. As for a beginning in the running of e-participation like Malaysian, the authors suggest that the internet with the web-based system application is the best approach. Essentially, all these resources play an important role in effective e-participation.

2.5.6 E-Participation Level

Macintosh (2004) developed three levels of participation that can characterize the e-participation initiatives, as illustrated in Figure 2.4. The first level is ***e-enabling,*** the use of technology to enable participation. E-enabling supports those who would not typically access the internet and take advantage of much available information. The objectives concern how technology can reach a wider audience by providing a range of technologies to cater to citizens' diverse technical and communicative skills. The technology also needs to provide relevant information in a format that is both more accessible and more understandable. These two aspects of accessibility and understandability of information are addressed by e-enabling.

The second level is ***e-engaging***, using technology to engage with the public. E-engaging involves consulting a broader audience to enable more profound contributions and support deliberative debate on policy issues. In this context, the term

‘to engage’ refers to the top-down consultation of citizens by government or parliament. The third level is ***e-empowering***, which refers to using technology to empower the public. The e-empowering public supports active participation and facilitates bottom-up ideas to influence the political agenda. The previous top-down perspectives of democracy are characterized by user access to information and reaction to government-led initiatives. From the bottom-up perspective, the public emerges as producers rather than policy consumers. This stage recognized a need to allow the public to influence and participate in policy formulation (Macintosh, 2004).

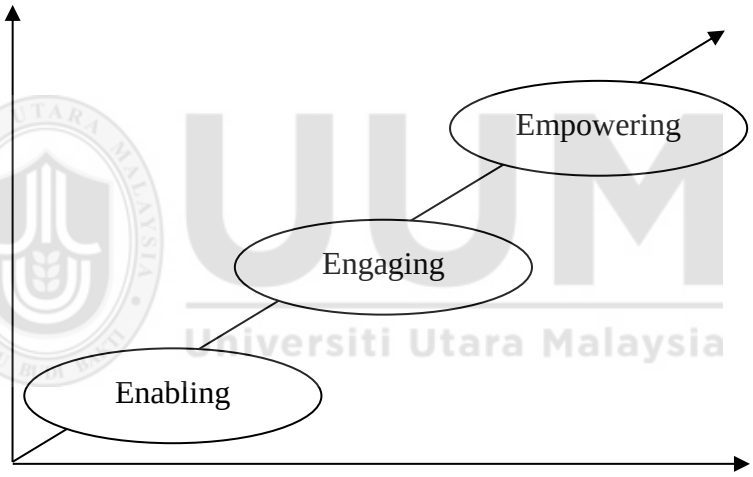

Figure 2.5 E-Participation Level
Source: Macintosh, 2004.

2.5.7 E-Participation Framework

According to Tambouris et al. (2007), it is equally important to understand public participation and the relevant supporting ICT tools. Therefore, Tambouris et al. developed the e-participation framework portrayed in Figure 2.5. This framework indicates that e-participation should be a process that is intended to be democratic, which includes different participation areas and involve specific techniques that are

supported by various categories of tools that are based on different technologies. The democratic processes include participation areas where citizens can interact with their representatives (G2C) or between themselves (C2C) and provide resources and social intelligence to the collective. The participation areas have to do with citizen engagement and involvement in the democratic process. It addresses the issue of 'what,' defining the context and the scope of the participatory process. Participation areas include information provision, community building or collaborative environments, consultation, campaigning, electioneering, deliberation, discourse, mediation, polling, participatory law-making, policy processes and citizenship education.

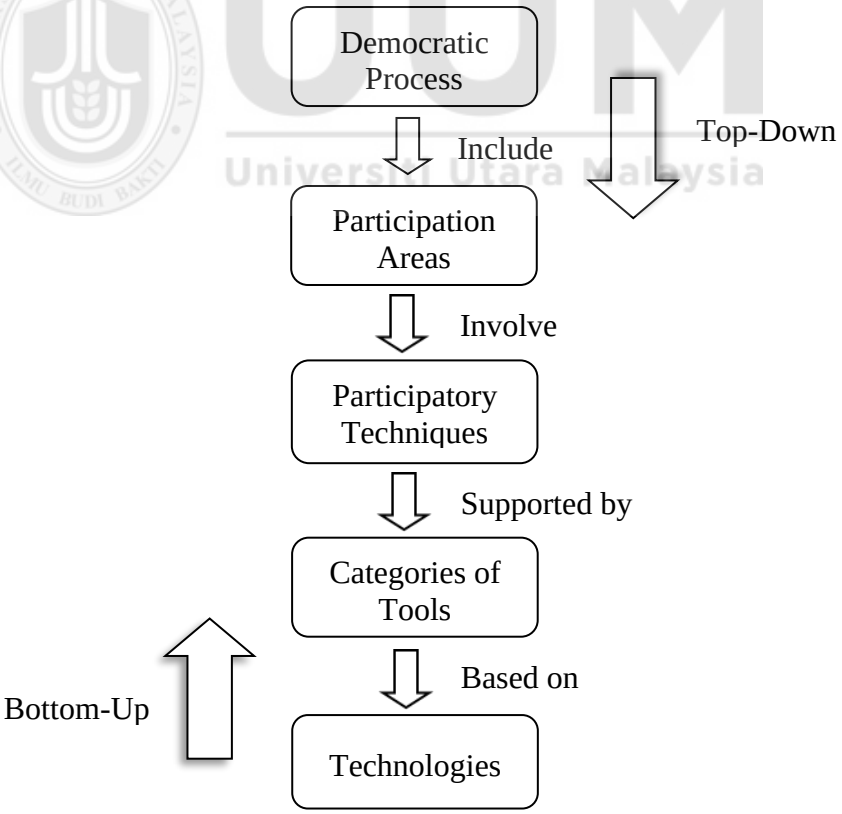

Figure 2.6 E-Participation Framework
Source: Tambouris et al. (2007: 288)

As in the next step, the participatory techniques are defined as the methods used to engage and involve the public and other stakeholders, decision-makers and politicians in the democratic process. Therefore, participatory techniques address the issue of 'how' the participatory process is brought to bear. Numerous techniques have been employed to facilitate participation. A comprehensive list of these techniques includes 21st-century meetings, charettes, citizens' juries, consensus conferences, deliberative polling, Delphi, expert panels, focus groups, public hearings, participatory evaluations, planning cells, scenario workshops and others (Steyaert & Lisoir, 2005).

In the meantime, the categories of tools refer to the software applications, products, tools, and components used to enhance and support the techniques that are in turn based on several diverse technologies. Categories of tools used to support e-participation include chat rooms, discussion forums or boards, decision-making games, virtual communities, online surgeries, ePanels, ePetitioning, eDeliberative Polling, eConsultation Platforms, eVoting platforms and suggestion tools for formal planning procedures. The introduction of tools and technologies in the traditional participatory process will lead to e-participation. However, ICT tools cannot support every participatory technique. Participatory techniques may require significant modifications that alter their initial structure to be adapted to an e-participation context (Thorleifsdottif & Wimmer, 2006).

In this framework, Tambouris et al. (2007) concentrated those technologies cannot support the participatory process in isolation from tools, techniques and areas, while the democratic processes lie more in political sciences. Thus, as the top-down approach addresses e-participation as a democratic process, it could be a catalyst by facilitating

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communication between the government's policymakers and the public and between themselves (G2G). It should be noted that there is also a bottom-up approach that can be envisioned from the present framework. Emerging technologies can result in the development of innovative ICT tools. New tools can introduce new participatory techniques that were not previously possible without supporting technology. These tools can broaden the participation activities and, hence, new types of public participation. In this case, the use of ICTs is no longer simply supportive but rather takes on a proactive role, which can result in a broadening and re-defining of the scope of the public.

2.5.8 E-Participation Tools

The introduction of ICT tools is the domain of public participation that leads to e-participation (Kalampokis, Tambouris, & Tarabanis, 2008). Thorleifsdottif and Wimmer (2006) stated that there are several software applications, tools, and components have been used in e-participation projects that range from weblogs and alert mechanisms to the more sophisticated consultation platforms. Thorleifsdottif and Wimmer further expand the list of e-participation tools that Macintosh, Coleman and Lalljee have developed into different categories, namely the core e-participation tools, the tools extensively used in e-participation and the basic tools of e-participation

The core e-participation tools include chat rooms, discussion forum/boards, decision-making games, virtual communities, online surgeries, epanels, epetitioning, edeliberative polling, econsultation platforms, evoting platforms and suggestion tools for formal planning procedures (Tambouris, Liotas, Kaliviotis & Tarabanais, 2010; Thorleifsdottif & Wimmer, 2006). In the meantime, the tools extensively used in e-

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participation include Webcasts, Podcasts, Wiki, Blogs, Quick Polls, Surveys and GIS-Tools. Meanwhile, the basic tools of e-participation include Search Engines, Alert Services, Online Newsletters, Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ), Listservs, Web Portals and Groupware Tools (Thorleifsdottif & Wimmer, 2006).

Above all, there are various sophisticated tools available in support of e-participation implementation, and currently, these tools and technologies also are constantly growing. However, understanding each tool requires further in-depth analysis and comprehensive discussion.

2.5.9 E-Participation Index

E-Participation Index (EPI) refers to the government's willingness to use ICT to provide high-quality information and effective communication tools to empower people to participate in consultations and decision-making as consumers of public services and citizens. In the simple term, EPI captures the dimensions of government to citizen interaction and inclusion by assessing how governments proactively solicit citizen input. The 2018 Survey measures e-participation through the EPI based on three main elements consist of e-information, e-consultation and e-decision-making (United Nations, 2018)

The first level is ***e-information,*** which refers to the availability of online information. Governments should provide people with information through ICT channels to help them make more informed choices at the next consultation stage. E-information is critical because, without access to publicly held information, participation cannot be evidence-based, fully relevant or significant. Results have shown that the member

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states have shared increasing information with the public, mostly in education and health, followed by social welfare and the environment (United Nations, 2018).

E-information level makes it possible for the public to know and acknowledge everything by making the needed information available. The second level is **e-*consultation***, which refers to online public consultations. It allows the public to be part of the deliberation process to craft new policies and design new services or projects. However, e-consultation need not mean that the government is obligated to use the received inputs. Rather, it could influence the information obtained to better respond to public sentiments on a subject (United Nations, 2018). The government website explains e-consultation mechanisms and tools. It offers a choice of public policy topics online for discussion with real-time and archived access to audios and videos of public meetings. E-consultation is when the government encourages the public to participate in discussions (United Nations, 2008).

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Meanwhile, the third level, ***e-decision-making***, directly involve the public in decision-making. There are two examples in which people can provide their input: (i) through direct e-voting and (ii) by identifying preferred or popular options and proposals by rating them through social media's function such as "Like/Dislike." While policy-making is the logical outcome of these types of public engagement activities, information gathering and consultations are equally valuable participation forms in their own right. Recently, policy discourse has been gaining special attention as new software tools are creating more complex and sophisticated systems of deliberation online (United Nation, 2018). In other words, e-decision-making evaluates the extent of a government's commitment to e-participation, as evidenced by the conclusive

acknowledgement of an individual public's input and taking it into account when making decisions and providing actual feedback on the outcomes of specific issues (United Nations, 2008).

The EPI discussed above is the main measurement used by the United Nations to measure the e-participation performance among countries. In the 2018 Survey, the EPI assessed the availability of e-participation tools on national government portals. It is noted in the 2018 Survey that more and more governments are encouraging citizens and businesses to collaborate by contributing ideas and providing feedback. According to the United Nations (2018), there are main e-participation features that measured in the survey include:

- Availability of sources of archived information such as policies, legal documents, budgets; use of digital channels including mobile devices; and open data technologies in education, health, finance, social welfare, labour, environment.
- Availability of online information regarding citizens' rights to access government information such as Freedom of Information Act or Access to Information Act.
- Evidence about government partnership or collaboration with third parties, namely civil society or the private sector, provides services.
- Evidence of free access to online government services through the main portal, kiosks, community centres, post offices, libraries, public spaces, or free Wi-Fi.
- Availability of open datasets in machine-readable non-proprietary formats and related policies or guidance.
- Evidence about collaborative co-production, crowdfunding.

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- Evidence about engaging citizens in consultation/communication to improve online/mobile services and raise citizens' satisfaction.
- Evidence about engaging citizens in consultation on education, health, finance, social welfare, labour, environment.
- Availability of personal data protection legislation online.
- Evidence about opportunities for the public to propose new open datasets available online.
- Availability of e-participation policies or mission statements.
- Availability of public procurement notifications and tender results online.
- Online tools on the national portal are available to seek public opinion and other input in raw (non-deliberative) form policy formation.
- Evidence on decisions made included results from online consultation with citizens in the education, health, finance, social welfare, labour, and environment sectors.
- Evidence about governments' publishing outcomes of policy consultations online.

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2.6 E-Participation Policy and Initiatives in Malaysia and Leading Countries

There is various government effort in terms of ICT enhancement and e-participation support. The policy and initiatives in Malaysia related to implementing the e-participation will be discussed to acknowledge a clear picture of the effort. In the meantime, the policy and initiatives that the top leading countries have implemented in e-participation have also been examined as the best example and guidance to other countries.

2.6.1 E-Participation Performance between Malaysia and Others

The researcher highlighted the E-Participation Index (EPI) in the previous sub-topic. The EPI provided by the United Nations refers to the. In the 2018 survey, out of 193 countries, Denmark, Finland, and the Republic of Korea are ranked as global leaders on e-participation. While tagging along are Netherlands, Australia, Japan, New Zealand, United Kingdom, United States and Spain (United Nations, 2018). Table 2.2 summarises the top ten countries that are leading in e-participation. The top-rank countries probably fulfil most of the e-participation features.

Table 2.3
Top 10 E-Participation Performers

Rank	Country	Index
1	Denmark	1.000
1	Finland	1.000
1	Republic of Korea	1.000
4	Netherlands	0.9888
5	Australia	0.9831
5	Japan	0.9831
5	New Zealand	0.9831
5	Spain	0.9831
5	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	0.9831
5	United States of America	0.9831

Source: United Nations, 2018.

Although Malaysia was not in the leading countries, Malaysia performed better in 2018 by placing in rank 32 compared to 47 out of 193 countries in 2016 (United Nations, 2018; 2016). Singapore and the Philippines led the e-participation among Southeast Asia countries when both were in rank 13 and 19. Meanwhile, Vietnam was

in rank 72, Thailand in rank 82, Indonesia in rank 92, Brunei in rank 97, Timor Leste in rank 153, Laos and Cambodia in rank 171 and Myanmar in rank 181. The United Nations (2018) was classified Singapore and Brunei as high-income countries. While both Malaysia and Thailand are upper-middle-income countries, others, including Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Timor Leste, are low-middle-income countries. However, even though Brunei is a high-income country, its e-participation ranking and performance are lower than Malaysia. The low middle-income country's Philippines remarkably placed in higher rankings than Malaysia and Brunei.

2.6.2 E-Participation Initiatives across Countries

As the government worldwide realized the importance of e-participation, various initiatives across countries were implemented. The e-participation initiatives vary across countries. It involves various governmental levels: local, state or national level; various issues: political, law and policymaking, budgeting, social or economic; and various advanced platforms according to the preferences. For example, in Australia, all agencies designing new or redeveloping public-facing services must meet the Australian Digital Service Standard, ensuring the proposed service is accessible to all users, regardless of their ability and environment. Meanwhile, Japan has the Digital Government Idea Box 2017 as a venue to widely discuss e-governance issues with its citizens and realize higher quality e-services.

In the meantime, Brazil supports social participation through the development of the Digital Governance Strategy of Brazil which is the objectives include: (i) to endorse the collaboration in the public policies cycle; (ii) to strengthen the social participation

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in the creation and improvement of digital public services; and (iii) to improve the direct interaction between the government and society. In 2014, the President signed Decree 8.243, establishing the National Social Participation Policy and creating the National System of Social Participation managed by the Secretary of Government of the Presidency of the Republic. Furthermore, through its social participation platform called Participa.br (www.participa.br), the initiative is engaging in the development of free software and body communication tools, discussion forums, chat rooms, videos, maps, participation trails and other means of online social consultation (United Nation, 2018).

Since its creation, Participa.br has hosted over 200 participatory processes and 30 public government consultations. The Brazilian open data policy has its fundamental objectives: the promotion of transparency and social participation, the development of new and better government services, the increase of public integrity, and the promotion of entrepreneurship. The Federal Executive Branch of the Ministry of Planning coordinates this policy. Moreover, to better promote social participation, Knowledge Networks was established through Ordinance No. 290 of 2016, inviting citizens, institutions and communities to become involved in thematic discussion groups in the E-Government Portal (United Nation, 2018). Additionally, Table 4.2 highlights other e-participation initiatives implemented in several countries.

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Table 2.4
E-Participation Initiatives across Countries

Continent: Country	**E-Participation Initiatives**	**Description**
Asia: Singapore	REACH Portal (http://www.reach.gov.sg)	A national-level consultation portal aims to encourage citizens' inputs regarding policymaking.
Australia	Community Builder (http://www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au/)	An interactive electronic clearing house for the community level for social, economic and environmental renewal. It enables online community consultation, e-petition and broadcast parliamentary activities.
Europe: Denmark	Nordpol.dk (http://nordpol.dk)	To enhance citizens' interest and knowledge in politics and strengthen the dialogue among citizens and politicians.
Europe: Estonia	TOM - Tana Otsustan Mina or Today I Decide (http://tom.riik.ee/)	To enhance citizens' participation in policymaking by allowing citizens to comment on draft laws and submit their ideas for new legislation.
Europe: Italy	Iperbole (http://iperbole.bologna.it)	An online civic network in Bologna has been set up to widen the use of the ICT, supply the information and interactive services to all the citizens of Bologna, and create an effective dialogue between all the citizens and government.
Europe: Sweden	Kalix Annual Consultation (http://www.kalix.se)	To engage citizens in a series of efforts to renew the town politics, including the remodelling of the city centre of Kalix and tax issues.
Europe: UK	UK Government Consultations (http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/regulation.aspx)	They are designed to facilitate public feedback on policy issues and offer useful political and civic information.
North America: US	Regulations.gov (http://www.regulations.gov)	A cross-agency e-government effort to transform the rulemaking process of the US's Federal by enhancing the public's ability to participate in the government's regulatory decision-making.

Source: Phang & Kankanhalli, 2008.

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2.6.3 E-Participation Initiatives among Top Leading Countries

2.6.3.1 Denmark

Denmark had proved that their ambitious idea by digitalising most of the services had turned into a reality. As Denmark never failed to be the top leading country in e-participation, the country's digital strategy as one of the key roles in all government aspects is successfully implemented. Denmark Digital Strategies 2016-2020 takes place at every level of the government, either central, regional or local government. There are tremendous initiatives that have been implemented in Denmark e-participation include:

2.6.3.1.1 Strategic Interaction

Denmark successfully implemented its digital strategy through strategic digital interaction between the public sector and other authorities. Denmark ensures that all sectors and the most complex and interrelated areas are possible through the digital platform. Digitisation successfully proved to be an effective and efficient tool in streamlining the processes and workflows in the public sector. In delivering effective, efficient and strong services to all public and businesses, the strategic collaboration in digitisation among the public sector requires a continuous effort. In the meantime, the public as an individual has a responsibility to understand the digital potential within its care and ensure that digitisation leads to the desired change (Agency for Digitisation, 2016).

In parallel with joint public sector efforts, there are sector-specific digitisation projects and strategies, for example, joint municipal and regional digital strategies. This approach to public sector digitisation balances common strategic targets and local

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adaptation and priorities. Additionally, strategic interaction between the public sector with other sectors such as private businesses, trade organisations and NGOs not only contributed to discovering the best mutual outcome for the digital evolution but it is also contributed to protecting a strong and secure digital foundation in Denmark (Agency for Digitisation, 2016).

2.6.3.1.2 Digital ID

Denmark had provided the digital IDs called NemID for all the citizens to interact with the government and access other numerous services even within the private sector. For example, citizens can use their IDs to make bank transactions, recover tax returns from the government portal, and even make an appointment with their hairdressers. Denmark is also looking forward to personalizing the digital services by providing targeted content for citizens on their NemID portals. For example, nearly retired citizens could log in to their portal to review the retirement planning options (Chia, 2018).

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2.6.3.1.3 Digital Post

Denmark had shown determination by introducing the digital self-service and digital post as mandatory to all people as stipulated in the legislation (Perez, 2015). In the meantime, the officials in Denmark had proved that digitisation is a key driver in ensuring that the public sector is strong, accessible and citizen-orientated. Denmark made it mandatory by law to receive official letters online through a government-provided Digital Post account in 2013 for businesses and 2014 for citizens. Since November 2015, the country's Digital Post strategy has attempted to ensure mandatory

compliance, whereby citizens digitally receive official communications from the public sector (Government Europa, 2018).

Currently, there are 89 different service areas, some of which are managed by local municipalities and some provided by the central government. Through this, the public could access various services, including the applications for health cards, maternity allowance, housing allowance, pensions, and even book for a campsite. All these self-services are available by the national citizen's portal. The government attempted to provide one platform to access everything easily. As a result, in Spring 2015, nearly 80% of all transactions were performed by Denmark's digital self-service. Meanwhile, on 1st November 2014, 97% of citizens above 15 knew the digital post would happen, and about 70% of citizens signed up for digital post before it became mandatory. For almost a year since Denmark introduced digital posts, more than 60 million letters have been sent to citizens online since 1st January 2018 (Perez, 2015).

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Overall, it has been a tremendous success. Denmark has been quite surprised how their mandatory approach has been accepted in the real life of their people and, surprisingly, to the elderly. And today, all people have been widely accepted that digital communication is the main platform to communicate with the public authorities in Denmark. Consequently, most Danish people are now using and receiving official letters digitally through the Digital Post (Government Europa, 2018).

2.6.3.1.4 Digital Welfare

Denmark had raised the standard for public digitisation through one of the remarkable initiatives by using the technology in caregiving and medical aspect. These initiatives

have been on the agenda for almost two decades. The social changes in society, such as an increasing number of ageing populations, chronic diseases, and limited financial resources, had pressured the government to find new and efficient ways of providing public services. Therefore, the technology utilization in welfare services can contribute to the economic stability in Denmark as a welfare state. New technology and digital welfare solutions have already empowered the elderly to live more autonomously and with a greater quality of life. For example, telemedicine to patients with *Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease* (COPD) has reduced costs and increased patients' sense of control and safety. This initiative provides services to all public and creates a better interconnection between the public sectors. Knowledge sharing across the public sector is important to ensure transparency and coherence in civil initiatives. Better coordination between authorities and data sharing may also improve the course of treatments when different stages of treatments are carried out by hospitals, general practitioners and the municipality (Agency for Digitisation, 2016).

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2.6.3.1.5 Other Digital Welfare Initiatives

Under this initiative, Denmark planned six other initiatives to digitise its services. However, two of the most important initiatives involve disseminating digital welfare solutions. This initiative aims to improve and accelerate the dissemination of documented and effective digital health and social care solutions. A project within this initiative is telemedicine for women with pregnancy complications. This initiative provided help to a woman with pregnancy complications through the medical equipment, which enables them to monitor themselves and submit the results to health professionals. In addition, this telemedicine helps them to feel safe and reduces their financial costs (Agency for Digitisation, 2016).

They were second, digitalising the learning and teaching processes. This initiative aims to provide advanced digital support in education. The well-utilised technology may contribute to the children's learning tremendously. For example, this initiative's project will help ensure that relevant written exams in secondary school, specifically in the 8th and 9th-grade exams, will be conducted digitally. Another project analyses how common IT standards and infrastructure can support data exchange to enable schools' digital platforms and digital teaching aids to interact (Agency for Digitisation, 2016).

E-participation in Denmark proves that e-participation is not impossible to be achieved. Nevertheless, it did not happen overnight because it requires continuous effort and hard work with full support from every level of government and people. However, the most important in Denmark's e-participation is no one is excluded. According to the Special Advisor to Denmark's Agency for Digitisation, Thomas Frandzen, e-participation is part of the country's digital strategy. The mandatory digital interaction may seem like a radical approach. Still, the government ensures that citizens who cannot access digital services are being helped. Frandzen further asserts that the government could not accept if the people have to suffer for potentially life-threatening consequences or lose the rights to certain benefits, just because they are unaware or unable to check their digital post (Agency for Digitisation, 2016).

Therefore, Denmark has implemented a massive campaign and a huge awareness programme for the groups they thought might have difficulties using digital communications. Subsequently, a dialogue session has been taking place with various special interest groups, which consists of the elderly organisations, disability

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organisations, networks, organisations working with immigrants and social housing groups. As a result, Denmark's remarkable digitisation initiatives are beneficial to all the Danish people and other stakeholders and expect to save the government expenditures up to £200 million a year (Perez, 2015). Denmark's future strategy is to prepare its citizens, businesses and public sector employees for the digital Denmark of the future (Agency for Digitisation, 2016).

2.6.3.2 Finland E-Participation

Finland's current digital age shows that its strong attitude in sustaining openness and democratic value is the key principle being applied by Finland. These values and principles are also practically applied through the Openness of Government Act reviewed in 1999. Furthermore, openness and citizen participation have been actively developed during the last decades through various development programmes which involve the Government's Project Register (HARE) in 1999; the otakantaa.fi website in 2000; the Hear Citizens Project (2000-2005); the Government's Policy Programme on Citizen Participation (2003-2007); the government portal of Finland as known as www.demokratia.fi and the ongoing Democracy Network that was established in 2007.

2.6.3.2.1 The Government's Project Register (HARE)

The government's project register provides the legal preparatory documentation on all public projects implemented by the government, parliament or ministries. The authorities could review all the necessary information and documentation on those projects to monitor or evaluate the progress. Meanwhile, under the parliament and ministries as the service provider, the internet version of the project provides all the documents purposely to all the public. The information provided in this version is

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mostly used by the ministries, state's administrative and public. Through this project, the government aims to be transparent and open about all the projects under the ministries (Holkeri, 2002).

This project is one of the convenient tools that provide the public with all the information, including the current project that takes place under various ministries, the aims of the projects, the preparatory legal documents and report to the parliament, the committee and boards of the state enterprises and agencies, the working team or human resources that involve behind the projects, the progress of the projects, the relevant publications and the relationship with the government's programme related to the Finnish and European Union legislation. The related documents will be automatically transferred to the government archives when the project is finished. The register itself will generate a final report to be kept archived. The public could use this platform without any charges, access code or username (Holkeri, 2002).

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2.6.3.2.2 The Otakantaa.fi Website

Otakantaa.fi's website aims to promote and enhance the dialogue and discussion between citizens and the public administrator on various topics. These include anything from drafting new laws to generating the needs and ideas for new policies. Public and other stakeholders could participate through provided tools such as polls and discussion. The public administrator would consider the public's input and comment in future policymaking. In the meantime, the consultations can be accessed through a website listing sorted by the organisations that have initiated the consultations. This website is beneficial to everyone and can be accessed by large stakeholders. It is a cost-effective medium because it is fast and easy to be used. The

participation methods and tools to support the consultation process also varied. In addition, it allows the public to participate at anytime and anywhere, and it unifies the consultation process within different organisations. The service has been acknowledged as one of the best practices by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (Wilhelmsson, 2017).

2.6.3.2.3 The Government's Policy Programme on Citizen Participation

In addition, under the Finland national democracy project, Finland had launched the Government's Policy Programme on Citizen Participation 2003-2007. This programme aims to promote an active role in society, create a strong civil society by empowering the public with the necessary influence, and effectively function representative democracy. Under this programme, through the cooperation between civil society and the research community with various ministries, several projects on promoting public participation were implemented (United Nations, 2018).

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This programme successfully increased the efficiency of civic and democracy education, improved the quality of communication between the citizen and the government, promoted democracy in municipal and improved the functioning of municipal councils, and evolved the need for legislative policies. Particularly this programme focuses on strengthening the knowledge of democracy and organizing the important information to the specific standard. In addition, the programme formulated a plan for a democratic policy that will enable the government to promote social participation and influence by citizens as required by Finland's Constitution (United Nations, 2018).

2.6.3.2.4 The Government Portal Demokratia.fi

Meanwhile, the government portal of Finland, www.demokratia.fi offers all citizens suggestions on the initiatives or commentaries to the national and local government. This portal presented in Finnish and Swedish languages only had launched one of the key services in the Citizen's Initiative for a legislative proposal in fall 2012. Over 50,000 people had signed on the initiatives within the specific time before it further referred to the parliament to be evaluated for any legislative changes or improvement. Furthermore, in 2015, through The Ministry of Finance, the government initiated a HELP project that purposely provides the necessary support for those who are incapable or unaware of using digital services. In the meantime, to ensure the diverse needs of different users are measured in accomplishing the goal to digitize public services, an Advisory Board called Digitalization of Everyday Life was set up. This board consists of over 20 members and is represented by various civil society organizations and academician United Nations, 2018).

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2.6.4 Malaysian E-Participation Policy and Initiatives

As Hummel (2016) stressed that the government needs tools and mechanisms to support e-participation, Malaysia also implemented e-participation through various initiatives. Therefore, even though Malaysia is lagging behind the developed countries, we should credit the government for its hard work.

2.6.4.1 Malaysian ICT Agendas

Considering ICT's potential for enhancing citizen participation, Malaysia has developed the national ICT agenda, including the National Telecommunications Policy (NTP) and the National Information Technology Council (NITC). The National

Telecommunications Policy (NTP) for 1994-2020 was formulated purposely to provide a proper plan and strategies for developing the telecommunications sector. The important parties in this policy include providers, investors and the government, particularly for investment, human resource development, network and service facilities, absorption of new technology and research and development. The civil service also presents as a developer and implementer of the policy. The objective of the NTP is to provide modern, sophisticated and quality communications services at a reasonable cost. Besides other guidelines, the NTP guides competition, interconnection charges, tariff rates and network development (Nor Mazny, 2010)

Later in 1994, the National Information Technology Council of Malaysia (NITC) was established. This council is the primary advisor and consultant to the government regarding ICT in Malaysia's national development. This council was chaired by the Prime Minister and has a team of leading strategic thinkers that involve public, private and community sectors. The government had shown its serious effort by establishing the NITC to integrate the federal and state councils to streamline the national ICT strategies. In line with its role of providing policy formulation, NITC sets its strategic direction for ICT, including technology adoption and industry promotion (Nor Mazny, 2010).

The establishment of the NITC facilitated the formulation of the National Information Technology Agenda (NITA). As a result, NITA launched in 1996 focused on a broader national development plan called Vision 2020. The NITA's vision is to use ICT to transform Malaysia, firstly into an information society, then a knowledge society, and finally to a values-based knowledge society in eight strategic areas:

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1. E-economy: Aimed to create added value and wealth through successful participation in the emerging knowledge-driven economy;
2. E-public services: Focused on the provision of people-oriented, customer-focused electronic services;
3. E-community: Aimed to improve the quality of life of the community through the quality of interaction and communication;
4. E-learning: Focused on developing a life-long learning culture;
5. E-sovereignty: Focused on building a resilient national identity;
6. Conferences and expositions to grow a framework and a platform for dialogue and the exchange of national and international experiences on ICT, as well as for raising the awareness of the Malaysian public about information age developments;
7. Support the application grants to promote the use of ICT and multimedia for socioeconomic development through developing communities enabled by electronic networks, e.g., NutriWeb, CyberCare, and Neighbourhood Centres;
8. The Multi-media Super Corridor (MSC) provides a comprehensive world-class ICT environment that acts as a global testbed for innovative solutions and a hub for developing local and foreign ICT SMEs (Nor Mazny, 2010).

Since it was launch in 1996, NITA's concepts and ideas have been carried forward through policy documents, white papers and working papers such as the Outline Perspective Plan 3 (OPP3), the Eighth as well as the Ninth Malaysia Plan and various sectoral master plans (Nor Mazny, 2010).

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2.6.4.2 Malaysian E-Participation Policy

Focusing on the e-participation in Malaysia, through the examination on various websites of the governmental department, the e-participation policy that has been represented is the same. According to Malaysia Administrative Modernization and Management Planning Unit (MAMPU), the e-participation policy in Malaysia aims to uphold the value of transparency in public participation and improve the quality of services by the government through e-participation practices. The government realises public involvement in the government helps the government have broader perspectives, various input and information, and potential solutions towards improving the outcomes of the services. It also helps to provide a productive relationship, a better communication and deliberation process and much more systematic governance (MAMPU, 2019a).

The government purposely invested in e-participation aims to open the opportunity for the public to easily be involved in the government's policy and decision-making processes through the utilization of information and communication technologies. Among the communication channels used by the government are Portal Poll; Public Participation; Portal Feedback that includes feedback, questions, complaints and suggestions; Customer Satisfaction Survey and social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. The public is encouraged by the government to participate. However, the participants should abide by the term and conditions that have been outlined in the e-participation policy as follows:

- Participants are strictly prohibited from making any provocative statements regarding the issues of race, religion and politics.

- Participants are strictly prohibited from making any statement that degrades, attacks or offends other participants.
- Participants should use appropriate language in making the statement to avoid any offensive issues and be open-minded to other participants' opinions.
- Participants should give their opinion on the issues that have been discussed.
- Participants are strictly prohibited from discussing or connecting in any pornographic website.
- Participants should not make any statement that breaches the copyright of law, trademark and patent.
- Participants are prohibited from using this platform commercially or otherwise to hold any contest or run any business by taking other participants' money through various fraud schemes.
- Participants should not provide any software or computer programmes that may harm other participants' computers and should also be aware that any viruses do not contaminate any uploaded files.
- The participant individually should understand that they are responsible for bearing the risk on any statement given in the e-Inclusion room because the administrator does not have the responsibility to approve, favour or confirm the truth, accuracy or reliability of any statement made.
- The administrator of the e-Inclusion, even in the absence of the author's consent, has the right to modify or remove any statement or comment.
- The administrator of the e-Inclusion at any time without any n has the right to modify the Investment Policies and Guidelines on e-Inclusion without prior announcement or notice.

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- Participants are encouraged to obey the terms and conditions stipulated in the e-Inclusion Guidelines (MAMPU, 2019a).

2.6.4.3 Malaysian E-Participation Initiatives

Besides the e-participation policy, the government has shown that they are serious in promoting e-participation through various initiatives and programmes such as:

2.6.4.3.1 1Malaysia Internet Centre

According to the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) (2014a), the 1Malaysia Internet Centre, initially built-in 2007, is one of the oldest projects under the Universal Service Provision. It is one of the initiatives that intend to impact the social and economy of the community positively. This centre was provided with all the necessary equipment such as desktop computers, printers, projector and screen. Additionally, it provides basic internet access to the community, but training on the ICT also was given by two supervisors that employed full-time at the centre. The objective of this centre is to provide up to 4Mbps basic Internet access to the rural and isolated areas where there are no internet facilities. Currently, 678 centres are operating throughout the state.

2.6.4.3.2 1Malaysia Internet Centre for the Urban Poor

1Malaysia Internet Centre for the urban poor started in 2013 is a programme that expanded from the 1Malaysia Internet Centre. Specifically, it aims to provide affordable basic internet access to the poor and underserved people in urban areas. One hundred centres are expected to be built in urban-low-cost public housing projects by 2015. This centre is administered by two permanent employed staff, equipped with all

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the basic facilities such as computers, printer, projector and screen as well as an access of the internet along with the training on the ICT (Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission, 2014a).

2.6.4.3.3 Community WIFI

Community WIFI provides wireless internet access to the selected location in underserved areas. This initiative aims to bring wireless internet access to all small communities in the remote villages right at their doorsteps. Although it focuses only on the selected village in remote areas, this programme successfully connected 4,270 villages with the wireless internet (Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission, 2014b).

2.6.4.3.4 i-Tegur

i-Tegur, formerly known as iKepoh, is an initiative developed by the ministry to facilitate the public in making complaints to the local authorities (PBT) through the mobile application. i-Tegur was developed purposely to give the best service to the public and create a good relationship between the PBT and the citizens through a user-friendly channel. Through this channel, the public could easily send their complaints and the government could manage and monitor the complaint effectively. This application also helps the top management of the PBT and Ministry of Urban Wellbeing, Housing and Local Government (KPKT) simplify access to public complaints through the same resources. i-Tegur plays an important function for the public to send their complaints through mobile without physical constraint. It is also responsive in efficiently providing feedback and monitoring the local authority's complaint statistics (KPKT, 2018).

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2.6.4.3.5 Jom Sembang

Another initiative is the establishment of Jom Sembang or formerly recognized as Digital Government Lab. Jom Sembang is a collaboration effort between Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC) with other members of the Digital Government Technical Working Group (DGTWG), which consists of the MCMC, MAMPU, Malaysia's Performance Management and Delivery Unit (PEMANDU), Economic Planning Unit (EPU) and Public Service Department (JPA). This platform aims to offer a continuous involvement for the citizen and stakeholders on the topic related to the Digital Government initiatives. This initiative aims to address the citizens' needs through three basic principles: conversation, consultation, and communication. Jom Sembang could be organised physically or through the digital platform (MAMPU, 2019b).

One of the physical examples of the Jom Sembang programme is on the 5 Mobile App Idea held on September 28 and October 5, 2015, at Putrajaya IOI Marriot and MAEPS Serdang respectively. The immersion participants developed the discussion from the immersion programme that consisted of 15 government officers. The government aims that through this programme, an inventive Citizen-Centric Mobile App to serve the citizens' needs and demands in many transformative ways. Headed by MAMPU, this programme also gets the collaborative involvement of other agencies, including MDEC, JPA and the National Institute of Public Administration (INTAN) (MAMPU, 2019b).

Meanwhile, the digital example of Jom Sembang was the enhancement of the Provider-Based Evaluation (ProBE) system in 2016. ProBE annually self-evaluate the

government agencies' websites were rebranded from the Malaysia Government Portals and Websites Assessment (MGPWA). Users could provide input and feedback on system enhancement through this virtual platform. There were approximately 20 users who participated in this online discussion. They are webmasters from various government agencies. Thus, MDEC is currently developing the newly enhanced ProBE system based on the users' needs (MAMPU, 2019b). However, the link to this initiative is currently no longer available.

2.6.4.3.6 Local Government E-Participation Initiatives

There are initiatives had been taken by the local authorities in supporting the public participation through online. For example, the Alor Setar City Council and other local council, has made an effort by increasing the number of public channels, including email, e-Aduan, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Twitter. The i-Sedar, which can be found on the Alor Setar City Council's website, has added another online complaint channel to the already existing ones (Alor Setar City Council, 2019). In the meantime, the City Council of Seberang Perai (MBSP) has developed MyMBSP, which aims to increase public e-participation through e-interaction with local government authorities Halimah, Mohamad, Dyah & Ridho, 2022).

In the state of Terengganu, the Kemaman Municipal Council (MPK) has also introduced ADU MPK, a smart digital public participation application which aimed at bridging the gap between joint engagement and local affairs discussion between the local community and the MPK local council (Halimah, Mohamad, Dyah & Ridho, 2022). Additionally, Putrajaya through Putrajaya Corporation, which leading roles in implementing smart cities in Malaysia, had launched the Putrajaya Mobile Application

(PMA) in 2016. Meanwhile, Petaling Jaya City Council also launched a unique community engagement e-platform, PJKita, to gauge citizens' input and accumulate community volunteers to co-produce its vision as a smart sustainable city (Lim & Yigitcanlar, 2022).

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed various literature and concepts limited within the study for a comprehensive understanding before the research was examined. However, all these literature and concepts are closely related in examining the evaluation of e-participation in the research area. In the meantime, the past literature on e-participation practices within the countries and other foreign countries was also explored. Thus, the best practices from the leading countries could be learned, and the area that has not been studied could be acknowledged. The following chapter discusses the research methodology.

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CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Research and methodology are strongly interrelated, and it complements each other. The methodology is reflected in research and guides the research (Perry & Kreamer, 1986). In both academic and business activities, research is essential even though there is no consensus in the literature on how research should be defined in these different fields. However, from many definitions offered, there appears to be an agreement that research is a methodological process of inquiry and investigation to increase knowledge (Amaratunga, Baldry, Sarshar & Newton, 2002). Research methodology is a systematic set of procedures by which researchers describe, explain, predict phenomena, and solve the problem. To simplify, it is a discipline on how the research will be implemented (Rajasekar, Philominathan & Chinnatham, 2013). This chapter elaborates on the methodology that has been applied in this study. It involves the aspect related to the data collection and data analysis in answering the study's objectives. The main elements in this chapter involve research design, research scope, research sample, research instrument, research procedure and data analysis.

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3.2 Research Framework

Evaluation is a systematic effort to collect and analyse data to evaluate the merit of that subject, either process, programme or policy. It is believed that an appropriate theory would help analyse the actual programme performance (Smith, Mitton, Cornelissen, Gibson & Peacock, 2012). Yet, for more than two decades, the discussion on the appropriate method in measuring the result of the social programme has been dominated by the paradigm of the randomized controlled experiment. As a result, a lack of attention is given to the essence of developing the theoretical model in understanding social programmes. Furthermore, a lack of underpinning theory in programme evaluation has hampered an understanding and efficient use of evaluation strategies in impact assessment. Therefore, it is crucial to bring the theory-driven approach back into the programme evaluation to produce much more efficient evaluation, better understanding and information on social programmes (Chen & Rossi, 1983).

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Savaya and Waysman (2005) declared the role of theory in developing, operating and evaluating programmes is gaining increased emphasis in recent years. A clear grasp of a programme's theory can contribute to the successful performance of many important developmental and evaluative tasks along its life span. Although there is growing recognition of the importance of programme theory in the development and evaluation of programmes, it should be noted that this is not a simple task. Programmes are often complex, comprising many different types of interlinking components. Therefore, a relatively simple instrument that can help the practitioner explain and present programme theory is needed by guiding and structuring the process.

In regard to the earlier discussion, the underpinning theories are defined by Gregor (2002) as theories for comprehending the social environment of the research that explain how and why things happen the way they do. Therefore, the underpinning theory in the programme evaluation serves as a foundation for measuring performance to provide an explanation regarding the mechanism or process that is involved in implementation toward achieving specific programme outcomes, as well as the circumstances, reason, or cause of the outcomes of the programme. The use of programme theory as the underpinning theory in this study is significant for an appropriate evaluation and understanding the e-participation implementation. In other word, this study utilise the programme theory as a guidance as it comprises all the instruments necessary for evaluating a programme. Programme theory, as emphasised by Rogers, Petrosino, Huebner, and Hasci (2000), has been viewed as a solution to a variety of problems in programme evaluation by assisting evaluators in understanding why the programme works or doesn't work, providing better evidence for causal attribution, and having the ability to directly or indirectly improve the programme. As a result, this study requires the usage of logic model as the programme theory.

The logic model is a tool to describe and articulate programme theory. This model has been used in both non-profit and governmental organizations. The logic model is one of the tools that explicates programme theory for various purposes throughout the life span of programmes: for assessing the feasibility of proposed programs and their readiness for evaluation, for programme development, for developing performance monitoring systems, and for building knowledge (Savaya & Waysman, 2005). Logic models link the problem or situation to the intervention, referring to inputs and outputs and the impact or outcome. Problem and situation provide an opportunity to

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communicate the relevance of the project. It involves the problem encountered, its consequences, and people affected by the problem. The situation statement establishes a baseline for comparison at the close of a programme. A description of the problem and its symptoms provides a way to determine whether the change has occurred. Describing who is affected by the problem allows assessment of who has benefited. Identifying other stakeholders and programmes builds a platform to measure overall contribution, including increased awareness and activity or reduced concern and cost (McCawley, 2001).

Assumptions that underline in the logic model refer to the identified element that is believed to be present and necessary to carry out the programme strategies (Hayes, Parchman & Howard, 2011). According to Renger & Titcomb (2002), assumptions play an essential role in the programme's success. The planner's expectation could be evaluated either it is valid, or there could be any gaps identified. Along a similar vein, Kaplan and Garrett (2005) identified that underlying assumptions were the most significant part in applying the logic model for the community programme monitoring and evaluation. It was proved in several cases that by articulating the underlying assumptions, the programme's gaps could be identified, thinking abilities could be improved, and a plausible case in support of the programme concept could be established. Although the assumptions are relevant to an understanding and assessing the programme, very few programmes complete this task due to the risk of modification of the programme, resources, and responsibilities. Thus, it is important for the local government to have the assumption on the main elements that supporting the e-participation implementation in facilitate an effective implementation.

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Next, inputs include the resources invested or put forward in a programme, such as knowledge, skills, or expertise. A programme must define the inputs since it provides an opportunity to communicate the programme's quality (McCawley, 2001). The inputs include staff, partners, volunteers, time, money, materials, equipment and technology (Barkman, 2003). Meanwhile, the output is related to the activities conducted towards achieving the goal of a programme, such as workshops, programmes, meetings, publications, media events and websites (Barkman, 2003).

Other than services provided to the programme's direct customers or programme participants such as a workshop, output also could be in terms of goods and products development. The people we reach also are outputs of the programme and need to be the Centre of the model. The people constitute a bridge between the problem and the impact. Information about the people who participated and what they were taught can include their characteristics or behaviours; the proportion or number of people in the target group that were reached; learner objectives for programme participants; the number of sessions or activities attended by participants; and level of satisfaction participants express for the programme (McCawley, 2001). In other words, an output constitutes a direct result of activities (Bucher, 2010).

As the main objective of this study is to evaluate the e-participation implementation at the Alor Setar City Council area, therefore, input and output play an important element in supporting the implementation. In term of local government input, this study measure the staff's knowledge, skills, commitment and support; financial resources and facilities such as technology, internet and online platform. Meanwhile, output involves the activities promoting e-participation that provided by local government,

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public participation in that activities and the usage of online platform. In term of public input and output, it is related the public knowledge on the availability of e-participation platform, the facilities in term of computer and internet that can help the public participate through an online as well as knowledge and skill in using any e-participation platform. Next, in term of output, it involve public knowledge and involvement in e-participation activities as well as public experience in participating with the local government through any online medium.

Furthermore, the outcomes element explains the changes or benefits to people, organizations, or other programme targets expected from their exposure to activities and outputs. Programmes typically have multiple, sequential outcomes, sometimes collectively called the programme's outcome structure. First, short-term outcomes are the changes or benefits most closely associated with or caused by the programme's outputs. Second are the intermediate outcomes, which are expected to result from the short-term outcomes. Finally, long-term outcomes are expected to follow the benefits enlarged through the intermediate outcomes (McLaughlin & 1999).

In the meantime, Barkman (2003) explains that a programme's outcome is divided into three different levels: learning, action, and impact level. The learning level could occur immediately, including creating awareness, knowledge gained, attitudes change, skills development, and the aspirations generated. The outcome could be measured at the action level through changes in behaviour, practice, decisions made, policies changed or adopted, and social action initiated. Meanwhile, the impact level constitutes the long-term outcome, including social, economic, civic, and environmental impact. Barkman further explains that the desired outcome level must be determined before a

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programme. The evaluation process should be an essential part of the planning process, not after the programme. However, be mindful that the outcomes may vary positively, negatively, or intended or unintended. The outcome of e-participation implementation examine from perspectives and expectations of both public and local authorities either the e-participation help to improve public participation, support an effective service and improve the future environment for both authorities and the public.

Besides the above elements that have been discussed, another factor that cannot be neglected in the programme evaluation is the external factor. Key contextual factors external to the programme and not under its control may influence its success positively or negatively and are critical features of the logic model (McLaughlin & Jordan, 1999). Overall, one of the essential uses of the logic model that should not be overlooked is communication. Developing a logic model brings people together to build a shared understanding of the programme's performance standards. The model also helps communicate the programme to those outside it concisely and compellingly and helps the staff to understand how the programme works and their responsibilities to make it work (McLaughlin & Jordan, 1999). The perspective from both group of informants regarding the external factors and main challenges that would affect the e-participation implementation had been evaluated in this study. In the meantime, this study also gathered the necessary suggestions on how the e-participation could be further improve.

The success of a programme is critical to the organization. Therefore, the evaluation aspect must not be neglected because an appropriate evaluation method would help contribute to the programme's success. Therefore, developing appropriate and

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measurable indicators is the key to a sound evaluation. In this study, the logic model of the University of Wisconsin Extension by Taylor-Powell and Henert (2008) will be used as the leading theory that guides the e-participation evaluation. Furthermore, the main element in this model will be used to suit the element that will be measured the evaluation of the e-participation programme at the Alor Setar City Council.

Therefore, in this study, the logic model is the most suitable tool to evaluate the evaluation of e-participation implementation to build knowledge and understanding of the subject matter. The logic model in various forms has been around since the late 1960s. However, it has come into increasing use in the past decade due to emphasis on managing results and measuring performance. The logic model also helps evaluators frame evaluation reports. The evaluation and measurement findings can show the performance, and results can be linked to programme elements and assumptions. Evaluators can use this tool to evaluate a programme during its design phase after it has ended or at any other point in its life cycle. Managers may use this tool in programme planning and design and communicate the program's significance in a larger organization or context. Finally, developing a logic model helps build shared understanding and expectations among programme staff and other participants (McLaughlin & Jordan, 2010).

This model has been developed to assess environmental projects such as UN Environmental Programme (Kubicek & Aichholzer, 2016). Besides, it also served as a fundamental theory and guidance in various studies and programmes such as education. For example, according to Newton, Poon, Nunes and Stone (2013), the logic model generates empirical evidence that advances the knowledge base of what

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works in teacher education and under what contexts teacher education programmes are effective. In addition, the logic model also has been used in evaluating student participation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) programmes (Wilkerson & Haden, 2014).

Other than that, this model is also widely used in measuring the participation in many different programmes such as sustainable development (Zainal, 2012), sustainable urban planning (Cohen, Quinn, Marshall & Sharp, 2019), the community-based programme (Mills, Lawton & Sheard, 2019; Van Koperen, Jebb, Summerbell, Visscher, Romon, Borys & Seidell, 2013; Hulton, 2007; Kaplan & Garrett, 2005; Chen, Kato & Rainford, 1999), scientific research (Baxter, Blank, Woods, Payne, Rimmer & Goyder, 2014; Shirk, Ballard, Wilderman, Phillips, Wiggins, Jordan, McCallie, Minarchek, Lewenstein, Kransny & Bonney, 2012), and healthcare (Chaves, Briand, Lord, Thériault, Lambert, Medeiros, 2021; Mills, Lawton & Sheard, 2019; Hayes, Parchman & Howard, 2011; Rema, Jihad, Taghreed & Rima, 2011). Therefore, this study chose to use this model as it is proven to measure public participation across fields of research and practices.

Figure 1.1 shows the theoretical framework in this study. All the important element such as conditions, input, output , outcome and impact as well as challenging factors in e-participation implementation will be evaluated from the local government an public perspectives.

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Research Framework

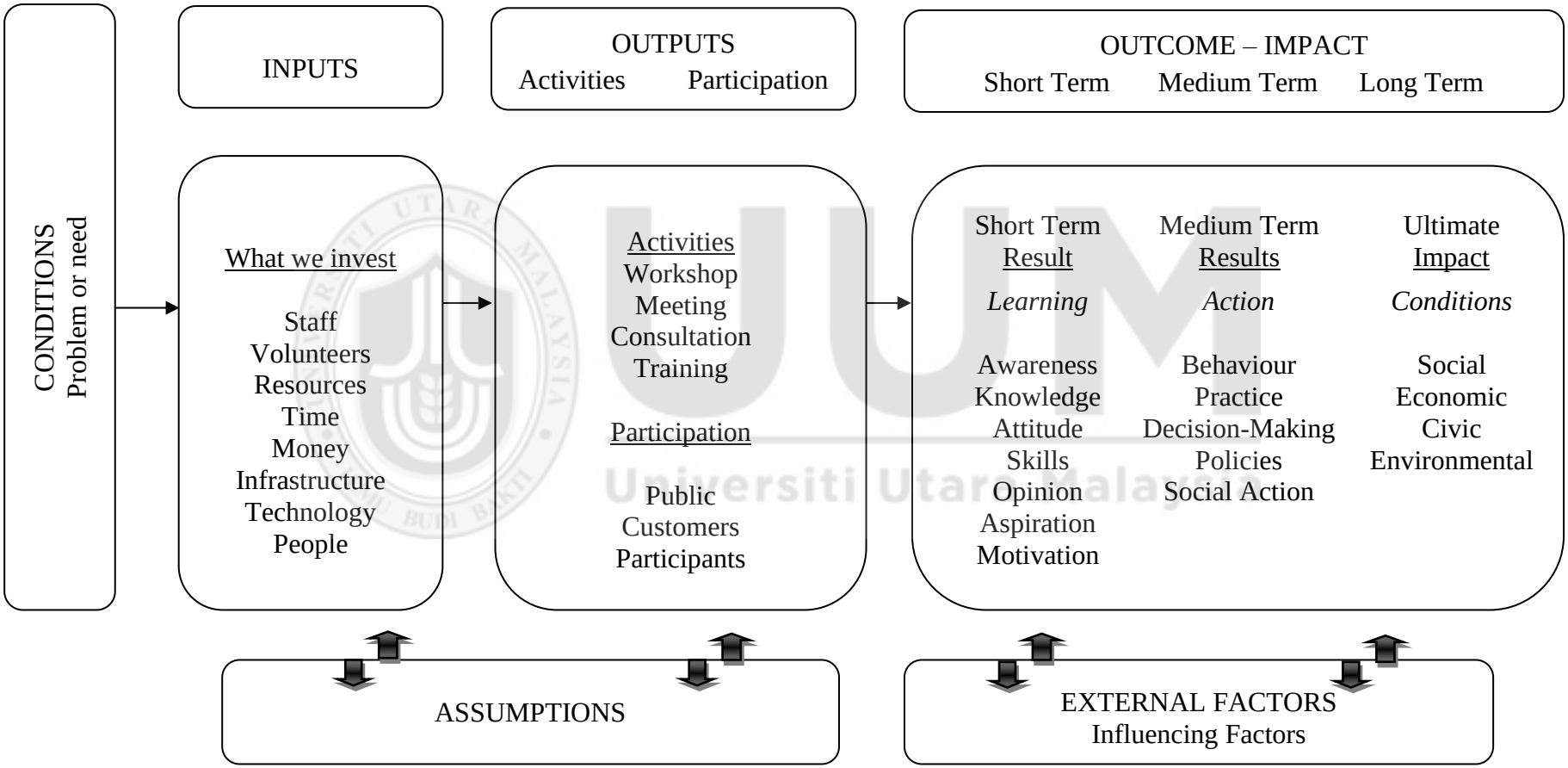

Figure 3.1 Research Theoretical Framework
Source: Taylor-Powell & Henert, 2008. University of Wisconsin-Extension.

3.3 Research Design

Research may be categorized into two different types: quantitative and qualitative research. In the past, attention is given to observation to express reality and attempt to describe people in a natural setting. In contrast, the quantitative approach grows out of a solid academic tradition that places considerable trust in numbers that represent opinions or concepts. Over the past 15 years, the quality of quantitative and qualitative methods has been debated. Various scholars have many arguments regarding each method's merits, strengths, and weaknesses in previous literature. However, there is no uniquely best to research (Amaratunga et al., 2002).

Some researchers favour the quantitative approach, which is objective and concentrates on measuring the phenomena. Therefore, the quantitative approach involves collecting and analysing numerical data and applying the statistical test. Meanwhile, other researchers prefer the qualitative approach, which is more subjective and involves examining and reflecting on perception to understanding social and human activities. Therefore, what is best is to understand the fundamental issues that pertain to the research typologies and know what is the most suitable to achieve the objectives (Amaratunga et al., 2002).

The methodological element of the study construct based on the specific philosophy or paradigm. Basically, the philosophers divide the study of philosophy of science into three aspects namely ontology, epistemology, and axiology. The ontology essentially talks about the nature of existence. Ontology tries to prove and study that science can be proven to be true. Further on, the epistemology in its discussion focuses on the importance of ways or methodology of the knowledge. So, when knowledge is

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highlighted through epistemology then the discussion is focused on how the sources used by scientists in developing science and what the methods are. Axiology basically talks about the value of science. The essence of axiology relates whether a science is worthy to be developed. In brief, the ontology speaks about its existence, epistemology speaks about its development, and axiology speaks of its value (Dewi, 2021),

Essentially, this research is placed within the constructivist paradigm. Constructivism as a scholarly method or approach to a problem is based on the assumption that reality and human behavior therein is characterised by continuous fluctuations, adjustments and transformations operating simultaneously at multiple sites and that they offer a subtle depiction of how facts emerge and truth are shaped (Van Der Walt, 2020). In other word, the constructivism believe that there's no single reality or truth, but rather multiple realities (Creswell, 2013).Constructivism assumes that the meaning of experiences and events are constructed by individuals, and therefore people construct the realities in which they participate (Charmaz, 2006).

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The implication is that, it is impossible to access social phenomena through objective, detached methods. Instead, the interaction mechanisms and relationships that create the social constructions have to be studied. Deductive approaches, hypothesis testing and quantitative methods are not relevant here. Hermeneutics, on the other hand, is highly relevant as it allows the analysis of the individual's interpretation (Takahashi & Araujo, 2020). Thus, the constructivism often address the processes of interaction among individuals in order to make sense or interpret the meaning other have about the world. This is why the qualitative research is often called interpretive research (Creswell, 2013).

The researcher believes that there would be multiple realities in the evaluation of e-participation implementation. Due to the complexity of the context, the researcher have to understand the truth through interaction with other to carefully interpret the meaning. As a result, in evaluating the e-participation implementation, the qualitative case study situated within a constructivist paradigm that uses constructivist data analysis approaches is the most appropriate. As Eisenhardt (1989) contends that a case study can be used to give a description, test, or produce a theory, with the latter being the most significant in terms of advancing knowledge in a particular field. Therefore, for the sustainability of the people and the nation, e-participation implementation is worthwhile to be evaluated in the contemporary digital environment. Perhaps the underlying paradigm of this study could contribute to a valuable findings. Details of the methodological approach of this study are further elaborated in the following sections.

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3.3.1 Qualitative Approach

Both quantitative and qualitative methods have the qualities that suit the research needs. However, in this research, the qualitative method is the most appropriate approach since this method helps to have a rich understanding of the issues. According to Njie and Asimiran (2014) research often employs the qualitative approach on purpose. It serves the specific purpose of explaining a difficult or poorly understood phenomenon. In the meantime, Leedy and Ormrod (2005) emphasises that the qualitative research is certainly not the route to choose if the researchers are expecting for quick results and easy answers. This is because, it requires passion and the will to go deeply into a subject or process in order to fully comprehend it. This frequently requires more time and investigation through observation, interviews and additional

follow-up sessions. Therefore, qualitative research is worthwhile the effort and substantial amount of time needed to do it to work loose complex phenomenon with rich details that cannot be gathered in research methods that rely on numbers and absolutes. It reflects the other aspect of mind that is deeply embedded and difficult to capture through scales and averages, the underlying significance discovered through the method of probing questions.

In addition, Mason (2002) intensely recapitulates that the qualitative research is purposely to explore a wide array of dimensions of the social world, including the nature and construct of daily life, the understandings, experiences and thoughts of the participants, how social structures, organisations, discourses or relationship function, and the importance of the meanings they produce. Creswell (2014) further declares that the qualitative research is conducted because the researcher needs a complex and detailed understanding of the issue. The only method of discovering this fact is to speak with the people directly and listen their stories. In addition to enabling people to tell their stories, qualitative research also reduces the power imbalance between the researcher and study participants by enabling them to hear their own voices.

In the same way, Bansal and Corley (2012) emphasis that the qualitative research has the capability to push the theoretical boundaries and generate theoretical insights. The process of theorising which involves creating compelling interpretations of explanations based on data, enables the researcher to maintain the ability to frame understanding and interpretation for others, is further explained by Cornelissen and Durand (2014) and Welch, Piekkari, Plakoyiannaki, and Paavilainen-Mäntymäki (2011). In the meantime, Ashworth, McDermott and Currie (2019) convinces that

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effective theorising in qualitative research provide different, but sufficient, combinations of rigour and richness. Given that quantitative approaches place a strong emphasis on objectivity and measurement, the qualitative method is the best strategy for doing this study. Additionally, by utilising the logic model, this approach aides the researcher in exploring, comprehending and discovering insightful explanations that serve to clarify the interpretation in a rich and meaningful manner.

3.3.2 Case Study Approach

Particularly, this study applied the qualitative case study approach. According to Njie and Asimiran (2014) the nature of qualitative studies requires a direction, which is mostly determined by the particular goal and study design used in order to provide a conclusion. One such direction that is driven by the need to delve deeply into a particular unit, person, programme, or organisation in order to gain a broader knowledge that would not have been feasible through other means is the case study. Meses defined a case study, in accordance with Starman (2013) as a description and analysis of an individual matter or case, with the purpose to identify variables, structures, forms and orders of interaction between the participants in the situation for the theoretical purpose, or, in order to assess the performance of work or progress in development for the practical purpose. Case study could serve both of these purposes at the same time. Besides, Simons (2009) described a case study as an in-depth exploration from numerous perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, program or system in a real life.

The case study allows the researcher to explore individuals or organizations, simple through complex interventions, relationships, communities, or programs (Yin, 2009),

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The case study is more than simply conducting research on a single individual or situation. This approach has the potential to deal with simple through complex situations. It enables the researcher to answer “how” and “why” type questions, while taking into consideration how a phenomenon is influenced by the context within which it is situated. For the inexperience researcher, a case study is an excellent opportunity to gain tremendous insight into a case. It enables the researcher facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources. This ensures that the issue is not explored through one lens, but rather a variety of lenses which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood (Baxter & Jack (2008).

George and Bennett (2005) have identified four advantages of case studies. First, case studies have a great potential for conceptual validity. Conceptual validity is the process of identifying and measuring the indicators that most accurately reflect the theoretical concepts that a researcher intends to measure. Many of the factors that social scientists are interested in, like democracy, power, and others, are challenging to quantify. Therefore, the researcher must perform a contextualised comparison, which automatically looks for analytically identical events even if they are expressed in different terminology and contexts. This requires a thorough analysis of contextual elements, which is exceptionally challenging in quantitative research but relatively typical in case studies.

Second, case studies are a powerful method for encouraging new hypotheses. Case studies are excellent for achieving the heuristic goal of inductively identifying new hypotheses and additional variables. There are no inductive methods for developing

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new hypotheses in quantitative studies. Furthermore, because they don't require a large number of examples or a specific set of variables, case studies can analyse qualitatively complicated occurrences and take into account many variables precisely. The use of pre-existing, well-defined datasets and easily quantifiable variables is not a requirement for case study researchers. Quantitative research can be used to spot outliers that can inspire new theories, but it doesn't have a good way of figuring out new theories on its own. It is impossible to discover inductive methods of analysis without extra investigation, such as open-ended interviews (George & Bennett, 2005).

Third, case studies are valuable for closely examining the hypothesised role of causal mechanisms in specific circumstances in detail. While quantitative studies, in their correlations, lack such causality, qualitative studies examine a large number of intervening variables within a single case and inductively observe any unexpected aspect of the operation of a particular causal mechanism or assist in determining what circumstances are present in a case that activate the causal mechanism. One must keep in mind, though, that it is not totally accurate to say that causation is absent from quantitative study. We are referring to the difficulty of quantitative research to incorporate contextual aspects other than those that are codified within the variables being measured; in this case, numerous more variables that may also be contextually important are missed (George & Bennett, 2005).

Fourth, case study have the capacity for addressing complex causal relations, such as equifinality, complex interaction effects and path dependency. This advantage is relative rather than absolute. Case studies can allow for equifinality by producing generalisations that are narrower and more contextual. Despite this advantage, others

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who prefer quantitative methods appreciate theories that are more general even if this means that they are more vague and more vulnerable to counterarguments (George & Bennett, 2005). In addition, there are several further benefits of using case studies. Researchers benefit from case studies' relevance to daily life and their availability of specific components and features from two perspectives. First, a case study is crucial for forming various worldviews, such as the understanding that human behaviour cannot be simply defined as an act motivated by a rule or a theory. Second, case studies can help a researcher develop professionally by giving them practical, context-dependent experience that improves their research abilities (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

Therefore, considering these qualities and attributes, the case study is the most appropriate approach for this study. Case study approach would contribute to holistic examination on e-participation implementation through the perspectives of both local authorities and public, for a more generic understanding. Above and beyond, although the grounded theory approach also contribute to have an in-depth understanding of the circumstances, however as Creswell (2013) underlines on the characteristic of the study, the grounded theory focused on developing a theory grounded in data from the field. Additionally, compare to the case study which using multiple source, the grounded theory primarily using the interview in the data collection. On the other hand, the grounded theory employed a rigorous distinct phases of data analysis strategies include open coding, axial coding and selective coding which in practice, this constant comparison process is overlap and merge because the theory development process proceeds iteratively (Mfinanga, Mrosso & Bishibura, 2019).

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3.4 Research Population and Sample

Generally, Malaysia is divided into two regions, namely Peninsular Malaysia and East Malaysia, comprising 13 states and three federal territories. There are 11 states and two federal territories on Peninsular Malaysia, and the other two states and one federal territory in East Malaysia. Peninsular Malaysia covers four central regions: Northern Region, which consists of Kedah, Perlis, Pulau Pinang and Perak; East Coast Region, which consist of Kelantan, Terengganu and Pahang; Central Region, which consist of Selangor, Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur and Federal Territory of Putrajaya; and Southern Region which consist of Negeri Sembilan, Melaka and Johor. In the meantime, East Malaysia includes Sabah, Sarawak and Wilayah Persekutuan Labuan (Tourism Malaysia, 2014).

The Malaysian government's administrative structure is divided into three levels: federal, state and district or well known as local government. Each of these levels of government has its vital functions and responsibilities within the jurisdiction (Government of Malaysia, 2004). According to the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, the local government is categorized into three levels of hierarchy: city hall and council for city centres, municipal council for larger towns, and district council for small urban towns. Currently, there are 151 local governments which consist of 1 city hall, 18 city councils, 40 municipal councils and 92 district councils, of which 99 of them are located in Peninsular Malaysia, 26 located in Sabah and another 26 in Sarawak (Rashidah, Mazuri & Ahmad Munir, 2013).

The local government in Peninsular Malaysia follows the Local Government Act 1976, while in East Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak follow their own respective Local

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Government Ordinances. Although local government is the lowest rank after Federal and State governments, it has been acknowledged as one of the most important agencies to drive the economic growth and social development of a particular district and its residents as they serve as a manager of urban environments (Rashidah, Mazuri & Ahmad Munir, 2013). The fact that local government is the one closest to the community and its unique position to identify community needs and make sure that those needs are met most appropriately has proven why these lowest levels of government are becoming very significant in shaping people's day-to-day lives. Because the local government's role and public participation are taking place at this stage, the local government would be the primary unit of analysis in this study.

The detailed information on the local government distribution in Peninsular Malaysia is provided in Table 3.1 and 3.2.

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Table 3.1
Local Government Distribution in Peninsular Malaysia

States	**City Hall/ Council**	**Municipal Council**	**District Council**	**Total**
Johor	3	7	6	16
Kedah	1	4	6	11
Kelantan	0	1	11	12
Melaka	1	3	0	4
Negeri Sembilan	1	2	4	7
Pahang	1	2	8	11
Pulau Pinang	2	0	0	2
Perak	1	4	10	15
Perlis	0	1	0	1
Selangor	3	8	1	12
Terengganu	1	2	4	7
Wilayah Persekutuan	1	0	0	1
Total	15	34	50	99

Source: Local Government Department, 2021.

Table 3.2
Local Government Distribution in Peninsular Malaysia

States	**City Hall/ Council**	**Municipal Council**	**District Council**
Johor	Johor Bharu Iskandar Puteri Pasir Gudang	Batu Pahat Kluang Kulai Muar Pontian Segamat Pengerang	Kota Tinggi Labis Mersing Simpang Renggam Tangkak Yong Peng
Kelantan	-	Kota Bharu	Bachok Gua Musang Ketereh Dabong Kuala Krai Machang Pasir Mas Pasir Puteh Tanah Merah Tumpat Jeli
Kedah	Alor Setar	Kulim Sungai Petani Langkawi Kubang Pasu	Baling Bandar Baharu Padang Terap Pendang Sik Yan
Melaka	Melaka	Alor Gajah Jasin Hang Tuah Jaya	-
Negeri Sembilan	Seremban	Port Dickson	Jempol Jelebu Kuala Pilah Rembau Tampin

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States	City Hall/ Council	Municipal Council	District Council
Pahang	Kuantan	Temerloh Bentong	Cameron Highlands Jerantut Lipis Maran Pekan Raub Rompin Bera
Perak	Ipoh	Manjung Kuala Kangsar Taiping Teluk Intan	Kampar Gerik Kerian Batu Gajah Lenggong Pengkalan Hulu Perak Tengah Selama Tanjung Malim Tapah
Pulau Pinang	Pulau Pinang Seberang Prai	-	-
Perlis	-	Kangar	-
Selangor	Shah Alam Petaling Jaya Subang Jaya	Ampang Jaya Kajang Klang Selayang Sepang Hulu Selangor Kuala Langat Kuala Selangor	Sabak Bernam
Terengganu	Kuala Terengganu	Kemaman Dungun	Besut Hulu Terengganu Marang Setiu
Wilayah Persekutuan	Kuala Lumpur	-	-

Source: Local Government Department, 2021.

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3.5 Case Study: Alor Setar City Council

Alor Setar City Council (MBAS) is the main focus of the research area in this study. Therefore, this sub-topic provided a brief background of Alor Setar as the capital city of Kedah and other information, including history, mission, vision, organisational chart, and achievement of the Alor Setar City Council.

3.5.1 Background of Alor Setar

Alor Setar or Alor Star in 2004-2008, is the capital city of Kedah. Alor Setar is the biggest city in Kedah and the most important city on the West Coast of Peninsular Malaysia. This city locates in the royal town of Anak Bukit and the Muadzam Shah City, which serves as the administrative centre of the Kota Setar District. Alor Setar is located 93 kilometres from the north Butterworth, Pulau Pinang and 45 kilometres from the south border of Thailand. The administration of the city of Alor Setar is placed under the responsibility of MBAS as the Local Government Authority (PBT). As the hub of transportation in the north of Peninsular Malaysia, the Alor Setar area that covered the land of 666km square feet. As one of the oldest cities in the area, Alor Setar also known as the most important city in Kedah besides another main town such as Sungai Petani, Kulim and Langkawi. The development of these leading cities aligns with the Alor Setar development (Alor Setar City Council, 2019). Currently, the population of Alor Setar estimated around 417,800 in 2020 (Department of Statistic Malaysia, 2020).

3.5.2 History of Alor Setar City Council

Previously, MBAS was known as a Sanitary Board. In 1958, the Alor Star City administration changed it into the Alor Star Municipal Board from the Sanitary Board.

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On 1 March 1974, it was upgraded to the Local Government District Council and once again, it was upgraded to the Kota Setar Municipal Council on 1 February 1978. Eventually, it was declared as the Alor Star Municipal Council on 28 December 2003. Nearing the Alor Star beginning as a city in December 2003, it completes its age of 268 years since it was established on 31 December 1735. With this, it is proved that Alor Star City is one of the oldest cities in this region (Alor Setar City Council, 2019).

3.5.3 Mission and Vision

The mission of MBAS is "Driving the excellence of a well-established Alor Setar City Council based on organizational quality, innovative, responsive and committed to sustainable development to achieve Liveable Municipality 2035". MBAS is committed to delivering the best services to its customers and stakeholders, particularly within Alor Setar City jurisdiction. The delivery of its services is continuously improved from time to time and integrated with the latest modern technology based on the council's financial capability. Meanwhile, the vision of MBAS is "To transform Alor Setar City as Liveable City." The MBAS is always committed to improving its residents' quality of life concerning the infrastructure, trade facilities, conducive housing estates environment, and public amenities (Alor Setar City Council, 2019).

Among the efforts is increasing the number of business premises to improve the state economy's standard. One of the ways used by MBAS to increase their source of income is by simplifying the process of issuing business licenses. In the meantime, continuous monitoring efforts are conducted to ensure garbage is collected according to the schedule and conduct communal work (gotong-royong) at every area to ensure a more comfortable and peaceful life. In addition, the collaboration with the enforcement

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agencies such as the Police, National Narcotics Agency, Maritime, Immigration, Custom, Islamic Religious Council and others are intended to reduce the crime index, misdemeanours and social problems. These efforts by MBAS will enhance the quality of life for the people (Alor Setar City Council, 2019).

Looking back at these mission and vision, it shows that the Alor Setar City Council striving towards upholding people's quality of life and well-being. Therefore, the Alor Setar City Council had preparing towards that direction by improving the quality of services and facilities to the people in various aspects. However, in delivering this mission and vision, public participation is the best remedy. Through the encouragement of public participation, the Alor Setar City Council could be being highly responsive towards the people needs. Consequently, it could contribute to shape the Alor Setar City Council as a strong organisation in creating a healthy, prosperous and liveable city for a strong and develop society.

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3.5.4 Administration and Management of Alor Setar City Council

The administration and management of MBAS consist of 24 elected council members from various agencies, who include the mayor as the head of the council, followed by the council secretary and the deputy secretary as the chief administrator in the council. Overall, there are nine main departments in MBAS, including Corporate Planning and Strategic Department, Management Service Department, Treasury Department, Assessment and Property Management Department, Development Planning Department, Engineering Department, Community Development Department, Environmental Health Department and Building Control Department. Each of these departments that led by a director (Alor Setar City Council, 2019).

In the meantime, there are six other subsections and units led by a responsible officer, which include Law Section, Internal Audit Section, OSC Section, Procurement and Contract Section, UTC Section and Enforcement Section. These units were established accordingly within the specific roles and functions to coordinate, facilitate and expedite the process and services (Alor Setar City Council, 2019). The detailed structure of the administration and management of the Alor Setar City Council could be referred to in the council organisational chart as attached (Appendix A).

Regarding the e-participation platform, besides e-services platforms commonly provided such as e-Form, e-Payment, e-Check, and OSC Plus Online, the MBAS also provided the people with the basic e-participation platform, specifically the online complaints. However, aligned with the advancement of the current technology, the MBAS has upgraded the online complaints system to a more sophisticated system called i-Sedar. In the meantime, the complaint channels have been expanded through social media such as WhatsApp, Facebook, WeChat, Line, and other applications (Alor Setar City Council, 2019). Overall, other leading countries might have many advanced platforms. Still, the MBAS had made an excellent effort to make these available platforms up to date to the latest technology and the public preferences.

Ultimately, the entire administration and management of the Alor Setar City Council significantly related to the community participation or e-participation. This is due to the fact, the viability of both community participation and e-participation depends on each individual in the council. Moreover, all of the management and administration are the central figure that represents the local government in serving the people. Therefore, either they directly or indirectly involve in managing the community

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participation or e-participation, it is essential for all local authorities to have the knowledge in this matter. This will allow them to provide the best possible services to the public while also ensuring a successful implementation.

3.5.5 Achievement and Award

In making the MBAS one of the best local authorities, various successes and achievements were achieved locally and globally. For example, MBAS had received 5S Certification and five starts in the financial management aspect. Latest, the MBAS had received the Golden Europe Award for Quality and Commercial in 2019 (Alor Setar City Council, 2019). The MBAS was the only local authority that received this award (Berita RTM, 2019). In the meantime, formerly the MBAS also had received the European Award for Best Practices by the European Society for Quality Research (ESDR) in 2014. Additionally, for two years in a row, in 2013 and 2014, MBAS received the 5S Certificate by Malaysia Productivity Corporation (MPC) to fulfil the standard requirement of the quality environmental management system. Besides, the MBAS website was rated at five stars and recognised as one of the best websites in Malaysia due to its easily accessed and user-friendly features by Malaysian Government Portals and Website Assessment (MGPWA) (Mohd Asri, 2014).

In addition, MBAS was awarded the Information Security Management System MS ISO/IEC/27001:2007 (ISMS) Certificate by the international assessment body, SIRIM QAS International and The International Certification Network (IQNET) in 2013 for the best quality of information technology security system. Last but not least, the council also has been recognised for The Best Municipality and The Best Municipal Manager due to the effective management of the city, its constants growth, and its

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attractiveness to the tourists. This recognition was awarded by the Europe Business Assembly, based in England (Mohd Asri, 2014). Therefore, all these accomplishments had proved that the MBAS was committed to improving its quality of services toward making Alor Setar a better city.

3.6 Research Sample

Creswell (2014) states that purposeful sampling is commonly used in qualitative research. He further explains that the sample selected for the study can purposefully inform an understanding of the study's research problem and central phenomenon. Purposeful sampling emphases on selecting information-rich cases whose will help enlighten the research issue (Patton, 2002). Purposive sampling is used when researchers wish to target certain individuals with characteristics of interest in the study. Although the sample is not likely to be representative of the population, those included in the study can provide a great deal of information on the topic of the specific research question (Lohr, 2009). In other method of non-probability sampling, the snowball sampling strategy often useful for hard to reach population. In this method, the existing participants will recruit future participants from the others they know (Berndt, 2020; Turner, 2020). Thus, as more people are introduced, more data are collected (Turner, 2020).

In the meantime, in the quota sampling, the population is divided into mutually exclusive subgroups. Then, individuals are selected from each subgroup in proportions that reflect the target population (Turner, 2020). In other word, the sampling strategy based on identifying strata with shared or unique characteristics of the population and selecting persons proportionate to the population (Berndt, 2020). Overall, compared

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these method, the purposeful sampling is more appropriate since this study had targeted the Alor Setar citizen as an appropriate sample in responding the e-participation evaluation in Alor Setar City Council. Therefore, the sample of the study is not rare and easy to be reach. Additionally, this study does not have the intention to evaluate the e-participation effectiveness based on the comparison between different group with certain characteristic of the sample base the quotas, such as either participative of non-participative group of citizen or according to gender, age, education and race.

In data collection process, the question of sample size is just as essential as the sampling procedure (Creswell, 2014). Various academics debate the optimal sample size for qualitative research. According to Sim, Saunders, Waterfield, and Kingstone (2018), rules in the same methodological domain tend to be similar in some circumstances but also tend to diverge considerably in others. Morse (2000) believes that to avoid losing data richness, the sample size for semi-structured interviews should involve a large number of participant, at least between thirty and sixty.

Meanwhile, Mason (2010) claims that when the sample is homogeneous, six to eight interviews are sufficient. The sample size for in-depth interviews ranges from eight to 10 interviews. Mason further indicates that the ideal sample size in qualitative research is between twelve and twenty-six people. Mason also goes over domain-specific sample size recommendations, which have been mentioned by previous researchers in the context of qualitative research. For ethnography study, thirty to fifty interviews are seen to be sufficient, twenty to thirty for grounded theory technique, and six data

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sources for phenomenological research. Mason also mentions for all qualitative research, the least allowable sample size is fifteen.

Additionally, Marshall, Cardon, Poddar & Fontenot (2013) believe that any size between twenty to thirty sources would suffice for grounded theory research. For phenomenological studies sample size between six and ten would be adequate and finally for case studies, any sample size between four to six data sources would be ideal. Similarly, Creswell (2014) suggests that case study research should be no more than 4 or 5 case studies in a single study. This size provides ample opportunity to identify theme of the cases and as well as conduct cross-case theme analysis.

Therefore, through the purposeful sampling, the sample size of 24 informants which involving 14 public citizen and 10 local authorities at the Alor Setar City Council is appropriate for this study. On the whole, the researcher however intrigues by Patton (2002). Patton posits that, there are never-ending question on the sample size in qualitative research such as "Will 10 samples be adequate to capture the most variation?" and "Do I need to find 2 more, or will 18 be sufficient?". Patton, however, invariably responds, "It depends," since there are no guidelines for sample size in qualitative research. This is because, sample size is determined by what you want to know, why you want to learn it, what will be useful, what will have credibility and what can be accomplished in the time and budget that are available (Patton, 2002).

Both breadth and depth have trade-off. With the limited time and resources, researchers could seek the breadth by focusing on a specific set of experiences for a larger number of people. Meanwhile, in seeking the depth, a smaller group of people

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will have access to a wider range of experiences. Particularly if the cases are information-rich, detailed information from a small group of people can be very beneficial. When examining a phenomenon and attempting to document diversity or comprehend variation, less in-depth observations from a bigger group of people van be extremely beneficial (Patton, 2002). Conceivably, these 24 informants is sufficient to gather the data needed for this study, which aims to provide an in-depth perspective and understanding on the subject matter.

On the other hand, according to Morse (1991) it is not a simple nor rigid subject on how we address the individual who assist us in our research inquiry because there is definitely room for personal preferences. However, because these terms defined a specific and distinctive relationship with the researcher, they should be discussed and carefully chosen. Morse specifies that subjects is a very passive term that is more frequently found in actual science. It is typically utilised in experimental or quasi-experimental designs where participants in the study function as integral parts or as intervention targets. Meanwhile, the term respondents is frequently used in sociology to refer to survey participants who respond to structured or semi-structured questionnaires. Usually, the respondents provide the researcher with only the information requested, neither more nor less (Morse, 1991).

Informants, on the other hand, which comes from the anthropology refer that the researcher need to be informed about the setting, cultural norms and so on. As culture is a complex phenomenon and need to be interpreted for the inexperienced, therefore the key informant is selected as the primary link between the anthropologist and the cultural group being studied. While participants, a phrase which frequently used in

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qualitative research, represents the most active roles of the subjects of the study. The participant and the researcher may have an equal or unequal connection depending on who has control over the situation, the participant or the researcher (Morse, 1991). However, Morse further emphasises that there are argument regarding the usage of these term according to the field of study. Therefore, either subject, respondents, informants or participants, the researcher should carefully choose the term that best describes the study.

Overall, as the term respondents commonly used in the quantitative study, therefore the term informants much fit for this study. Bygstad and Munkvold (2011) mentions that most of the important textbooks on the qualitative research advise to include feedback from the informants as part of the research strategy. The role of informants' feedback is a recommended practice in the social science study. Particularly in a case study, the informant play the role of a shareholder who offers qualified knowledge or opinion as well as a chance for shared reflection and learning on the phenomena. The preferred and prospective roles of informants in the case study analysis have been the subject of numerous perspectives in earlier qualitative social science research. These perspectives range from validating the actual data, using informant feedback as a source to prove the researcher's understanding of the case, to considering informants as prospective co-researchers (Bygstad & Munkvold, 2011).

The informant from the local authorities includes both upper and lower level of management, either directly or indirectly involved in the implementation of e-participation. The mayor is also involved in the interview even though the Head of Department (HOD) is more directly involved in managing the e-participation

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programme in the local council. As the mayor holds the highest position in the council, the success or failure of every programme implemented in the council would be under his responsibility. The Government Secretary also is responsible for coordinating the ICT initiative at the local council under his jurisdiction. Besides, other staff from various departments at the local council also would be involved. Therefore, the sample from the local authority was selected based on purposeful sampling.

In the meantime, the sample from the public was selected based on purposeful random sampling because the potential purposeful sample is too large. Though, the maximum variation sampling, also called as heterogeneous purposive sampling, is also used in conjunction by the researcher. Patton (2002) underlines that the maximum variation sampling is one of fifteen different sampling strategies in the purposeful sampling. This sampling attempts to identify and describe a unifying theme that spans a wide range of diversity. Any pattern that emerges from a considerable deal of variety is particularly valuable and interesting for encapsulating the essential experience and shared aspect of a situation or phenomena. Consequently, using a small sample that is highly diverse, data analysis will produce two types of significant findings for qualitative research: (1) a thorough, in-depth explanation of each instance, which is helpful in demonstrating its individuality; and (2) significant insights that are common to all cases and gained their importance as a result of heterogeneity (Patton, 2002).

Apparently, there is a necessary need to incorporate this sampling, as the researcher would select diverse range of cases to provide as much relevant insight as possible to the evaluation of e-participation. As a result, in selecting the public informants, the researcher would makes sure to gather as many different kinds of people as possible

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to develop a solid public's perspective on the topic. Additionally, the best suitable candidates is important in every study. As Sharat, Satish, Govindaraj and Prabhu (2020) emphasises, other than defending on the sample size, it is equally crucial for the researcher to thoroughly evaluate why a specific group of people was the best candidates for the study. Therefore, the process of choosing the public informants in this study is not restricted on specific traits.

The informants were selected at random with the intention of representing a diverse variety of backgrounds, including gender, race and ethnicity, geographical, level of education, occupation, and income. Due to the fact that e-participation is open to everyone, whether they are male or female, young or old, living in urban or rural areas, having a high or low level of education, earning a high or low income, or working or not, every person has the potential to be an informant and share their perspectives. Because of this, every public informant that was selected is appropriate for this study, which aims to include a variety of demographics among the informants. The informants may have or may not have had prior experience participating electronically in local government. The researcher had one restriction, though, the chosen informants had to be young adults who were at least 18 years old or older because they might be mature enough to have an opinion. Table 3.3 displays the detailed distribution between these two different groups of informants.

Overall, this study believe that the quality of finding could be gathered as the selected local authorities and public informants through the purposive sampling appropriate with the aim and objective of this study. As specified by Campbell, Greenwood, Prior, Shearer, Walkem, Young, Bywaters and Walker (2020), the purposive sampling

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allows for greater alignment of the sample with the aims and objectives of the study which contribute in enhancing the validity of the data and the reliability of the findings In a similar vein, Tongco (2007) underlines that purposive sampling is a practical and efficient tool when used properly, and can be just as effective as, and even more efficient than, random sampling. Tongco further indicates on the reliability of the informants by pointing out that the reliable informants may not necessarily be competent. Reliability refers to how honest and truthful the informant is, while competency involves how qualified the person for providing answers.

On the other hand, Seidler (1974) accentuates that the reliability of informants tends to be higher for objective data than subjective data. Poggie (1972) in his study proved that, the informants approximated survey results when the questions concerned facts or openly observed phenomena. However, the more private and personal a question was, or the more the answers were based on opinions, the informants were less accurate in approximating survey results. Thus, the manner of interviewing, conditions during the interview and how comfortable the informant is with the researcher may also affect reliability (Alexiades,1996; Bernard, Pelto, Werner, Boster, Romney, Johnson, Ember & Kasakoff, 1986). In essence, this study holds that the reliability of the chosen informants and the method of interviewing, along with truthful and honest responses, contribute to the quality of findings of this study.

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Table 3.3
The Distribution between Different Groups of Informants

Informant: Local Authorities	**Gender**	**Age**	**Length of Service**
Mayor	M	63	7 years
Council Secretary	M	57	3 years
Director (Management Service Department)	M	43	6 years
Director (Development Planning Department – GIS Unit)	M	56	30 years
HOD (Information Technology Department – IT)	M	56	21 years
HOD (Town Service & Disease Control/ Health Promotion Department)	M	46	13 years
Officer (Tourism, Sport and Community Unit – Corporate Planning Department & Community)	M	37	7 years
Officer (Planning & Corporate Communication Unit – Corporate Planning Department & Community)	F	50	26 years
Officer (Finance Department)	F	51	20 years
Officer (Enforcement Unit)	M	39	10 years
Total Informants	**10**		

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Table 3.3
The Distribution between Different Groups of Informants

Informant: Public	**Gender**	**Ethnicity**	**Location**	**Age**	**Education**	**Occupation**	**Income**
Informant 1	Female	Malay	Urban	20	Certificate/Diploma	Student	-
Informant 2	Male	Malay	Rural	36	Certificate/Diploma	Student	-
Informant 3	Female	Malay	Rural	30	PhD	Student	-
Informant 4	Male	Chinese	Urban	39	Bachelor's Degree	Professional/Management/Corporate	RM3001-4000
Informant 5	Female	Malay	Urban	39	Bachelor's Degree	Professional/Management/Corporate	RM6001 & above
Informant 6	Male	Malay	Urban	65	Secondary School	Retiree	RM2001-3000
Informant 7	Female	Malay	Urban	54	Bachelor's Degree	Professional/Management/Corporate	RM6001 & above
Informant 8	Female	Malay	Urban	33	Bachelor's Degree	Student	RM1000-2000
Informant 9	Male	Malay	Urban	46	Certificate/Diploma	Self-employed	RM3001-4000
Informant 10	Female	India	Urban	26	Bachelor's Degree	Student	-
Informant 11	Female	Malay	Urban	30	Bachelor's Degree	Professional/Management/Corporate	RM2001-3000
Informant 12	Male	Malay	Urban	47	Certificate/Diploma	Executive/Administration/Clerical	RM2001-3000
Informant 13	Female	Malay	Rural	34	Master's Degree	Professional/Management/Corporate	RM6001 & above
Informant 14	Female	Malay	Urban	33	Master's Degree	Student	RM1000-2000

3.7 Unit of Analysis

In this research, the researcher attempts to study the evaluation of e-participation in the local government of Malaysia. However, it is impossible to study all the local government. Therefore, the Alor Setar City Council is chosen as the case study for this research. The target population would be involved in e-participation implementation at the Alor Setar City Council. Therefore, there are two different groups of informants: the public as the main client to the local government that directly involve and receive the services from the local government; and the local government authorities from both higher and lower level of management who serve the public and responsible in managing the e-participation initiatives.

The Alor Setar City Council has been chosen as a unit of analysis in this study because most of the local government in Malaysia has an e-PBT system under the e-government initiative. e-PBT system or electronic local authority computerized system is one of the government initiatives implemented purposely to serve the public with a convenient, easy, fast, effective and efficient service delivery. Overall, it involves five main systems and 21 subsystems. One of them is the e-complaints system that has been attention in this research. The e-PBT system started on 1 June 2004, and the *Projek Rintis* was successfully implemented in August 2007 at two states, namely Perak and Negeri Sembilan. Therefore, there are three local councils in both states that have chosen to be involved in this project which include Manjung Municipal Council, Kuala Kangsar Municipal Council and Kampar District Council at Perak and Port Dickson Municipal Council, Nilai Municipal Council, and Jelebu District Council at Negeri Sembilan (MAMPU, 2013).

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Due to the success of this project, the e-PBT system has been continued to be implemented started on 11 October 2007 to other remaining local governments, which involve ten (10) local governments at Perak, four (4) at Negeri Sembilan, five (5) at Terengganu, two (2) at Melaka, one (1) at Selangor and Perlis. As a result, the e-PBT system started to be fully utilized at all 23 local governments on 31 March 2010. Meanwhile, for the other 32 local governments, the e-PBT system was implemented on 7 July 2010, involving only nine (9) local governments at Kedah and all the local governments at Pahang and Kelantan (MAMPU, 2013).

The government initiative had shown from the online services provided at every local government for the public. There are various mediums are provided to the public, either traditionally or through the ICT. As the local government web was observed, the online statistic had shown that online complaints had been received in every local government. The difference is only the number of complaints received between the local governments. Therefore, the online method of participation that is provided has been used by the public. However, it cannot be concluded that the e-participation approach is successful. Besides, there is a lack of empirical research on e-participation, especially in our local government. Thus, the researcher believes measuring within our local context is important.

The Alor Setar City Council was selected as the analytical unit in this study due to the comparability in the nature, structure and functioning of the local governments in Malaysia. In the meantime, according to the star rating system (SSR-PBT) indicator, out of 101 local authorities, the Alor Setar City Council with other 64 other local authorities had successfully ranked 5 star in 2018 (KPKT, 2022). SSR-PBT is intended

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to improve citizen services by enhancing the delivery of government services. This system aim to rank local authorities appropriately based on their performance in order to assess their competitiveness and preserve the level of efficiency and effectiveness of high-performing local authorities. (Pawi, Martin, D., Wan Yusof & Fazira, 2012).

Additionally, using the data envelopment analysis (DEA), Suhaiza, Julia and Husniyati (2020) measured on the efficiency of local government in term of technical efficiency (TE), pure technical efficiency (PTE) and scale efficiency (SE) revealed that, among 35 local government, the Alor Setar City Council had efficiently utilising the input or resources to provide the facilities and services to the public. Technical efficiency (TE) specifically refers to all aspects of local government efficiency. While pure technical efficiency (PTE) and scale efficiency (SE), respectively, refer to how well local government uses input and operates at the best scale. In term of TE and SE, the Alor Setar City Council had scored a constant efficiency trend with above 0.90 mean score for the period 2008-2015. Meanwhile, among 11 local authorities, the Alor Setar City Council recorded maximum PTE scores of 1.000 ini all 8 years.

Through this indicator, therefore, the researcher believes that the of Alor Setar City Council is would be a good starting point in measuring the e-participation evaluation as guidance to other local government. As the highest level of the local government, compared to the municipal and district councils, the Alor Setar City Council is more appropriate for the study. This study excluded these two lower level of local government which consider semi urban or rural area, due to the possibility that findings may be predicted.

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3.8 Research Instrument

Qualitative method is a source of well-grounded, rich descriptions and explanations of processes in the particular local context. It helps derive a valuable explanation in the study (Creswell, 2014). In this study, the data was collected through interviews. The researcher chooses the interview not because it is a widely used method in qualitative research. However, the interview helps to generate a meaningful perspective from the interviewee. It helps the researcher understand how and why they come to have that particular perspective (Amaratunga et al., 2002). In addition, the researcher believes that two-way communication between the researcher and the informants during the interview will contribute to an in-depth understanding of the current circumstances and the described phenomena.

The evaluation of the evaluation of e-participation implementation from the informants' experience will be conducted by semi-structured interviews with the local authority from different levels of management and the public within the Alor Setar City Council area from different backgrounds of sex, education, social class, and marital status. According to DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019), the semi-structured interview method has become a common qualitative analysis method. It has proved to have many advantages. The semi-structured interview has flexibility, convenience to focus on the important and detailed data collection about interviewees' attitudes and experiences, advantages over acquiring rich information within a reasonable time frame, and easiness for longitudinal research (Bryman, 2016).

The researcher believes that since the semi-structured interview is not as rigid to the pre-determined questions that have been constructed, the researcher can communicate

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and listen to the informant and open up the flexibility to raise other issues that the researcher may not cover. The questions in the semi-structured interview was construct by the researcher based on the theme and elements that relate to evaluating the e-participation within the theoretical research framework. Therefore, it involves the issues in implementing e-participation, whether it is a success or a failure, and the factors that contribute to it. Specifically, it also relates to various aspects that play an important role in the e-participation implementation, including input which refers to the resources such as staff, technology, infrastructure; output which refer to the activities and programme and the participant in that programme; an outcome which refers awareness, knowledge, and attitude of the participant; and other surrounding factors that may not know in affecting the programme.

However, this study also referred to few of the earlier studies mainly by Alonso (2009) and Beltrán (2015) as these study also evaluate the e-participation practice in the local government. Accordingly, the process of developing the interview questions involved the researcher referred to both key components of the theoretical framework and the compatible components of these prior studies simultaneously. As the questions had developed, the expert validity had been obtained. The data collection will be proceed as the expert are completed the validation and approved the draft of the interview questions expert.

The interview question was validated by an internal professor, who is renowned for his expertise in local government studies, community development planning, policy evaluation and development impact studies and urban politics, and urban and regional planning. His research works and writings revolve around community development in

the local government. In addition, he is one of the prominent author in public participation and had published his book title Introduction Public Participation in 1991. The researcher believe that the validation of the interview questions of this study is adequate due to his expertise and knowledge.

The process of developing the interview questions for this study is illustrates in Figure 3.2.

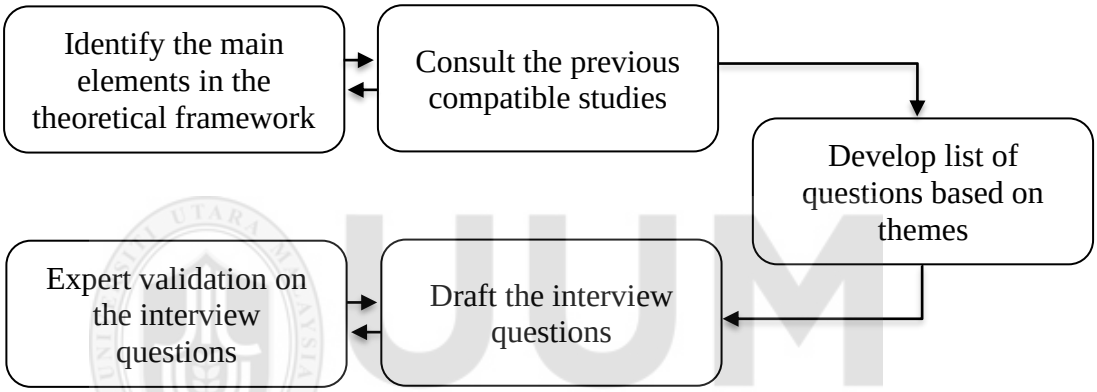

Figure 3.2 The Development of Interview Questions

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3.9 Validity and Reliability

In referring the term of validity in qualitative research, various literature substitute this term with trustworthiness (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006) or rigour (Golafshani, 2003). Rigour is essential in every research, or otherwise, it would be meaningless or, even worse, would merely be work of fiction (Morse, Barret, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). (Morse, Barret, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). The trustworthiness of a study is the central aspect of the issues that are conventionally called validity and reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In measuring the validity in qualitative research, Paiva, Leão and Mello (2011) proposed five criteria: (1) triangulation, (2) the construction of a

research corpus, (3) a clear, rich and detailed description of the research conducted, (4) element of surprise and (4) feedback of informants or known as communicative validity.

Triangulation may be the utmost well-known standard for qualitative researchers. Triangulation consists of the interrelationship between the information obtained from the data that was collected from different sources to increase the understanding of the research questions, thus improving the reliability of the results. According to Olson, McAllister, Grinnell, Walters and Appunn (2016), triangulation has been one of the most used methods to ensure validity in research. Fusch, Fusch and Ness (2017) indicates that the triangulation technique allows the researcher to explore several facets of the studied phenomenon. For Jick (1979), the triangulation help the researcher to achieve what is often called a dense description and a holistic work; or a convergent meaning as according to Bonoma (1985). In the meantime, Patton (1999) clarifies that triangulation makes it possible to compare and to cross-check data, thus assessing the consistency of the information coming from different sources at different times.

The second criteria is equivalent to the representative sample and sample size in quantitative surveys and can be used for both validity and reliability. To operationalise the construction of the research corpus to guarantee the quality and rigor of the study, there needs to be another criterion that is well known to qualitative researchers which called data saturation. Data saturation is demonstrated by the number of interviews that are conducted until there is no additional useful information due to saturation. As observed by Morse (2003) through the saturation process, the researcher has continued

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sampling and analysing data until no new data appear and all concepts in the theory are well-developed.

The third criterion, the clear, rich and detailed description which makes it possible to provide others with the context and a certain transferability of the situation. This criterion assists in contextualising and provide a thorough explanation of the phenomenon (Geertz, 1973; Paiva, Leão, & Mello 2011). In addition to supporting validity, this criterion also influences the reliability of the study, which means that other researchers may find results that are consistent with different attempts. Reliability contains a particular embedded notion of stability of the results found, which means that they will be repeatable over time (Golafshani, 2003). As pointed out by Grossoehme (2014), the essence of reliability for qualitative research lies with consistency.

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The fourth criteria that ensures the validity and reliability is the element of surprise. According to Hayashi, Abib and Hoppen (2019), it is always necessary to safeguard the innovative potential and changes brought about by the research field and the scientific findings. In order to achieve that, therefore the research and its process cannot be a sort of restriction. Paiva et al. (2011) also emphasises that, the element of surprise as the validity in qualitative research has an importance in tradition both regarding the discovery of inspirational evidence to new forms of thought on a specific theme, and the change in mentality already preserved around the phenomenon. However, Hayashi, Abib and Hoppen (2019) contends that all research cannot be expected to be innovative as the corroborative studies or supporting evidence also present their importance and prominent role in science. The final criteria is informants'

feedback or also known as confirmability. This criteria serves as a routine inspection that validates if the informant's intended message was captured in the data that collected and analysed, or if the phenomenon under study is accurately portrayed (Hayashi, Abib & Hoppen, 2019).

On the other hand, Waterman (2013) concisely indicate that validity in qualitative research means the appropriateness of the tools, processes and data. Whether the research question is valid for the desired outcome, the choice of methodology is appropriate for answering the research question, the design is valid for the methodology, the sampling and data analysis is appropriate, and finally the results and conclusions are valid for the sample and context. In assessing validity of qualitative research, the challenge can start from the ontology and epistemology of the issue being studied (Waterman, 2013). Thus, validity can take on different forms according to the research paradigm. As highlights by Ollaik and Ziller, constructivism or interpretivism emphasises on the research processes without neglecting the importance of the articulation of pertinent research questions and the sound interpretation of results (Takahashi & Araujo, 2020).

Based on the stated discussion, it is considered that this study fulfils the criteria for validity and reliability. Through triangulation, the main finding of this study had been appropriately supported by multiple and diverse sources through a comprehensive comparison and verification. Data saturation and consistency also had been achieved. Besides, operating under the constructivism paradigm, the close interaction between the researcher and the informants had contribute in reflect the thick description, valuable meaning and interpretation of the findings, as a result achieve the aim of the

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study. Although this study is not inventive in fulfil the element of surprise in the validity and reliability, its interesting findings, nevertheless, add the value to the existing study in the same field. With the sound methodology, process and instruments, perhaps this study could be considered as one of the good qualitative studies that benefits the inquisitive reader. As Leung (2015) accentuates that, any work of qualitative research, when read by the readers, is always a two-way interactive process, such that validity and quality has to be judged by the receiving end too and not by the researcher end alone.

3.10 Secondary Data

In the research, the primary data itself would not be adequate, and it must be supported with a wide range of data. Therefore, secondary data would be much necessary. The secondary data refers to the data that have been already collected by other earlier researchers and are readily available from other sources. Such data are cheaper and more quickly obtainable than the primary data. The secondary data also is so economical, saves efforts and expenses, and in the meantime, it is also time-saving. In addition, it helps to make primary data collection more specific since, with the help of secondary data, the researcher can make out the gaps and deficiencies and what additional information needs to be collected. It also helps to improve the understanding of the problem, and it provides a basis for comparison for the data collected by the researcher (Management Study Guide, 2011).

The secondary data in this study include journals from previous researchers and scholars. Various journals are valuable to the researcher to have a clear picture of this subject matter from various perspectives. Likewise, it also provides the researcher with

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the key variables, theories, and various issues and experiences across the globe that would be very helpful as guidance. All the journals obtain from the printed material and online. In addition, books also play an important role in this study. The researcher read a range of books since it helps the researcher search out various issues and problems related to this study. Besides journals and books, sources from the Internet also have been used. The researcher also spent most of the time looking for the information available for the study, especially in terms of statistics, online journals and articles, conference proceedings, and other relevant information. The researcher also uses the internet to observe the government's portal, especially local government websites.

3.11 Data Collection: The Interview

A total of 24 face-to-face interviews were conducted about six months from Jan to June 2017 which consists of 10 staffs at Alor Setar City Council and 14 public informants. According to the priority, the interview was started with the local authorities and interchangeably with the public. Because of the tight working schedule, especially the mayor, most of the interviews with the local authorities took place with an appointment. But some of the interviews with the local authorities' officers were easily conducted during their working hours. Therefore, interviewees, especially the local authorities, were free to select an interview location. However, all of the interviews take place at their work location. The workplaces provide favourable environments for interviewing and recording except for minor interruptions such as ringing telephones. However, the interview session with public informants was challenging because it took place in various public places. Thus, the potential of background noise affects the recording quality.

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Typically, interviews lasted roughly 30 minutes to 90 minutes and were conducted in Bahasa Melayu. Before the start of every interview, interviewees were explained about the nature of the study, and the acknowledgement letter obtained from the Ghazali Shafie Graduate School of Government, Universiti Utara Malaysia was shown (Appendix B). Permission to use a voice recorder at the interview was also verbally sought, to which most of the interviewees was agreed. The recorded interview allowed the note-taking to a minimum and pay more attention to the conversation. In addition, all interviews were transcribed from digital voice recordings, which produced transcripts that form the central core of this study.

An interview guide was developed to capture primary data from interviews. The questions were designed to be open-ended, in-depth and semi-structured, permitting a variety of responses from the interviewees. The guide consisted of 16 questions for the local authorities and 13 questions for the public divided into five sections that roughly concerned the interviewees' awareness and understanding of e-participation, including e-participation in enhancing public participation and e-participation medium provided and challenges to e-participation implementation. Tables 3.4 and 3.5 show the interview guide for both informants, which the supervisor and other expert-approved.

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Table 3.4
Interview Guide for Public

Need/Conditions
1. What do you understand about e-participation? 2. How do you know about e-participation? 3. What do you think about the need for an e-participation platform in helping to improve public participation in the local government?
Input
1. What is the e-participation platform that you know provided by the local government authority? 2. Do you have the facilities to participate through an online medium? 3. Do you have the knowledge and skill in using any e-participation platform?
Output
1. What is the e-participation activities that you know provided by the local government? 2. Do you participate in those activities? 3. Do you have any experience communicating or participating with the local government through any online medium?
Outcome
1. What do you expect from e-participation in the local government? 2. What do you think about e-participation as a medium to enhance public participation in a much better way?
Challenges
1. What is the main limitation and challenges that you have faced in using the e-participation platform in the local government, or that you think would hinder the implementation of e-participation in the local government? 2. What would you suggest to improve e-participation in the local government?

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Table 3.5
Interview Guide for Local Authority

Need/Conditions
1. What is the local authority's problem regarding the current mechanism in public participation? 2. What do you understand about e-participation? 3. What do you think about the need for an e-participation platform in helping to improve public participation in the local government?
Input
1. What is the e-participation platform provided by the local authority? 2. Is all the local authority staff involved in supporting the e-participation effort? 3. Does the local authority have an adequate resource in promoting the e-participation implementation? 4. Does the local authority have the infrastructure and the technology to support e-participation implementation?
Output
1. What activities does the authority engage in promoting e-participation in the local government? 2. Who usually participates in the activities? 3. In terms of the e-participation platform provided, do the public actively use it to participate with the council?
Outcome
1. What is the local authority expecting from e-participation from the public in the local government? 2. Does e-participation help the authority act and serve the public much more effectively? 3. Does e-participation help improve the future environment for both authority and the public?
Challenges
1. What are the main limitations and challenges the local authority faces in implementing e-participation in the local government? 2. In your opinion, what are the other external factor that would affect the evaluation of e-participation implementation in the local government? 3. What would you suggest to improve the e-participation in the local government?

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3.12 Transcribing and Translation Process

Other than transcribing, the translation process were also required since the interview was not conducted in English. Transcribing is a common practice in the qualitative research (Oliver, Serovich & Mason, 2005). Meanwhile translation becomes an integral part of cross-language qualitative research (Mandal, 2018). Transcribing involves converting the verbal statement into the written form (Clark, Birkhead, Fernandez & Egger, 2017; Duranti, 2006). Meanwhile, translation involves converting that written material into another language. Unlike transcribing which uses the same language as the original source, translating deals with the source language along with another language (Clark, et al., 2017).

Transcribing is not restrict to the researcher only, other party may carry it out instead. McMullin (2021) however asserts that, compare to the outsource transcription, the personally perform transcription is much more appropriate in term of consistency between the research approach and transcribing approach, as well as the researcher's confidence that the written transcript is an accurate interpretation of the interview that took place. For the outsource transcription the other hand, there is a need for the researcher to provide clear and complete instructions regarding the key components of the study. The researcher should also double-check transcripts for accuracy, correction on any errors and make sure the transcription document meets their standards for formatting, style, and literal content. Therefore, it is best for the researcher to select a transcriber who has expertise in the subject matter and used to the accents or dialects of the speakers. Additionally, key project details, including research questions and relevant terminologies, should also be given to the transcriber (McMullin, 2021).

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Nor Mazny (2010) on the other hand, raises her concern when she argue, if the transcription was done by someone other than the researcher, there is a greater chance of missing the utter words' meaning construction, delicacy and precision, since facial, hand and other body expressions can occasionally confuse verbal language. Therefore, while attempting to code the interview meticulously, the decision to personally make the entire transcription of the interviews proved beneficial. Transcribing allowed the researcher to personally immerse in the data under the study. Although it is time-consuming, it allows the data quality evaluation and identification of a wide range of themes (Nor Mazny, 2010). Though hiring another skilled and experienced transcriber would be beneficial for the study, the researcher believe personal transcribing would be more fulfilling nonetheless. Accordingly, the researcher made the decision to proceed with all 24 digitally recorded interviews were self-transcribed.

The initial step in the transcription, which can be done in one of two ways: either naturally recording every word and utterance (naturalism) or eliminating non-verbal cues and pauses from speech (denaturalism) (Oliver, Serovich & Mason, 2005). The transcribed data for this study, which sought to address the research question, concentrated primarily on what was said in regard to the study. Delays, jokes, and other elements of the interaction between the researcher and informants were thus left out. Although it was fortunate that most of the interviewees agreed to have their interviews recorded, on attempting to transcribe, it was found that spoken words do not parallel written ones. The diction, punctuation, and pronunciation are sometimes very hard to determine. However, this process substantially benefits the researcher in familiarising the data according to the theme and content, making the subsequent coding process a little easier.

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In the meantime, the translation process which took place after the transcribing process was done. All these process took seven months to complete, which more than initially schedule. However, both process is crucial to facilitate the researcher's understanding of the information. It was started with the transcribing process of Bahasa Melayu's interview in the first phase, before move to the next phase of translating it to English prior to conducting the analysis. Some of the transcription was then done right away after the interview and some other in between the next interview. On the other hand, the English translation took place after all the Bahasa Melayu's transcriptions and interview was done. The complete translation then uploaded to the ATLAS.ti for analysis. The flowchart of the transcribing and translating process to the data analysis could be refer in Figure 3.3.

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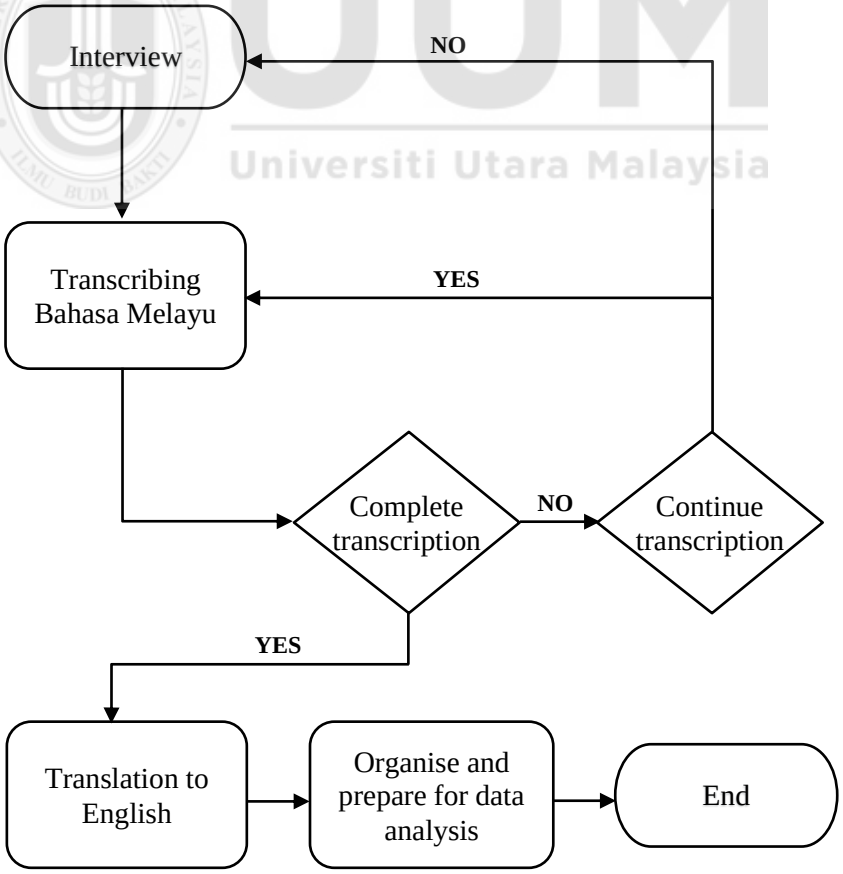

Figure 3.3. Flowchart of Transcribing and Translation Process to the Data Analysis

Transcription is a powerful representational tools since it profoundly affects how the data are conceptualised (Oliver et. al., 2005). Accordingly, the researcher verifies that this transcription appropriately corresponds to the meaning during the interview session as the interview grounded on the theme and elements that evaluate e-participation within the research theoretical framework. Additionally, along with the recorded interview, the transcription was explicitly guided. Consequently, the researcher attentively ensure to not lose the integrity and meaning of the important facts. On top of that, integrating the deductive and inductive approaches substantially contributes to gaining a deeper comprehension of the data. In the meantime, it helps the researcher recognising and categorising the data into pattern and theme that make the analysis more systematic.

3.13 Data Analysis

3.13.1 Data Analysis Tool: ATLAS.ti

The qualitative data resulting from the transcribed interviews were subjected to be sorted, coded, and analysed. Like any other software that supports the analysis of quantitative data, numerous software programmes also available for the qualitative data analysis. The first computer-aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) programmes, also known as qualitative data analysis software (QDAS), appeared in the 1980s when researchers experimented technologically with some of the problems with manually evaluating qualitative data. (Mangabeira, 1995).

Following qualitative programmes were independently developed in different parts of the world in the late 1980s including: Textbase Alpha in Denmark; HyperQual, QUALPRO, TAP and the Ethnograph in the USA; NUDIST in Australia; and MAX, Aquad and ATLAS.ti in Germany (Kelle, 1996). As a result, there were approximately

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15 QDAS packages available by 1993 (Mangabeira, 1995). Later in 1997, the first version of NVivo was released (Dhakal, 2022). The NVivo which developed in Australia is combine the features of the popular software program NUDIST 6 and NVivo 2.0 (Creswell, 2013). Currently, the most recent version of NVivo available is simply called NVivo was released in March 2020 (Dhakal, 2022).

All of QDAS programme does not analyse the data. It is simply a tool for supporting the process of qualitative data analysis. However, this software is an advanced technology which contribute to offered better management of data (Friese, 2014). Software assists in relieving the researcher of all the tasks that a machine can perform far more efficiently, for example, modifying code words and code segments, retrieving data based on various criteria, searching for words, integrating material in one location, attaching notes and finding them again, counting the number of coded incidences and providing overviews at various stages of a project. Thus, with the use of software and programmes, it becomes much easier to analyse data systematically and ask questions that you otherwise would not ask because the manual task involved would be too time-consuming. Furthermore, even a large volume of data and different media types can be quickly structured and integrated with the software (Saillard, 2011).

Overall, it is impossible to identify a particular programme as the finest out of all of these programmes. This is due to the unique traits and strengths that each programme has. Barry (1998) makes the point that any software can benefit and enrich the analysis process. But according to Weitzman and Miles (1995), ATLAS.ti and NVivo are the most beneficial research tools in the newest category of coding and theory-building software. Likewise, Lewis (2004) emphasises that ATLAS.ti and NVivo are the best

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and possibly most practical tools for qualitative data analysis. Both programmes give the researcher the ability to assign codes or labels to sections of text, sounds, photos, or videos, search these codes for patterns, and create classifications of codes that reflect testable models of the conceptual structure of the underlying material. Both are incredibly adaptable programmes that work well in a variety of contexts. Both are Microsoft Windows-based products, and neither is a Mac OS app. Lewis clarifies that while NVivo can be difficult to compete in certain areas, ATLAS.ti is more astounding and undoubtedly the winner as a general purpose QDA core.

The researcher decided that ATLAS.ti 7 was the most appropriate software to be employed after analysing a few computer-aided qualitative data analysis software packages and consulting prior papers and literature. According to Paulus and Lester, (2016) ATLAS.ti allow the researcher in documenting the analytic decisions in a transparent, reflexive, rigorous and systematic way. Barry (1998) draws attention to the features of ATLAS.ti in particular, including its visually appealing and well-designed interface, which displays all features on the screen at once; its unlimited text coding, which can code any amount of text as one unit; its hypertext links between data, codes, and documents; its conceptual network displays, which are manipulable; its ability to include text segments and memos in network displays; its support for creative and visualised theoretical thinking; and its memos' ability to be linked multiple times. Essentially, the strengths of ATLAS.ti mostly revolve around its immediacy, its visual and spatial features, its innovative interface and its interconnectedness. Among all, its simplicity of operation make the ATLAS.ti easier to be learn and understand.

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In similar vein, Lewis (2004) notes that ATLAS.ti is a fantastic option for absolutely any QDA research project due to its many exceptional features and its data-handling capabilities. ATLAS.ti has the ability to work with wide range of qualitative data and move beyond relatively straightforward texts. One of the most striking features of ATLAS.ti is the range of data file types that the researcher can import and analyse such as sound files, video files and numerous graphics file formats and work with directly. Even ATLAS.ti handles the foreign language effectively. Based solely on these features, the ATLAS.ti is worthy of significant consideration by every QDA researcher. Additionally, coding, constructing and displaying conceptual networks are easily done in ATLAS.ti.

Equally, Konopasek (2007) emphasise that sophisticated interface of ATLAS.ti is crucial not only because it enables easy and straightforward usage, but also because it offers a variety of visually associated devices. Consequently, ATLAS.ti enables researchers to think visibly. Visualized thoughts can easily be stored, recalled, categorised, linked, filtered out in large quantities and summarised to provide meaningful result. For instance, visualisation suggests that codes are not just mental entities or thoughts but also named objects of different sizes and colours that may be manipulated by the hands and controlled by the eye. As a result, with ATLAS.ti, thinking that is made visible is also made more responsible and illustrative.

After all, despite the fact that ATLAS.ti does not offer a large number of possibilities for sophisticated analysis, given its numerous strengths and positive attributes, ATLAS.ti is an appropriate tool for the analysis of this study. Above all, a well-

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designed interface and simple navigation of ATLAS.ti had contributed to enhancing the researcher's understanding, making the analysis process of this study much easier.

3.13.2 Process of Data Analysis using ATLAS.ti

The analysis process started with the interviews were transcribed, cleaned and examined through to gain a general understanding of it. This process is consistent to what Bogdan and Biklen (2003) proposed as a part in the qualitative process of data analysis, as demonstrates in the Figure 3.4.

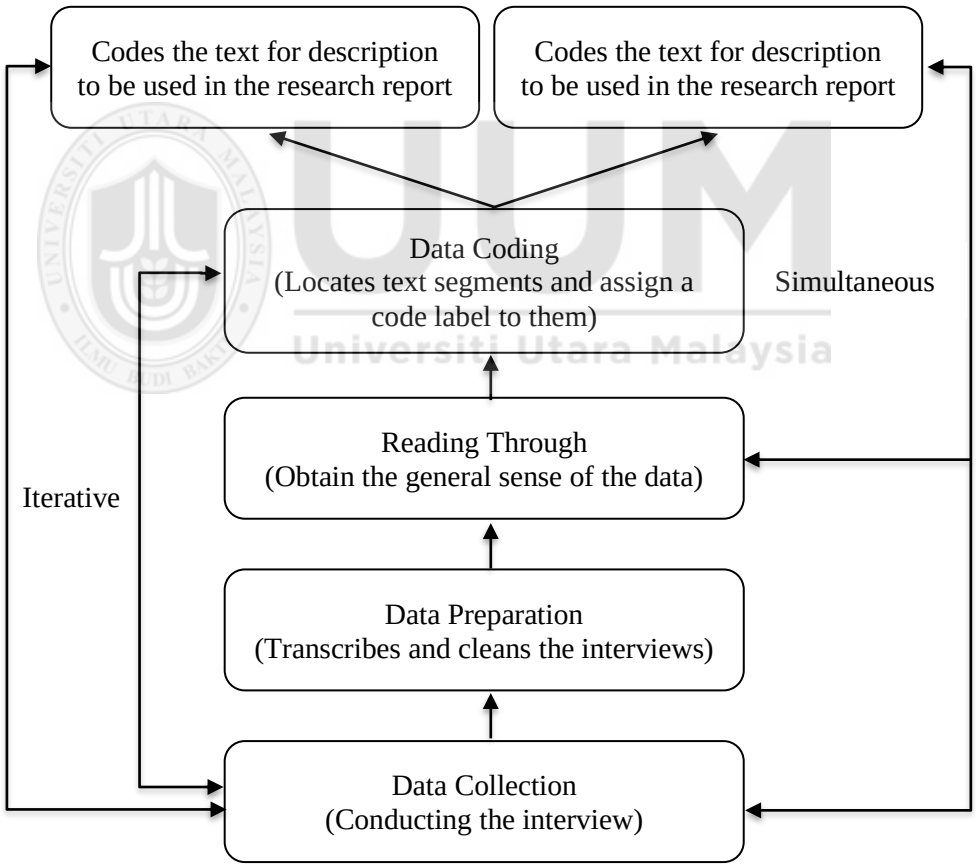

Figure 3.4 Qualitative Process of Data Analysis
Source: Bogdan & Biklen, 2003.

Ani Munirah (2014) emphasises that the features of ATLAS.ti are highly helpful in providing the necessary tools in the data analysis for the research which simultaneous and iterative in natures. In line with this, this study extensively utilised ATLAS.ti to derive the main findings. The analysis using ATLAS.ti begin with creating new project in the opening window. Next, after the project was created and named, the complete transcribed interviews was uploaded through. All these necessary document will be keep and appear in the document manager.

The ATLAS.ti document manager function has proven to be very helpful for this purpose. The importance of making the most of the document manager is that, the entire data was stored in My Library, a specific folder on the computer that was accessible by the ATLAS.ti project known as Hermeneutic Unit. The researcher merely had to select the document manager option, which essentially enabled the researchers to manage all the data, to be able to retrieve the information whenever they wanted it (Ani Munirah, 2014).

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After that the process of coding will take place. At this stage, the researcher will create all the necessary coding according to the need of the analysis in the code manager. According to Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2008), in line with thematic coding, the code manager manages each code in the list. In accordance with the relevant themes, data segments are coded using the constant comparative analysis method. Meanwhile Boeije (2002) posits during this phase, the researchers started to consider what makes a piece of data unique and or comparable to other pieces of data. This is an inductive method of analysis as the researchers carefully examine on the data to derive new meaning (Glaser, 1965).

Additionally, the ATLAS.ti coding tool enables the researcher to correctly construct the code list using either an inductive or a deductive approach. Preconceived codes were added to the code manager once the researcher had a framework to operate within, enabling deductive coding. Themes from the higher order classifications or categories were first used to build the code list. To fit into each of the larger classes, each of these topics was then divided into smaller codes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). For instance, under the code manager, through new entities and new code(s) button, this study had developed the main category codes namely awareness, implementation, challenges and suggestions. Then, the necessary sub-code created under this category code such as, for the category code of implementation the sub-codes derived including the e-participation platform, staff support, provider resources, provider infrastructure and technology, the usage of platform.

The detail of category code and sub-codes in this study illustrates in the Table 3.5. All the existing codes then applied in the data segment easily through drag and drop. As the data segment was highlighted, then the selected one or more codes was drag onto the highlighted segment. This process continued to all the data segments until completed.

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Table 3.6
Category Code and Sub-Codes Guidelines for Coding Analysis

Category Code	**Sub-Codes (Local Authority)**	**Sub-Codes (Public)**	**Combine Codes**
RQ/RO1 Awareness	• Problem by LA • Understanding of EP • Needs of EP • LA Expectation • EP Effective Service • EP Improve Environment	• EP Understanding • How • Needs of EP • Public Expectation • EP Enhancing PP	• Motivation for EP • Understanding • Finding out EP • Needs of EP • Outcome & Impact - Enhancing of EP - Expectations of EP - EP Effective Service - EP Improve Environment
RQ/RO2 Implementation	• EP Platform • LA Staff Support • LA Resources • LA Infrastructure & Technology • Activities Promoting EP • Participation in EP Activities • Usage of EP Platform	• EP Platform • Public Facilities • Public Knowledge & Skills • EP Activities • Participation in EP Activities • EP Experience with LG	• EP Platform • Input - LA Staff Support - LA Resources - LA Facilities - Public Facilities - Public Knowledge & Skills • Output - EP Activities - Participation in EP Activities • EP Usage & Experience
RQ/RO3 Challenges	• LA Challenges • External Factors	• Public Challenges	• LA Challenges • External Factors • Public Challenges
RQ/RO4 Suggestions (Enhancement)	• LA Suggestions	• Public Suggestions	• LA Suggestions • Public Suggestions

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Following, in reporting the findings, this study used two main analysis which are the network and code-document tables. The network function in ATLAS.ti allows the researcher to explore the data visually and generate the findings of the research (Friese, 2014). Network features of ATLAS.ti substantially facilitate this study in identifying the relationship between the codes, analysing the results, and communicating the findings. To generate all the necessary network, the researcher started by selecting the specific code from the code manager, followed by a right-click, before selecting the open network connection. There are various interesting option of layouts and routings for the generated network. The network may, however, be altered and arranged at any point by the researcher as preferred. Direct weak links and strong linkages were constructed in the entire network to display the meanings drawn from the data for reporting purposes (Ani Munirah, 2014).

Subsequently, the code-document tables helps to explore code frequencies across the documents. The code-document table provides a helpful global overview and allows comparisons across the data by displaying the frequency with which each code was used across all of the informant data. Using this tool, the researcher created tables that display the frequency of the codes to determine how frequently the informants used a specific code in a given document. All the networks and frequencies tables could be found in the next analysis chapter.

Largely, the documents manager, code manager, network views and code-document table were all heavily utilised aspects of ATLAS.ti. The choice to do the qualitative analysis utilising ATLAS.ti was proven to be a major contribution in streamlining the

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analysis process of this study. If the traditional manual analysis was utilised, the data analysis of this study could be a daunting, disorganised and unproductive process.

3.14 Research Limitations

There are several limitations during the data collection process. The interview session with all the selected local authorities is not a problem because most staff can respond and give their feedback according to their experience in the working field. The only problem is that the interview session with a few local authorities has been delayed several times due to various matters. Therefore, it consumed much time. Other than that, phone calls occasionally caused the interview session to be interrupted. Likewise, the required offsite job and meeting demand the sessions be brief and cut short. Deep conversation and response were therefore difficult to be obtain. However, it is much more challenging to get the public informants representing different demographic backgrounds such as race and ethnicity, age group, and level of education. In the meantime, some public does not want to be interviewed. Moreover, since the interview took place at public area, therefore, the surrounding of the place affected the recording quality, consequently affecting the process of transcribing.

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3.15 Conclusion

This chapter had discussed the methodology that used in this study. It is essential to know the best suitable method. The proper method helps to understand the current circumstance studied, discover the fact and the truth in every issue, answer the research's question, and obtain the best-expected result in supporting the study. Basically, this is a qualitative case study research. The interview was done with the local officials from the Alor Setar City Council as it served as the analytical unit for

this study. In addition to the local authorities, this study also investigates how the general public, as one of the key informant groups in e-participation perceives. The information from the interview was transcribed, then analysed using ATLAS.ti. Following, this chapter provided further explanation and justification for the analysis processes and techniques.

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CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS, RESULTS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the empirical findings generated from the interviews conducted for the study. The interview data were analysed from the perspective of two different informants, including the local authorities of the Alor Setar City Council, and the public. The breakdown of the informants as described in Chapter 3 is characterised by the specific identification number as shown in Table 4.1. The informant from the local authorities' group was given the identification number starting with 01 and the informant from the public group was given the number 02 to facilitate the recognition.

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Table 4.1
Unit of Analysis and Respective Informants

Local Authorities	ID
Positions	
Mayor	01-001
Council Secretary	01-002
Director of Management Service Department	01-003
Director of Development Planning Department (GIS Unit)	01-004
HOD at Information Technology Department (IT)	01-005
HOD at Town Service & Disease Control/ Health Promotion Department	01-006
Corporate Planning Department & Community	
1. Officer at Tourism, Sport and Community Unit	01-007
2. Officer at Planning & Corporate Communication Unit	01-008
Officer at Finance Department	01-009
Officer at Enforcement Unit	01-010

Public	ID
Public Informant	02-001
Public Informant	02-002
Public Informant	02-003
Public Informant	02-004
Public Informant	02-005
Public Informant	02-006
Public Informant	02-007
Public Informant	02-008
Public Informant	02-009
Public Informant	02-010
Public Informant	02-011
Public Informant	02-012
Public Informant	02-013
Public Informant	02-014
Total Informants	**24**

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The study sought to address the main research question: How effective is e-participation implementation at Alor Setar City Council? Therefore, to answer this main research question, four other research questions have been identified and presented in the sections below based on the following questions:

1. To what extent is the awareness of e-participation among the public and providers at the Alor Setar City Council area?
2. How is the e-participation implementation at the Alor Setar City Council area?
3. What are the challenges facing the implementation of e-participation at the Alor Setar City Council area?
4. How to enhance the e-participation implementation at the Alor Setar City Council area?

4.2 Awareness of E-participation

This section discusses the research findings concerning the public and provider awareness of e-participation at the Alor Setar City Council area. A summary of the findings is presented in Figure 4.1 below to show the various aspects of awareness and understanding of e-participation at the Alor Setar City Council area. Accordingly, the detailed breakdown of the interview response for this research question is provided in Table 4.2.

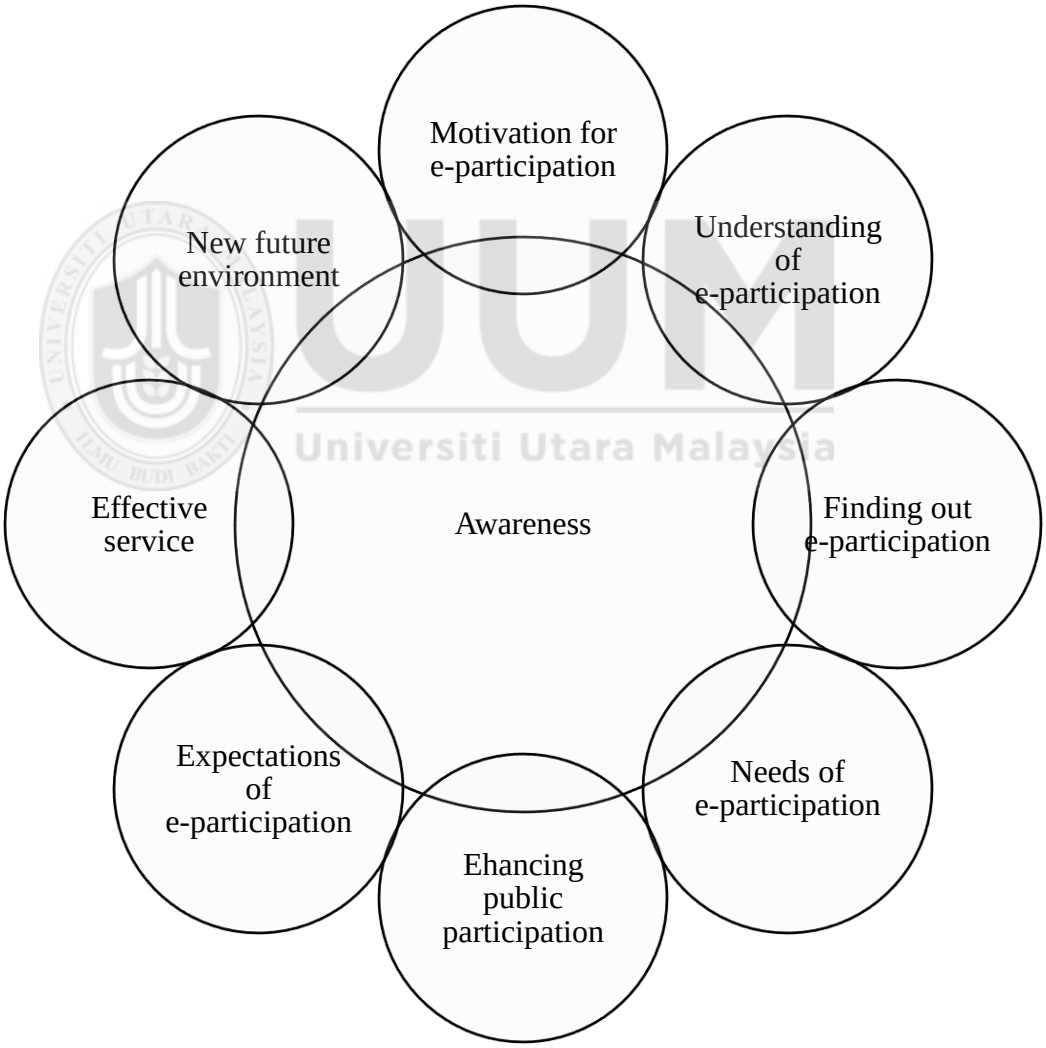

Figure 4.1 Awareness of E-Participation

Table 4.2
Findings on the Awareness of E-Participation

Theme	Aspect	Number of times mentioned	Who mentioned
Motivation for e-participation	No problem	11	01-002, 01-003, 01-004, 01-005, 01-007, 01-008, 01-009, 01-010
	Low public participation	2	01-006, 01-007
	Fast response	1	01-001
Understanding of e-participation	Online and internet participation	22	01-010, 01-003, 01-004, 01-005, 01-006, 01-007, 01-008, 01-009, 01-010, 02-001, 02-002, 02-003, 02-004, 02-005, 02-006, 02-007, 02-008, 02-009, 02-010, 02-011, 02-012, 02-013, 02-014
	Source of information	2	02-009, 02-014
	Lack of clarification	1	02-006
	Partial response	1	01-002
Finding out e-participation	Do not know	1	02-013
	Local government	1	02-006
	Media, internet, reading and learning experience	13	02-001, 02-002, 02-003, 02-004, 02-005, 02-006, 02-007, 02-008, 02-009, 02-010, 02-011, 02-012, 02-014
Needs of e-participation	Effective public participation	8	01-010, 01-002, 01-003, 01-005, 01-007, 01-009, 01-010
	Enhance public participation process	3	02-001, 02-003, 02-008
	Necessary in present time	6	01-006, 01-008, 01-010, 02-009, 02-011
	Convenient platform	7	02-002, 02-007, 02-009, 02-012, 02-013
	Medium diversity	2	02-005, 02-006

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Theme	Aspect	Number of times mentioned	Who mentioned
	Additional medium	1	01-004
	Local government response	2	02-004
	Limited to a group of people	4	02-006, 02-008, 02-010
	Inadequate medium	1	02-010
	Do not know	1	02-014
Enhancing public participation	Digital divide problem	1	02-014
	Good and necessary medium	7	02-001, 02-002, 02-003, 02-007, 02-008, 02-009, 02-011
	Need better implementation	4	02-004, 02-005, 02-006, 02-012
	Public and local government support	3	02-010, 02-011, 02-013
Expectations of e-participation	Enhance public participation	4	01-006, 02-001, 02-012
	Effective engagement	6	01-002, 01-007, 01-008, 01-009, 01-010
	Effective implementation	6	02-003, 02-006, 02-007, 02-009, 02-011, 02-014
	Council efficiency	5	01-004, 01-003, 01-005
	Local government promotion	5	02-002, 02-005, 02-007, 02-010
	Service and response	2	02-001, 02-013
	Capture public interest	2	02-008
	Active participation	1	02-004
	Appropriate use	4	01-001, 01-010
E-participation effective service	Fast and efficient service	10	01-001, 01-002, 01-003, 01-004, 01-005, 01-006, 01-007, 01-008, 01-009, 01-010
	Peoples' convenience	2	01-004, 01-009
E-participation improve the future environment	Improve environment	10	01-001, 01-002, 01-003, 01-004, 01-005, 01-006, 01-007, 01-008, 01-009, 01-010
	Two-way communication	1	01-003
	Avoid conflict	3	01-006
	Better public service	1	01-005

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4.2.1 Motivation for E-Participation

Despite the various factors and motivation for e-participation as highlighted in literature by Wirtz et al. (2016), Traber (2013), Kim and Lee (2012), Milakovich (2012), Golubovic (2010), Sobaci (2010), Phang & Kankanhalli (2008), Sæbø, Rose and Flak (2008), Rose and Sanford (2007) and Macintosh (2004) as discussed in Chapter 2, the interview with the provider revealed minimal issues with regards to traditional public participation. Figure 4.2 shows that the informants generally opined no major issues relating to conventional public participation. As remarked by most of the informants:

> *"Basically, most public participation in the council occurs in traditional settings either through written or walk-in. For now, there are no issues with the current mechanism of participation. We also have e-Aduan, which is online, and public complaints increase day by day, maybe because most people are now IT literate." (Informant 01-002)*
>
> *"I believe we have no issues in gaining participation from the public. Currently, Town Hall Meeting is one of the mediums to gain public participation. We also received a lot of complaints through various mediums. Compared with other local governments, I believe people in Alor Setar are more educated. So, they have the information and know-how to make the complaint." (Informant 01-003)*
>
> *"Currently, there is no problem with the current mechanism of public participation. We received public participation through various mediums, and the public itself was actively involved." (Informant 01-005)*
>
> *"Our department deals with the revenue. So, our main transaction is payment either in cash, cheque, or so-called online e-Bayar. So far, there is no problem with the current public participation mechanism. We mostly received the payment by cash, where the public can walk in and pay at the counter or any representative bank. Only 20 per cent of the payment were received online. But of course, on the current mechanism of participation, most of it comes from middle age or older people. People 50 years and above are much more comfortable walking in either to make the payment or complaint to the council." (Informant 01-009)*

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However, only two informants believe that the public shows less interest in participating, especially during communal (*gotong-royong)* activities. Due to that, one of the informants voiced his concern about the public participation in e-participation implementation. The details were remarked by the informants as follows:

> *"I would say that public participation is very low. Most of the people involved in the gotong-royong were the council's staff. The public will participate if there is any attraction such as breakfast, lunch, and a lucky draw. We expect the Residents Representative Committee (JPP) to help the council persuade and attract the public to be involved. Still, the participation is low. So, when I heard about e-participation, I can say that this would have much more problems." (Informant 01-006)*
>
> *"So far, there are no issues on the current public participation mechanism. In terms of the traditional method of participation, the public regularly participates. However, participation from the people in activities such as gotong-royong is quite low." (Informant 01-007)*

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In the meantime, one of the informants asserted that participation through the current form was sufficient. But the main concern was how fast the council could respond and take the measures to solve the problem. This response was indicated as follows:

> *"We received participation from the public in many forms such as written, walk-in, e-Aduan, and WhatsApp. Council also held a dialogue session with the public from time to time (periodically). So, public participation is not really a problem. But the problem is whether the council can take fast action or not. That's all." (Informant 01-001)*

What could be gathered from this finding is that even the existing method of traditional participation seems not a major issue, however the Alor Setar City Council are not depend only on these method. There are online platform and services available that provided by the Alor Setar City Council for the convenience of citizen. This shown that, the Alor Setar City Council had realised the significant of electronic or online

method which is crucial nowadays. The governments worldwide have realised the significant impact of actively getting their citizens to interact with governments through the e-participation channel. In the meantime, the advancements of technology have significantly transformed the way governments deliver their services to the citizens (Nasrah, Wan Adilah & Hanif, 2019). Furthermore, the need to improve the existing method is aligned with the support from the central government, especially within the global Covid-19 pandemic circumstances, which began in early 2020. The Covid-19 pandemic also significantly impacted our education landscape, which noticeably everyone could not afford to escape the internet and technology as one of the essential elements in the online learning process (Mahiswaran, Nur Atikah & Nor Alyani, 2020)

Therefore, Malaysia has currently taken the lead in implementing the digital government by maintaining the citizen-centric as the primary focus. The government aims to digitalise the end-to-end (E2E) service delivery through the digital government, which means that the public could perform all the processes online without being present (Yusof, 2020). Correspondingly, since the technologies have trigged profound changes in our society's lives, Penang, for example, was initially the first state in Malaysia that introduce the smart parking system. The Penang Smart Parking (PSP) system was officially announced on August 19, 2019 and was made available to all 1.8 million residents of Penang (Kee & Ching, 2020). This initiative, a pioneer for smart city implementation, is Malaysia's first innovative parking solution that allows users to keep track of available parking spots throughout Penang Island. For the public to use the system, the Digital Penang, in collaboration with Penang

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Smart Parking, had provided the digital class specifically for the public to learn the basic functions and features of this application (Penang Smart Parking, 2019).

Although the PSP is still in its infancy, and its evaluation might be questioned, the initiatives shown by the government are driven to improve the services and make them fit for the public needs. In the meantime, although it is not as advanced as what had been implemented by the Government of Penang, MBAS had also recently upgraded their services by implementing a cashless parking system available at the Urban Transformation Centre (UTC) of Kedah. Effective October 1, 2021, the payment could be made through Flexi Parking or cards or the Touch N Go application (Alor Setar City Council, 2021).

Above and beyond, technology that is not important to everyone might play a vital role for most other people. However, technological change was inevitable and will remarkably develop in the future. Therefore, the current study believed that the traditional method of participation was no longer an option for public participation since the technology was evolved along with the society. Similarly, technological innovations have become another important need that essential for people to thrive and evolve.

Concisely, although the function of traditional public participation was still significant, yet the Alor Setar City Council also addressed the critical requirement of e-participation approach, especially in this age. The Alor Setar City Council had therefore made every effort to provide and make e-participation platforms available, for the sake of the society.

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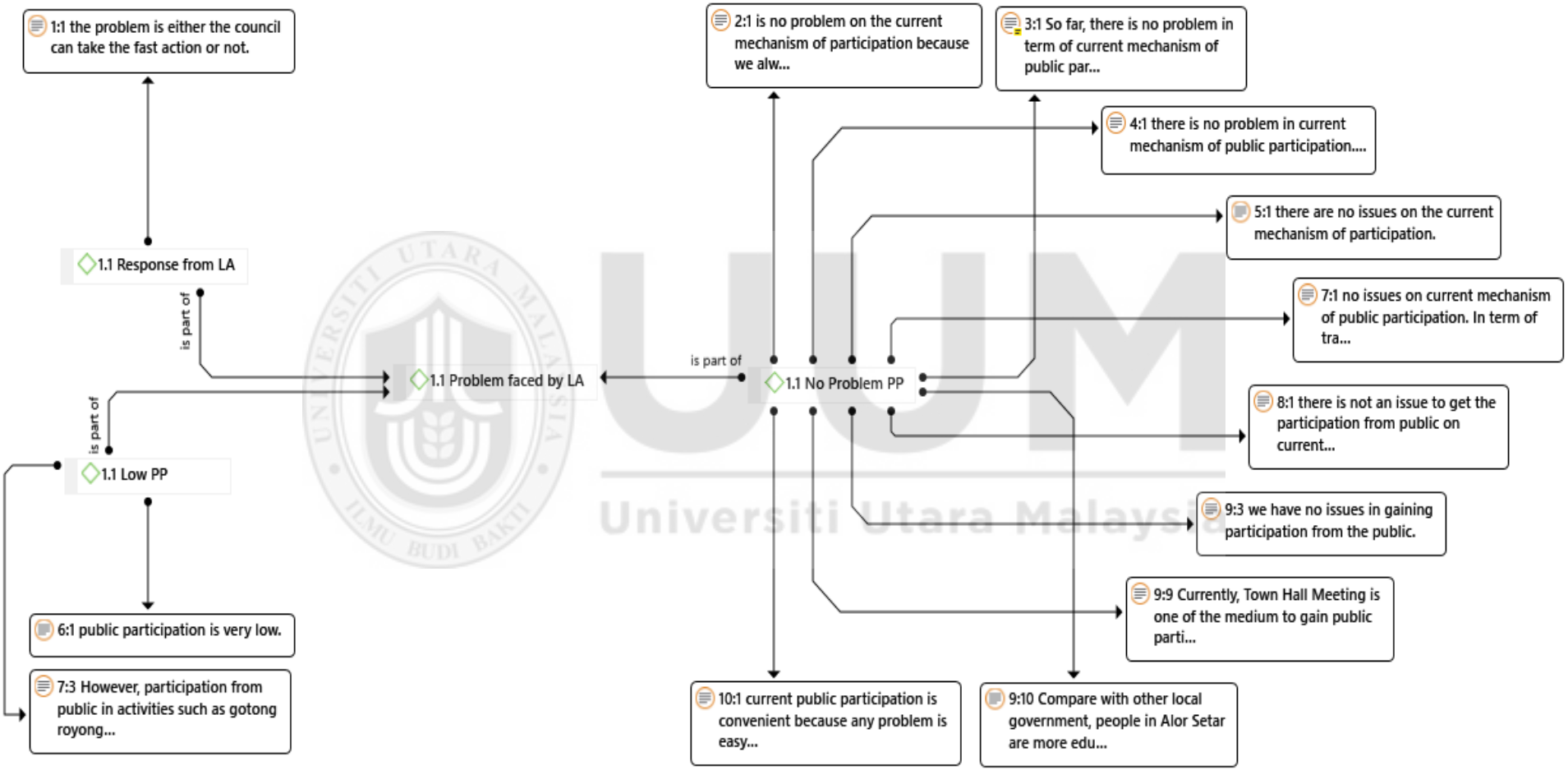

Figure 4.2 Problem Faced by Local Authority

4.2.2 Understanding of E-Participation

In measuring the perception of e-participation, the perspectives from both groups of informants were obtained. Figure 4.3 and Figure 4.4 below represent the understanding from the provider's group, which is the local authority and group of publics, respectively. The findings show that most of the informants from both groups understands that e-participation is online medium participation by using the internet and particular technology when most of them were remarked:

> *"It is one of the facilities that the local government must provide for the public to participate electronically." (Informant 01-003)*
>
> *"Basically, the word 'e' is a short form for electronic. Nowadays, we can do so many things through the internet just by sitting in front of our computer screen without being present at the location. So, e-participation or electronic participation means that people can communicate, involve, and participate with the government online. It streamlines the public participation process." (Informant 01-005)*
>
> *"From my understanding, e-participation is about the public using certain technology to participate." (Informant 01-006)*
>
> *"E-participation is the use of technology, namely online, where the public can participate without presenting at the council." (Informant 01-007)*
>
> *"When I heard the term e-participation, I think about e-government and online transaction. I believe through an electronic medium, the public can participate by sending their complaint, voice out their opinion and also can pay the bills." (Informant 01-010)*
>
> *"I only have the basic knowledge of e-participation. What I know, the public could participate either through email, Facebook, and other social media." (Informant 02-004)*
>
> *"I have the knowledge on e-participation, but not much. I understand that e-participation makes it easy for the public not only to participate but also to find out the information. (Informant 02-009)*
>
> *"E-participation is public involvement through the medium of internet." (Informant 02-010)*
>
> *"E-participation is like online banking. It takes place through the internet or social media." (Informant 02-011)*

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> *"E-participation is when the public or citizens are encouraged to electronically contribute their comments or feedback. It is means the internet is used as a medium to voice out any agreement or disagreement." (Informant 02-013)*

In addition, two of the public informants further clarified that e-participation is not only a platform to participate or convey any complaints, but it is also a source of information. The responses were remarked as follows:

> *"…e-participation makes ease for public not only to participate but also to find out the information." (Informat 02-009)*
>
> *"…source of information in the government department." (Informant 02-014)*

However, one informant from the provider group was a partial response to it. The informant clarified that the public should understand they could participate and voice their opinions in certain areas but not in decision-making. However, he overlooked explaining the e-participation aspect. The response was posited as follows:

> *"The term participation itself means that the public can take part or involve in the council. But what is much more important and needs to be understood is the area that which the public can participate. It is because the public should understand that not every area they can participate in, such as in the process of decision making. The public can only participate by giving their opinion, feedback, and complaints as input that the council could use to improve." (Informant 01-002)*

In the meantime, there is a lack of clarification from one of the public informants as he was mentioned:

> *"I know about e-participation only on the basis." (Informant 02-006)*

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Above all, it was found that most of the local authorities and public had the knowledge and understanding of e-participation. Although two of the informants from both groups missed out on explaining their understanding, it is unfair to jump to the conclusion on the informant's knowledge and understanding because the informant responded to other interview questions. Supposedly, this matter should not be disregarded, and the researcher must acknowledge and pursue in-depth information on the particular response.

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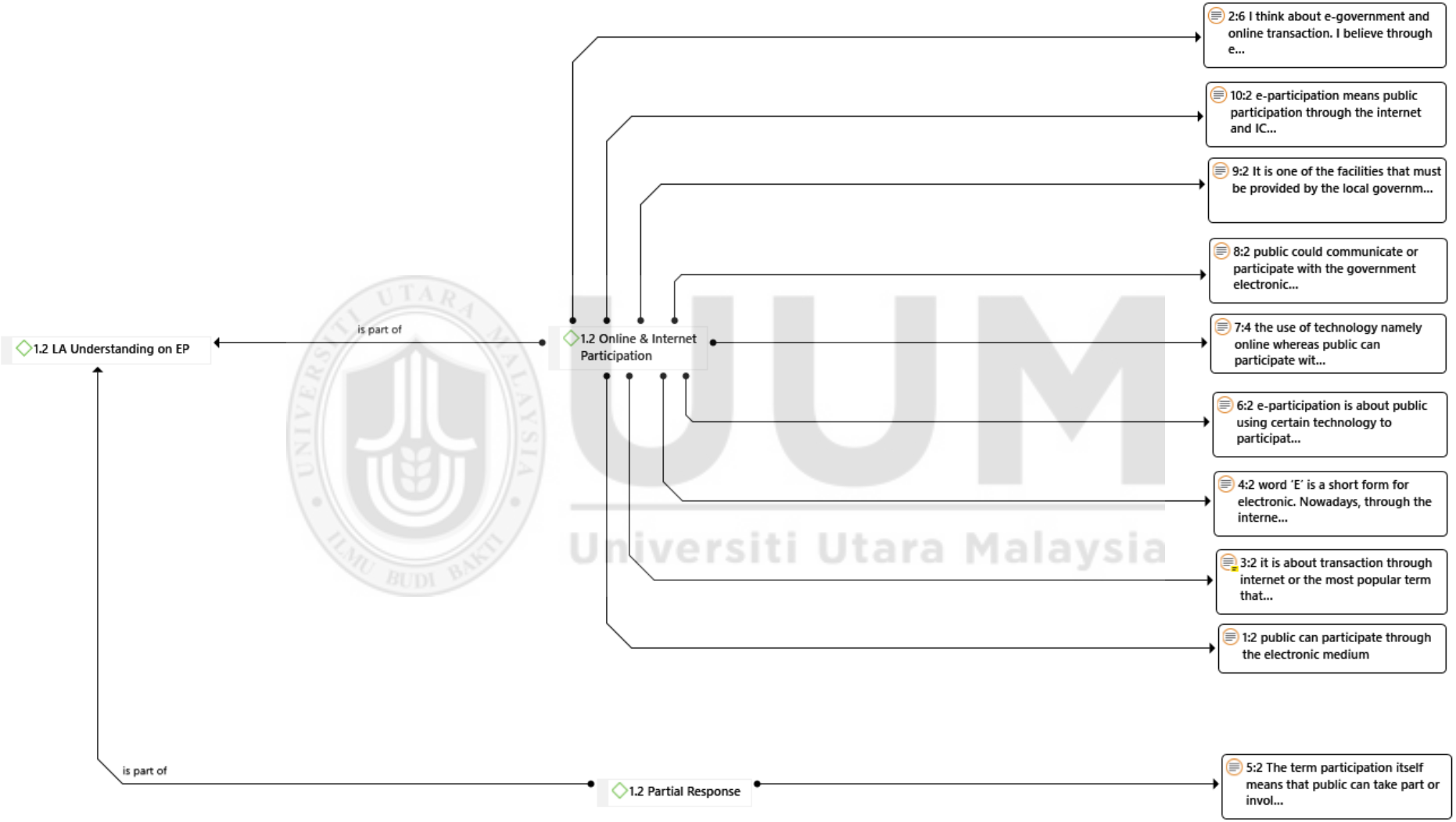

Figure 4.3 Provider's Understanding on e-Participation

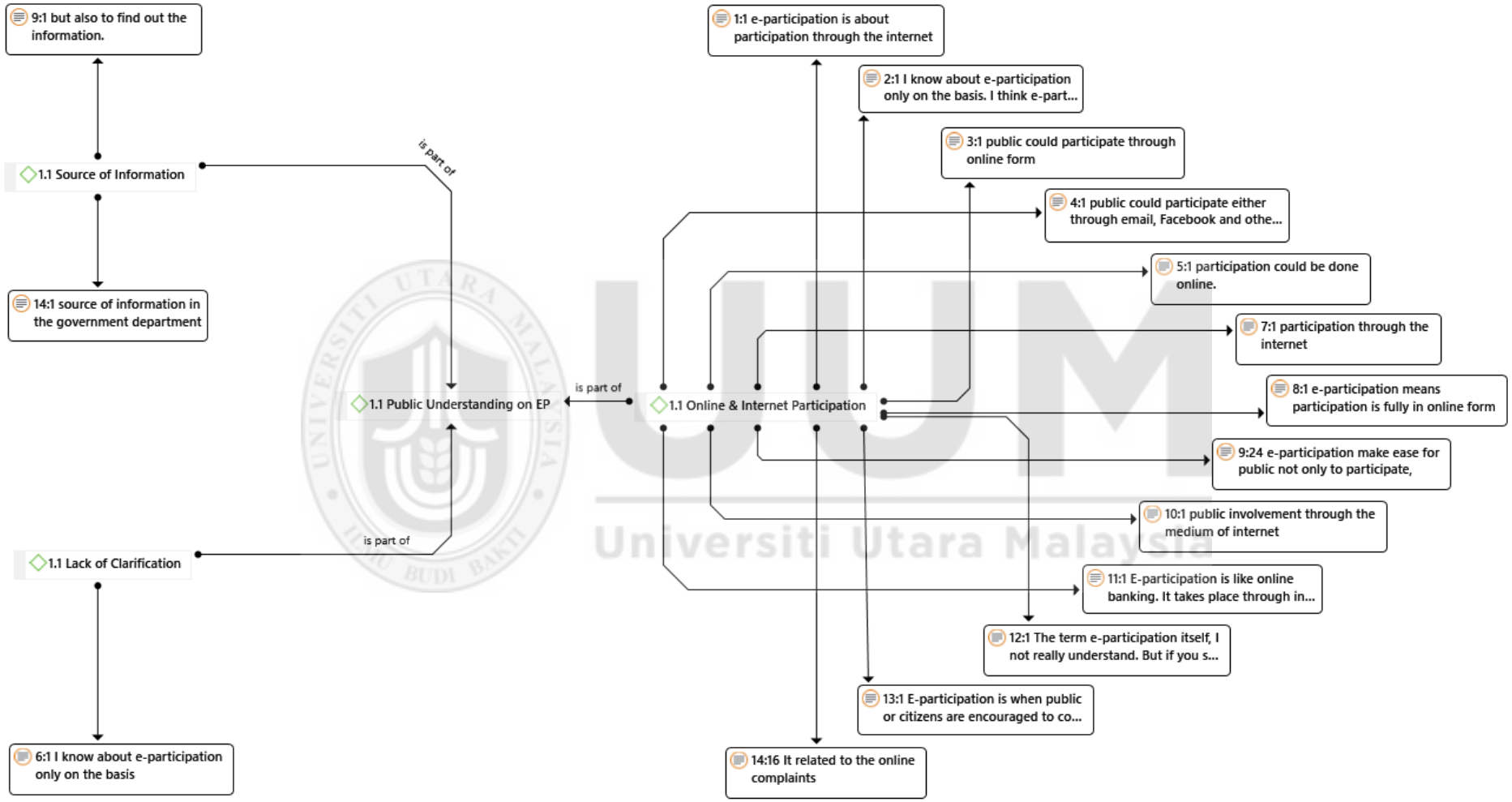

Figure 4.4 Public's Understanding on e-Participation

4.2.3 Finding out on E-Participation

Figure 4.5 below shows how the public informants found out about e-participation. The informant's knowledge and understanding are derived from the internet and various media and their reading, working field, and experiences.

> *"I know about e-participation only on the basic during the learning at the university and through the internet." (Informant 02-001).*
>
> *"I know about it from the media as well as through some reading." (Informant 02-002)*
>
> *"I just have a basic knowledge mostly from the internet, during my study at the university and from my own experience." (Informant 02-003)*
>
> *"Through the internet." (Informant 02-004 & Informant 02-014)*
>
> *"From my reading and through various websites. (Informant 02-005)*
>
> *"Through the watching and reading.." (Informant 02-006)*
>
> *"I got the knowledge through my experience, profession, and through my reading." (Informant 02-007)*
>
> *"Through learning and internet." (Informant 02-008)*
>
> *"Through reading and mass media." (Informant 02-009)*
>
> *"I have the exposure through my reading and internet surfing." (Informant 02-010)*
>
> *From learning during my study and from day-to-day life. (Informant 02-011)*
>
> *Through reading, learning, and experiences. (Informant 02-012)*

Additionally, one of the informants stated that he found out how to make the complaints from the information disseminated by the local government.

> *"…there is also notification by the local government about the complaint that could be done through phone or email." (Informant 02-006)*

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In the meantime, one of the informants might have been misinterpreted the question as she declared that she hardly knew about e-participation. She might assume that the researcher had referred to the informant's level of knowledge and understanding.

"I don't really know about e-participation." (Informant 02-013)

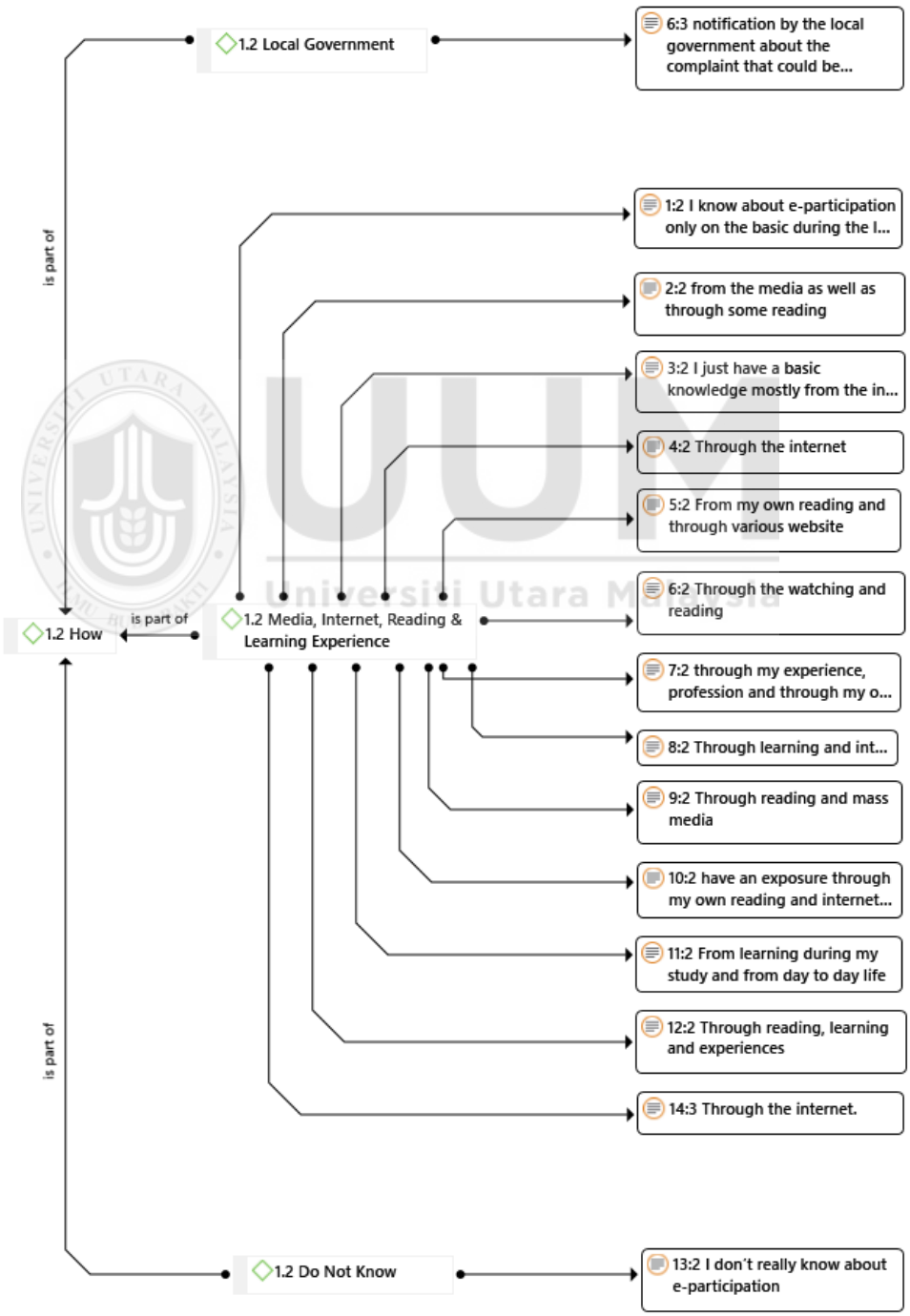

Figure 4.5 How Public Know about E-Participation

4.2.4 Needs of E-Participation

Figure 4.6 and Figure 4.7 below indicate the perspectives from both informants on the need for e-participation in helping to improve public participation in the local government. The analysis revealed that most provider informants perceived that e-participation is significantly needed. But, not all public informants perceived the same way as the provider. The result shows that seven out of ten providers agreed that e-participation is necessary because public participation would be much more effective. The communication process between the public and the local council would be much more convenient, easier, and faster. The people could easily communicate their problems, and the local council could also take immediate action. All the responses were remarked as follows:

> *"Of course, it is really a need to help the public participate and communicate with the council much easier and faster." (Informant 01-001)*
>
> *"Surely, there is a need for an e-participation platform. The council must provide the e-participation platform because it would be easier for the public to channel their opinion. Without any e-participation platform, it burdens the public to voice their problem and the council from taking any quick action. Thus, I strongly agree that the e-participation platform is significant and needed in helping to create effective public participation in the local government." (Informant 01-002)*
>
> *"Yes, surely there is a need to engage with the public." (Informant 01-003)*
>
> *"I strongly believe that there is a very high requirement of e-participation. It is a need because it will help the public to communicate with the local government much easier and quicker." (Informant 01-005)*
>
> *"It is a good medium in helping the public participation process become more effective." (Informant 01-007)*
>
> *"For sure there is a need on e-participation platform because it makes public participation much easier, In the meantime, it much more convenient and time-saving." (Informant 01-009)*

"Public could participate easily and much faster than traditional medium." (Informant 01-010)

Meanwhile, three from each group of informants perceived that e-participation is needed and necessary in the present time. Align with the advancement of the current technology, the internet, online medium, and smartphones were extensively used by the people most in everything. In addition, most working fields also transform their system, process, and practices through information technology applications. Therefore, the electronic medium is critical to ensure that no one is left behind. All the responses were remarked as follows:

"For me, e-participation is a good tool, and indeed there is a need. Back then, we need the computer to search for anything. But today, most of us have smartphones. So, the work is much easier and quicker. It just depends on us whether we want to participate or not. But then, some people use the internet just for leisure activities. However, I believe in the future, when our people's minds are much more open and we are developed, public participation will increase. But it will take some time. Maybe from 20% will go to 30% and up to 40% and it will gradually increase." (Informant 01-006)

"Yes, surely there is a need. It is because, in today's world, the electronic medium is significant, and without it, we will be left behind. For example, nowadays, most departments use an online system for leave applications and payslips." (Informant 01-008)

"E-participation in today's world is very much needed as a mediator. It aligns with the technological advancement and nowadays, most people use the smartphone with the internet subscription." (Informant 01-010)

"There is a very high requirement now.. nowadays most of the youngsters using the smartphones." (Informant 02-003)

"There is a need because it has an abundance of benefits. It is also appropriate within this era, and it could not be neglected." (Informant 02-009)

"There is a need, especially at present." (Informant 02-011)

Besides, five public informants perceived that e-participation is needed due to its conveniences. Online mediums make everything much easier and faster. Therefore, they could participate and communicate directly with the council anytime and anywhere. The public does not need to trouble themselves to attend the council's office, and they can avoid waiting in the queue as in the traditional mode of participation. In the meantime, the public would easily retrieve any information through online updates. All these were posited by the informants as follows:

> *"I really think it is good because the public could have a quick access with the council in any issues." (Informant 02-002)*
>
> *"E-participation is very much needed because it is fast, easy, and the public shouldn't have to go through an excessive bureaucracy to make the complaint. It is a comfortable platform the public can communicate directly at any time. In fact, technology nowadays plays an essential part in our daily lives and our community. For example, people now communicate, update and spread the news to the community on various events only through WhatsApp Messenger. (Informant 02-007)*
>
> *"Usually, people would have a long queue at the counter for any official affairs. Thus, when the internet is a mediator between the public and government, it makes dealings easy. (Informant 02-009)*
>
> *"Yes, it is most needed because at this moment, everything could be done online, and it is much more convenient. (Informant 02-012)*
>
> *"This platform can be a useful medium for the public to participate in the local government. Personally, the public will use this medium as it is convenient, fast, and safe. (Informant 02-013)*

Next, e-participation is needed because it helps to enhance and accelerate the public participation process, as posited by three of the public informants as follows:

> *"It is one of the mediums that needed because it helps to facilitate the public participation process." (Informant 02-001)*

> *"There is a very high requirement now. It will help to increase public participation because nowadays, most the youngsters using the smartphones." (Informant 02-003)*

> *"There is a need because it is beneficial. It speeds up the participation process." (Informant 02-008)*

In addition, e-participation is needed since it supports expanding the mode of participation and diversifying the medium of communication, as stated by two public informants as follows:

> *"Currently, the need of e-participation is very much important. This is because it diversifies the communication methods with the local government. It extends the multi-way communication channels." (Informant 02-005)*

> *"…it is needed because it diversifies the method." (Informant 02-006)*

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Furthermore, one of the informants clarified that e-participation could not have been relied on as a primary medium because online might not be preferred for some people. But unquestionably, it is needed as an additional medium for public participation. It was remarked by the informant from the provider group as follows:

> *"Absolutely, there is a need for an e-participation platform, and it could be implemented as one additional medium for the public to participate. But it could not be the primary medium because there would be people who love to be online and who are not." (Informant 01-004)*

Although most public informants perceived that e-participation is a good platform and is much needed, two of the informants were concerned that it is beneficial only to the limited group of people, especially the younger generations. It is also applicable only to the related stakeholders and those with the needs. It was remarked as follows:

> *"Certainly, it is a good medium. But this online medium gives much more advantage to the young generation than older generation like me." (Informant 02-006)*

> *"However, it would be one important function only for those who need to participate and to the related stakeholders." (Informant 02-008)*

Besides that, as much as e-participation is needed because it is a good platform, the local government should effectively support the implementation by being highly responsive to the people. For example, one of the public informants remarked this as follows:

> *"It is a good platform to be implemented. However, the main concern is the response from the government. Therefore, if the government could respond quickly, public participation through e-participation would be effective." (Informant 02-004)*

Among all the public informants, only one of the informants perceived differently. She disagreed on the need for e-participation in helping to attain public participation because it is still an inadequate medium. She believed that it would favour only those who have the knowledge and awareness, not those with a low level of education. She remarked her response as follows:

> *"For me, the e-participation platform is one of the mediums that is inadequate because it is limited only to the people who know how to use it. But it is hard for those who do not know like my father because of his low educational level. Therefore, it would be a good platform if people have the awareness." (Informant 02-010)*

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However, one of the public informants remarked that she does not know among all the informants.

"I don't know." (Informant 02-014)

To sum up, all the informants from the provider group perceived that e-participation is needed due to the various benefits. Only one of the informants believed that it is needed only as a different medium of participation. But only nine out of fourteen informants perceived that e-participation is significantly needed from the public informants' group. But, not for the other five of the informants. One of the informants was concerned that e-participation might be an inadequate medium. At the same time, the same informant with two other informants believed that its benefits were limited only to the group of people. Meanwhile, one of the informants believed that e-participation would be a good platform if the local government were highly responsive. Last of all, one of the informants appeared to be either lack of knowledge, understanding or was uninterested since she did not respond to this matter.

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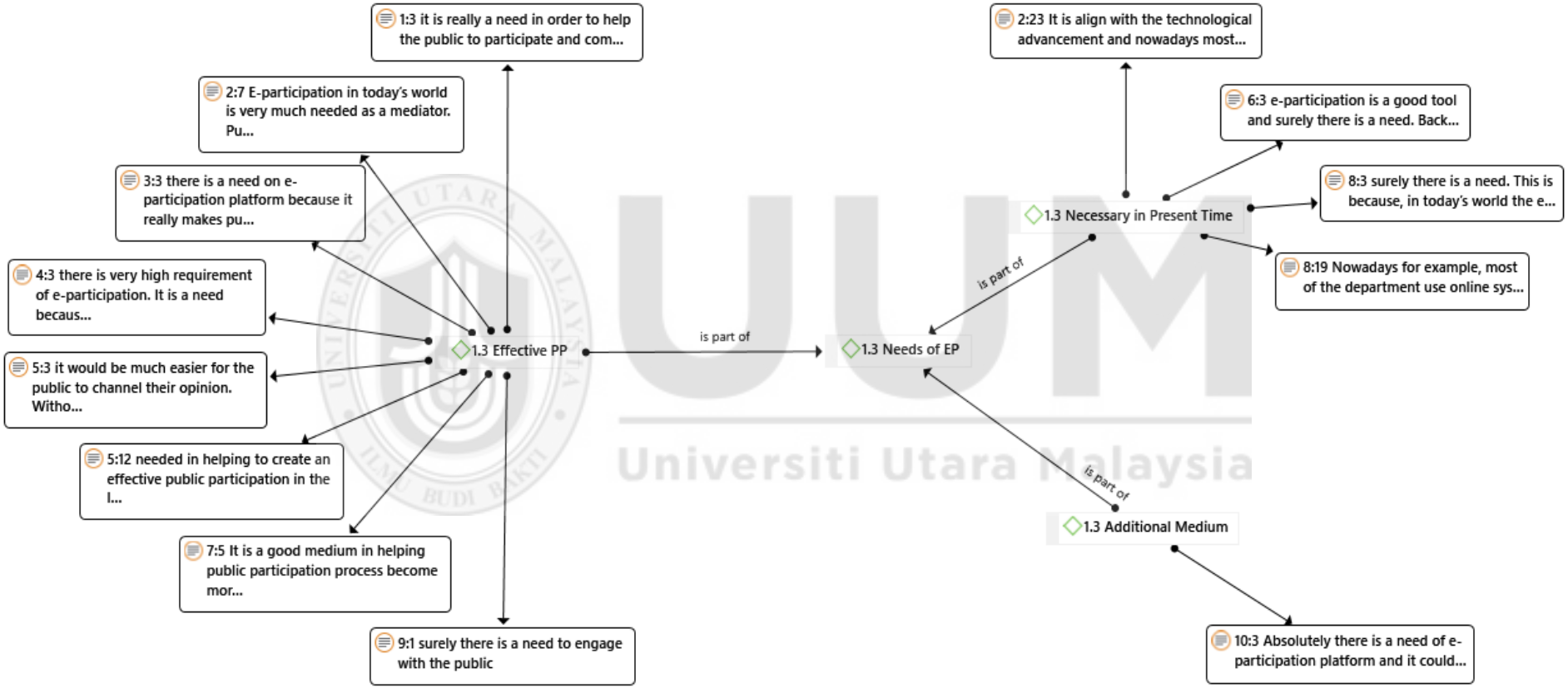

Figure 4.6 Provider's Needs of E-Participation

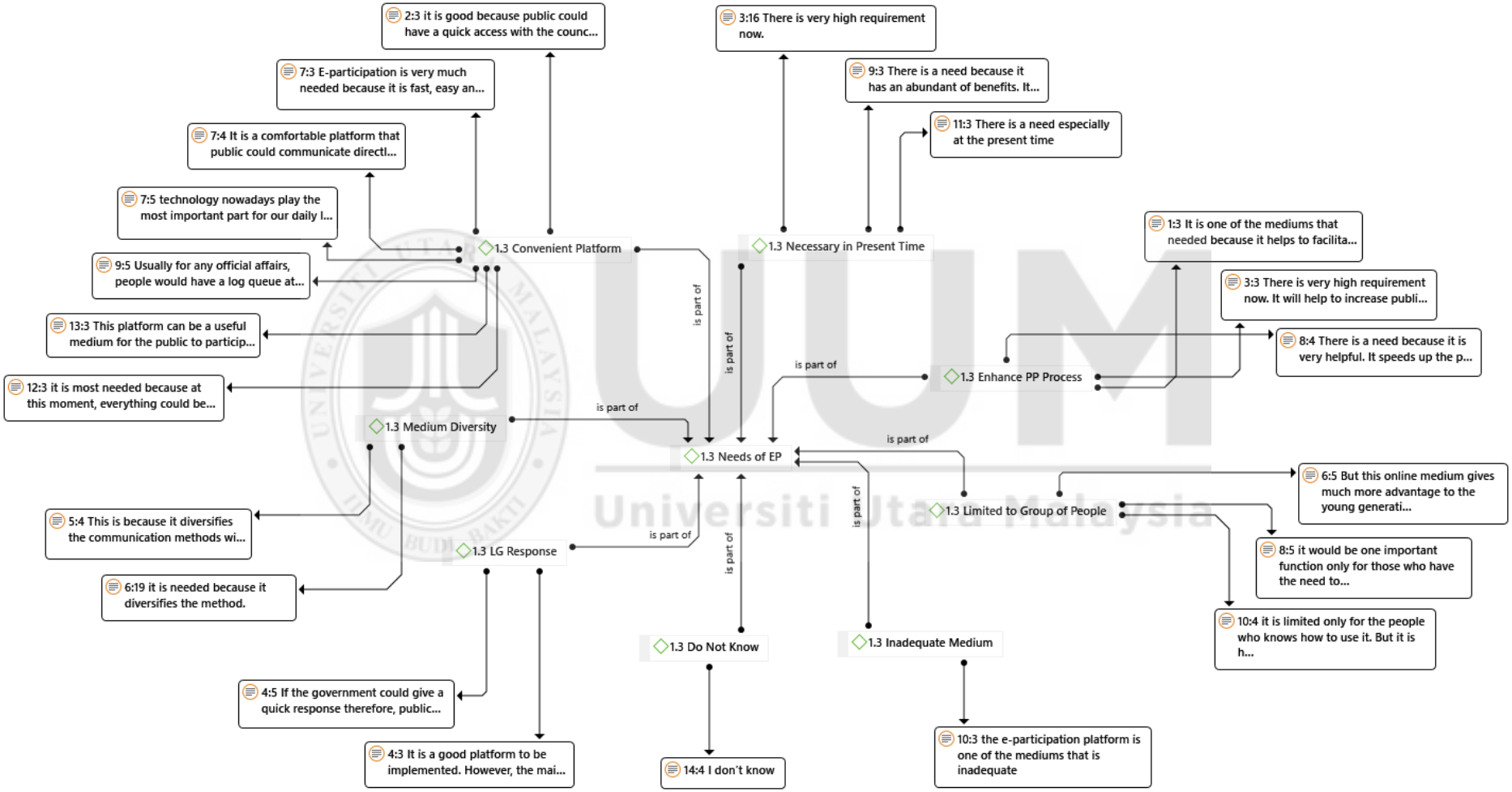

Figure 4.7 Public's Needs of e-Participation

4.2.5 E-Participation in Enhancing Public Participation

This study also examined the outcome and impact of e-participation from the perspectives of both informants. In terms of e-participation in enhancing public participation, the findings are summarised in Figure 4.8 below. The data gathered from the public informants' perspectives showed that most informants agreed that e-participation help enhances public participation. Seven of the informants stated that e-participation is a good and necessary medium that helps the public to communicate and participate with the local authority. Therefore, one of the informants acknowledged that the internet centre for the rural community is one of the best efforts from the government, and it should be continuously improved. Meanwhile, it is also an appropriate medium since most youngsters, especially IT savvy. Additionally, public participation would be much more effective with sophisticated technologies and system improvement. As the informants remarked as follows:

> *"I truly believe that it is a very good medium." (Informant 02-001)*
>
> *"I think e-participation is one of the best mediums for the public to participate. That is why 1Malaysia Internet Centre for the rural community is one of the best efforts from the government, and it should be continuously enhanced." (Informant 02-002)*
>
> *"Yes, I think it is. (Informant 02-003)*
>
> *"E-participation is necessary and very much needed because the public could directly communicate with the local government." (Informant 02-007)*
>
> *"It is a good platform. In today's world, most of the youngsters are IT literate and very close to the gadget. Who knows maybe in the future the technology is much more sophisticated?" (Informant 02-008)*
>
> *"It helps towards the evaluation because it much more systematic and the system is much more upgrade." (Informant 02-009)*
>
> *"Truly, it is a good platform because it could help the public to participate." (Informant 02-011)*

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In the meantime, several informants stated that e-participation would help enhance public participation subject to certain conditions, only if both public and the provider give their full support. The public should have aware of e-participation to participate. At the same time, the provider should help and attract the public to participate by providing them with the necessary tool that is easy to learn and understand. The provider also should be responsive to the public. The detailed responses were remarked as follows:

> *"E-participation would be an effective medium if the local government would give a quick response to the public." (Informant 02-004)*
>
> *"It would be helpful if it is support from both parties." (Informant 02-010)*
>
> *"Truly, it is a good platform because it could help the public to participate. But if there is awareness from the public to use it, it would be very much effective." (Informant 02-011)*
>
> *"It must be user-friendly and interactive." (Informant 02-013)*

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Subsequently, public participation would also be enhanced if the implementation aspect is improved. The informants are strongly believed that e-participation is a great platform. However, it failed to reach a large group of people. Therefore, it certainly needs an effective implementation, as remarked by three of the informants as follows:

> *"Yes, I believe e-participation is a good medium. It's only the implementation aspects that should be improved." (Informant 02-005)*
>
> *"Yes, I think it is a good medium, but it needs a better implementation because it does not reach all groups of people." (Informant 02-006)*
>
> *"It is a good platform if it can be executed to the maximum." (Informant 02-012)*

However, among all the informants, only one informant showed disagreement. Due to the demographic and social background gap, the informant was concerned that e-participation could be complicated and challenging for rural areas.

> *"It is quite burdening the people, especially for those who live in the rural area." (Informant 02-014)*

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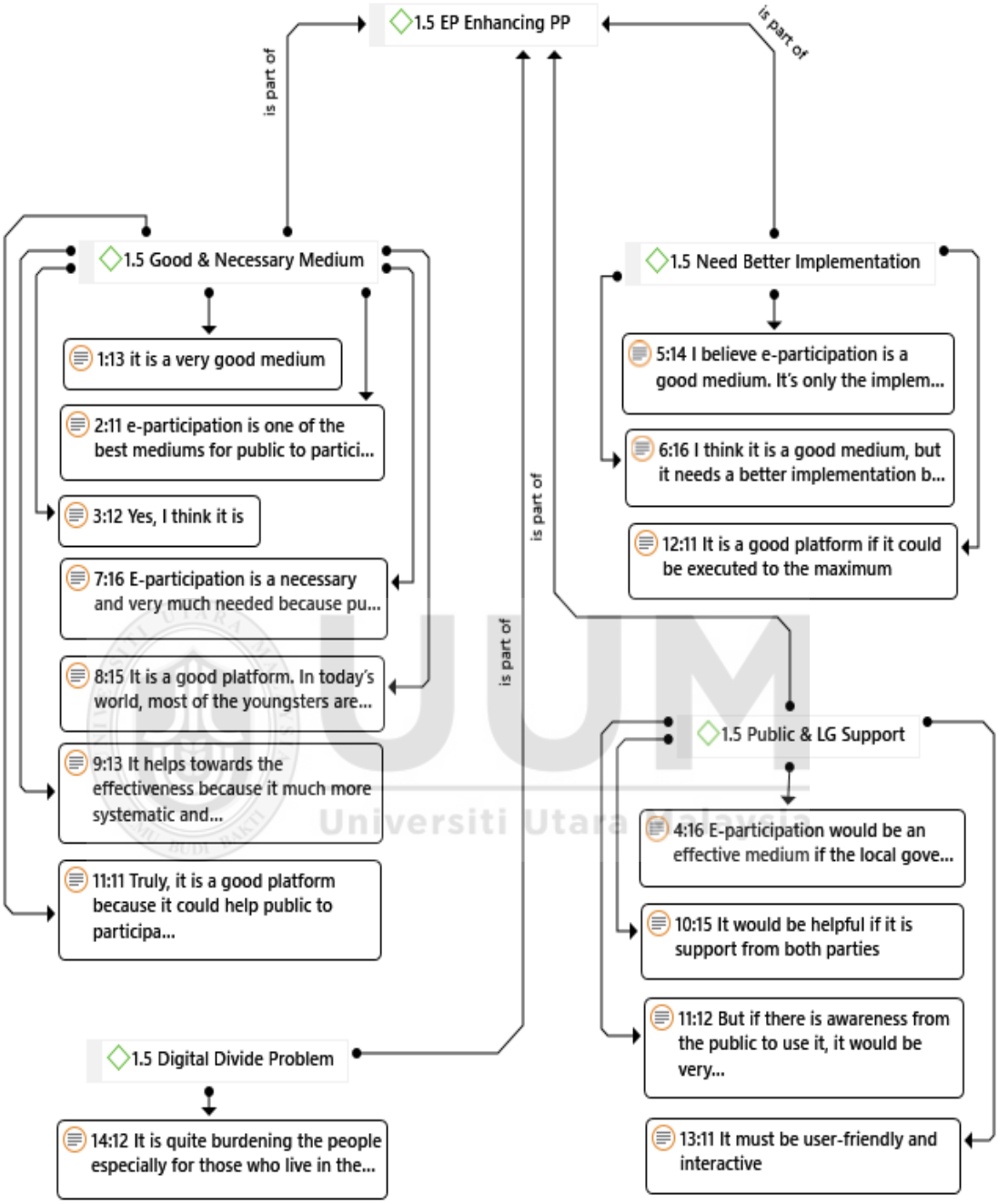

Figure 4.8 Public's Perception on E-Participation Enhancing Public Participation

4.2.6 Expectations of E-Participation

Regarding the expectations of e-participation, both groups pointed out various thoughts, as presented in Figures 4.9 and 4.10 below. One of the informants from the provider group and two from the public group highlighted that they hoped e-participation would help to enhance public participation. With the development of the current technology, the public's limitations and challenges could be conquered. Thus, it helps to open the great opportunity for the public to participate, and the quality of public participation could be improved. This was remarked as follows:

> *"In the future, I hope that public participation will increase. The technology is developed if we compare in the 80s and 90s. Therefore, the public can actively participate. People in a rural area, for example, have the limitation to make complaints and present at the council. But when we much develop and the challenges have been overcome, thus this kind of problem can be avoided. So, the public can easily participate." (Informant 01-006)*
>
> *"I hope e-participation in the local government would help to enhance the quality of public participation as well as the quality of local government services." (Informant 02-001)*
>
> *"I highly support the e-participation effort because it will help to increase the public participation and public does not need to go to the council every time." (Informant 02-012)*

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Then, e-participation is also expected to support an effective engagement. The local council needs active participation from the people because it mainly contributes such valuable input for the council and largely to the town and community development. Therefore, the local council is responsible for ensuring the best facilities are available for the public. Consequently, public participation through e-participation medium would be much more effective and efficient through this cooperative manner. The detailed responses by five providers and one public informant were remarked as follows:

"I hope through e-participation, the public can actively engage with the council to continue giving us valuable input. Why do I say that? It is because, sometimes, the public knows best more than us who work in the council. They can highlight the real issues that we may not know. Public input indirectly could contribute to the overall community and town development." (Informant 01-002)

"I hope public could use e-participation platform and actively engage with the council."(Informant 01-007)

"I wish that the public would be an optimist. They could see the e-participation as one of the cost-effective mediums that facilitate them to participate with the government without being physically present." (Informant 01-008)

"Hopefully that the public can extensively use the e-participation platform provided by the council." (Informant 01-009)

"I expect both parties, the council, and the public could cooperate in making e-participation one of the most efficient methods of participation. Thus, to make this a reality, from our side, we must make sure that our ICT should be available in the very best condition." (Informant 01-010)

"Hopefully, e-participation would be a platform that actively used by the public." (Informant 02-004)

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Besides, the informants also anticipated that e-participation would help to enhance the council's efficiency. Through public input and recommendations, either positive or negative, the local council could take it into their account to help them improve their services. Moreover, as services and performance are improved, it would eventually increase the council revenues. As this was remarked by three of the informants from the provider group as follows:

"E-participation gives the advantages to the council. In one aspect, e-participation helps the council to get the public's recommendation. But on the other aspect, sometimes the public does not help the council. Even though there are negative sides of e-participation, the council could take that as advice to improve our services. It is because e-participation also contributes a lot of positive sides." (Informant 01-003)

"I hope that e-participation from the public would help increase the department's efficiency." (Informant 01-004)

"I hope that the public can be involved together with the council. E-participation from the public not only helps to improve the quality of communication and dissemination of the information between public and local government, but indirectly it also helps to increase the revenue." (Informant 01-005)

Furthermore, six public informants expressed their expectations regarding the effective implementation. As e-participation significantly benefits all, the local authority needs to enhance the implementation aspects. Hence, solid and organised implementation is required to effectively meet the needs of the people and achieve a successful e-participation adoption. It was remarked as follows:

"I hope e-participation will benefit all. But the implementation should be enhanced." (Informant 02-003)

"I hope the implementation of e-participation should be enhanced." (Informant 02-006)

"The e-participation implementation in the local government should be enhanced. I believe the public knows the importance of e-participation. Still, they might not have the knowledge how to operate the technology, or they do not have the facilities to participate especially for the public in the rural area." (Informant 02-007)

"I hope the e-participation effort in the local government should be continued." (Informant 02-009)

"I hope the e-participation could be fully implemented. For example, any form that downloaded could be sent straight away. Not like now, when it needs to submit to the council physically." (Informant 02-011)

"It should be systematically implemented." (Informant 02-014)

In addition, the local authority is also expected to constantly promote and update the required information on e-participation and the availability of the related medium. The necessary information enables the public to acknowledge and understand. At the same

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time, public participation through electronic mediums could be encouraged. It was remarked by four of the public informants as follows:

> *"I hope this medium would make known by the public so that the society would enjoy the benefit." (Informant 02-002)*
>
> *"I hope the local government could update their services and announce to the public so that everybody could access it." (Informant 02-005)*
>
> *"I believe the public knows the importance of e-participation, but they might not know how to operate the technology or do not have the facilities to participate, especially for the public in the rural area." (Informant 02-007)*
>
> *"Hopefully, the government could provide a variety medium of participation and announce to the people so that everybody could be involved. I see that there is no promotion from the government on the medium of participation such as WhatsApp, or maybe I am not aware of that." (Informant 02-010)*

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Moreover, as e-participation medium help to improve the participation from the public, suppose it would also help the local government enhance their quality of service and response. Thus, the local authority needs to give fast feedback and prompt action on the public complaints. These responses were remarked by two of the informants as follows:

> *"Hopefully, e-participation in the local government would help to enhance the quality of public participation as well as the quality of local government services." (Informant 02-001)*
>
> *"The action is taken immediately and seriously once any feedback from the public is given." (Informant 02-013)*

In the meantime, one of the public informants posited that e-participation should capture the public interest. It is because different people own different perceptions and

preferences. Therefore, the local government website should be interesting and interactive to attract the public to participate intuitively. This was remarked as follows:

> *"E-participation should psychologically draw people's attention. So, the website should be interactive, and the presentation should be interesting because people's perspective is different." (Informant 02-008)*

Apart from this, two providers voiced their concern about the appropriate use of e-participation medium. Although e-participation medium was made available for the public and the public has the freedom to use it, the public is likely to express their disapproval and openly condemn the council rather than share their real problem appropriately. So, the local authority expected the public to consider and avoid misbehaving. This was remarked as follows:

> *"I hope the public can use the services provided in the right manner. From what I see, I noticed one main problem regarding participation online or on the internet. The public tends to criticise the council than voice out their problem. That is not the right way to do it. The public could peacefully share their problem without bringing down the council with inappropriate comment." (Informant 01-001)*

> *"From the public side, they should appropriately use the facilities." (Informant 01-010)*

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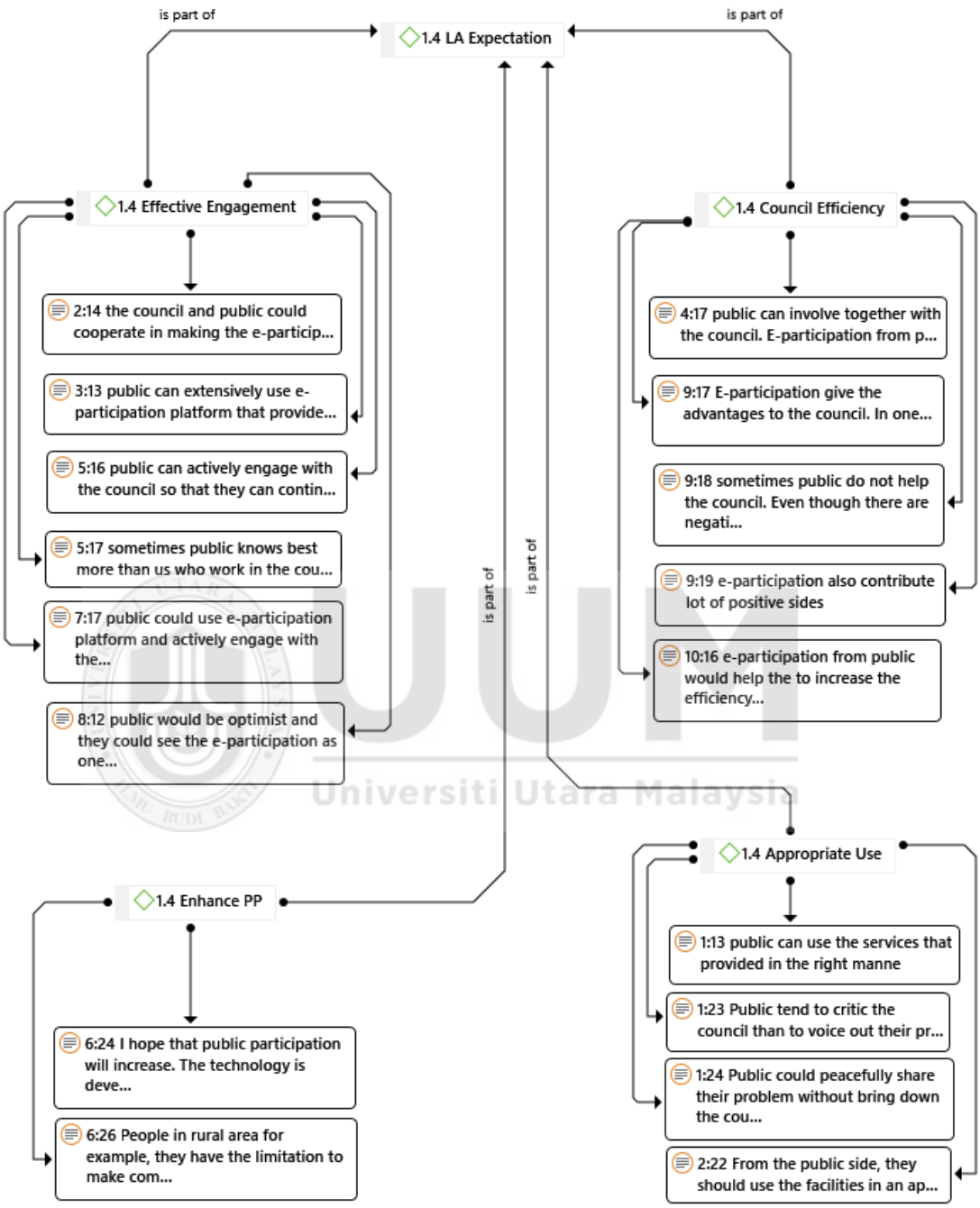

Figure 4.9 Provider's Expectations on E-Participation

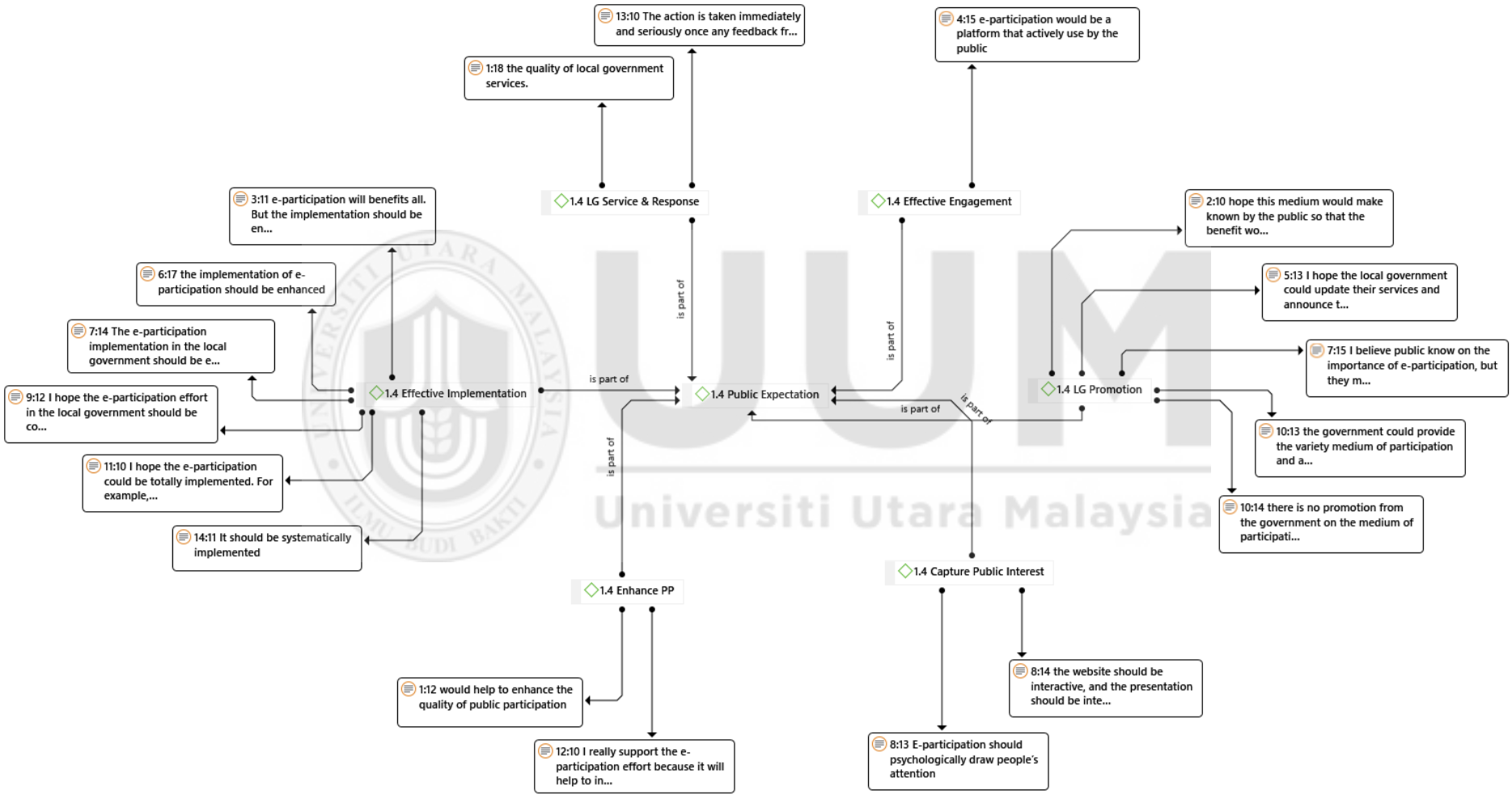

Figure 4.10 Public's Expectations on e-Participation

4.2.7 E-Participation for Effective Service

The outcome and impact of e-participation implementation from the perspective of the provider group were also examined. From the interview, the informants were asked whether e-participation helped them act and serve the public much more effectively. Figure 4.11 below illustrates the summary of the findings. The findings revealed that all the informants perceived that e-participation significantly helped them deliver the services to the public efficiently and effectively. The local authority could monitor the public complaints anywhere outside the workplace and provide much faster feedback. In terms of non-technical issues especially, the public complaints could be immediately extended to the responsible department and solved immediately. In the meantime, e-participation also offers an effective two-way communication whereby the public opinion and feedback were highly appreciated by the local authority to serve them in return with much effective and efficient services. However, two of the informants further emphasised for effective and efficient service, the e-participation implementation itself must be effective, whereby it should be well utilised and well administered. The local authority also should be very responsive to all public complaints. All detailed responses were remarked as follows:

> *"For me, it does, and it's really helpful. For example, when I worked outside the office, I still got the information and knew what was happening through WhatsApp. After that, I can straight away channel the problem to the responsible department. Usually, the problem that is not critical and does not involve the technical issue could be solved in no time." (Informant 01-001)*
>
> *"Yes, it helps the authority take fast action on the public's complaint." (Informant 01-002)*
>
> *"E-participation not only helps the council to act and serve the public effectively…" (Informant 01-003)*
>
> *"Yes, if it is successfully implemented, it would help us give the services much more efficiently." (Informant 01-004)*

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"I believe it does. E-participation will help the authority act and serve the public much more effectively, but on one condition, the authority should be very responsive towards public complaints. As we know, e-participation is one of the tools that help the public to channel their opinion or problems easily. Thus, if it is not well used and managed, what is the difference with the traditional method of participation?" (Informant 01-005)

"Yes, it does. E-participation offers an effective two-way communication. Council as the service provider needs feedback from the public to serve the public." (Informant 01-006)

"Yes, e-participation really helps the council to act fast. For example, in the aid distribution programme of e-Kasih, previously, the data was recorded manually. So, it is makes everything slow and time-consuming." (Informant 01-007)

"We at the council will instantly receive their complaint. So, it much effective and efficient for the public as well as to the council." (Informant 01-009)

"I can say it is very helpful for the local government authority to act more effectively. For example, previously, we don't have WhatsApp. Therefore, the feedback is slow. But now, we can give feedback much faster." (Informant 01-008)

"Yes, for me, it helps the council to respond to the problem of the public in much effective way." (Informant 01-010)

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In the meantime, two of the informants posited that e-participation is also convenient to the public. The public could communicate their problem easily and effectively online without being physically present at the council. This was remarked as follows:

"…it also helps the public to channel their problem in much more effective way." (Informant 01-003)

"Yes, it does. Public can channel their problem directly through an online platform without having present at the council." (Informant 01-009)

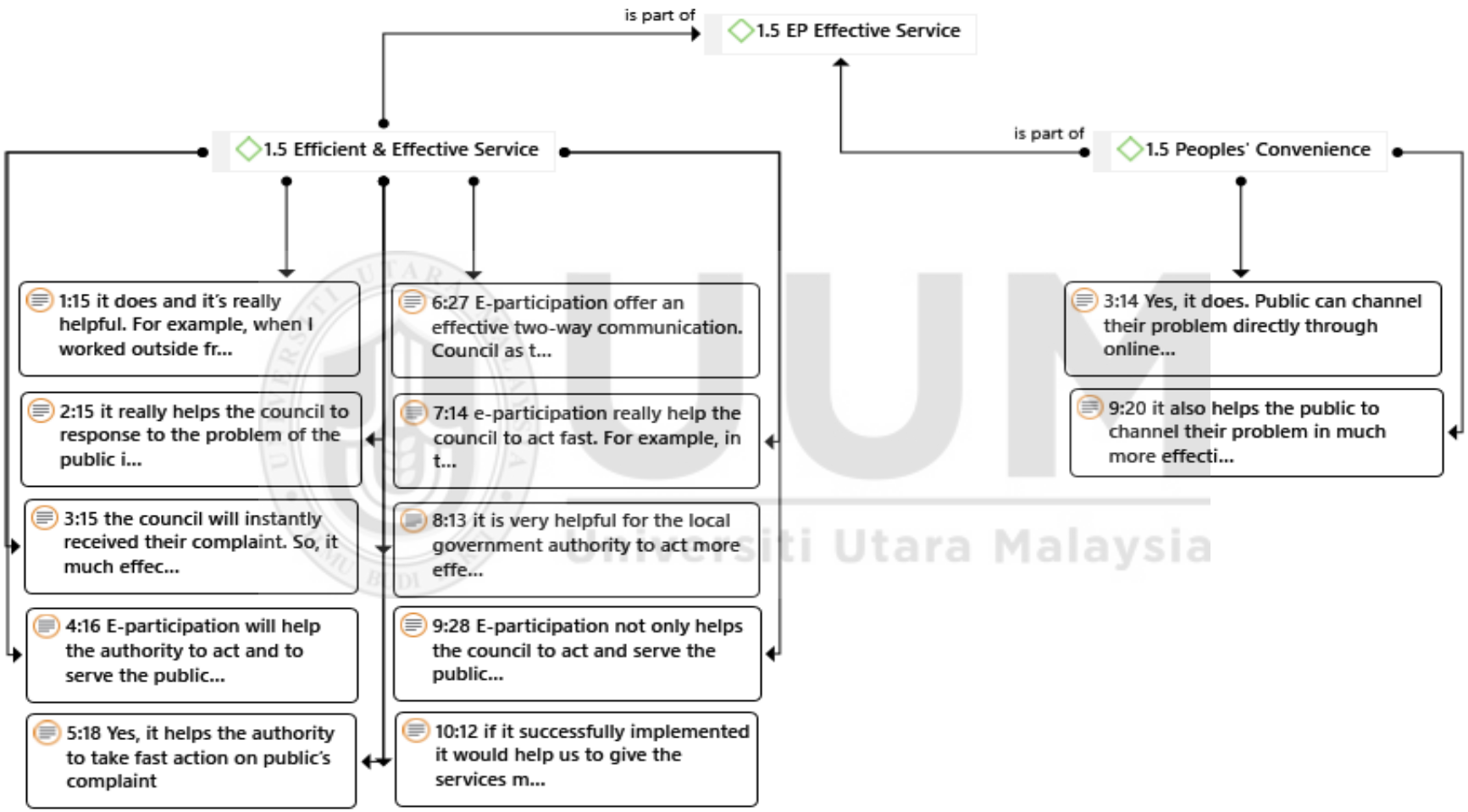

Figure 4.11 Provider's Perception on E-Participation for Effective Service

4.2.8 E-Participation in Improving Future Environment

The informants from the provider group have also been asked whether e-participation has a positive impact in helping to improve a new future environment for both provider and public. The summary of the findings presented in Figure 4.12 below discovered that all the informants agreed that e-participation help improves a good environment. In the meantime, one of the informants further posited that if both local authority and public become involved and play their part effectively in e-participation, there would be a tremendous potential to develop a new future environment. All the responses were remarked as follows:

> *"Yes, it does." (Informant 01-001, 01-003 & 01-004)*
>
> *"Yes, absolutely." (Informant 01-002)*
>
> *"Yes, there would be huge potential to improve a new future environment if both authority and the public play their role effectively in e-participation." (Informant 01-005)*
>
> *"Yes, it really does." (Informant 01-006, 01-007 & 01-009)*
>
> *"Yes, it also helps to improve a good environment." (Informant 01-008)*
>
> *"Yes, it does. It really gives a good impact for the council and public." (Informant 01-010)*

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Furthermore, it also helps to increase the local council competencies and contribute to a better public service, as remarked by one of the informants as follows:

> *"It will improve the local government capabilities and create better public service." (Informant 01-005)*

Moreover, e-participation also helps to establish a positive environment through effective two-way communication. This was remarked by one of the informants as follows:

> *"Yes, it creates a good environment for two-way communications." (Informant 01-003)*

Besides, e-participation also significantly contributes to a new future environment as it helps avoid conflict between the local authority and the public. According to the informant, the traditional method of participation requires the provider to respond to all complaints in public or person to person. Consequently, when some people were not in their best conditions, sometimes it pressured both parties. Due to that, it will create greater conflict. Yet, e-participation help to avoid any conflict because it also helps the providers to provide an appropriate response to the public. For example, the provider could discuss with the right person in the department and refer to the accurate source of information for any issues before giving any feedback. Accordingly, online communication through e-participation certainly help to prevent any disputes or disagreement and create much pleasant and conducive environment between provider and public, as remarked by the informant as follows:

> *"Yes. It really does. It is because, in the traditional mode of participation, when an issue arises, the council should respond to it directly. At that time, sometimes, when both parties are not in a good mood, it will create great tension. However, in e-participation, the staff could kindly reply after discussing with others. It helps to avoid the wrong answer with insufficient sources. Therefore, when there is no face-to-face communication, it helps avoid the prolonged conflict and creates a much friendly environment between the public and council." (Informant 01-006)*

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Overall, even though only a few informants support their perception with additional explanation, all of them agreed that e-participation help creates and improve the new future environment for both provider and the public.

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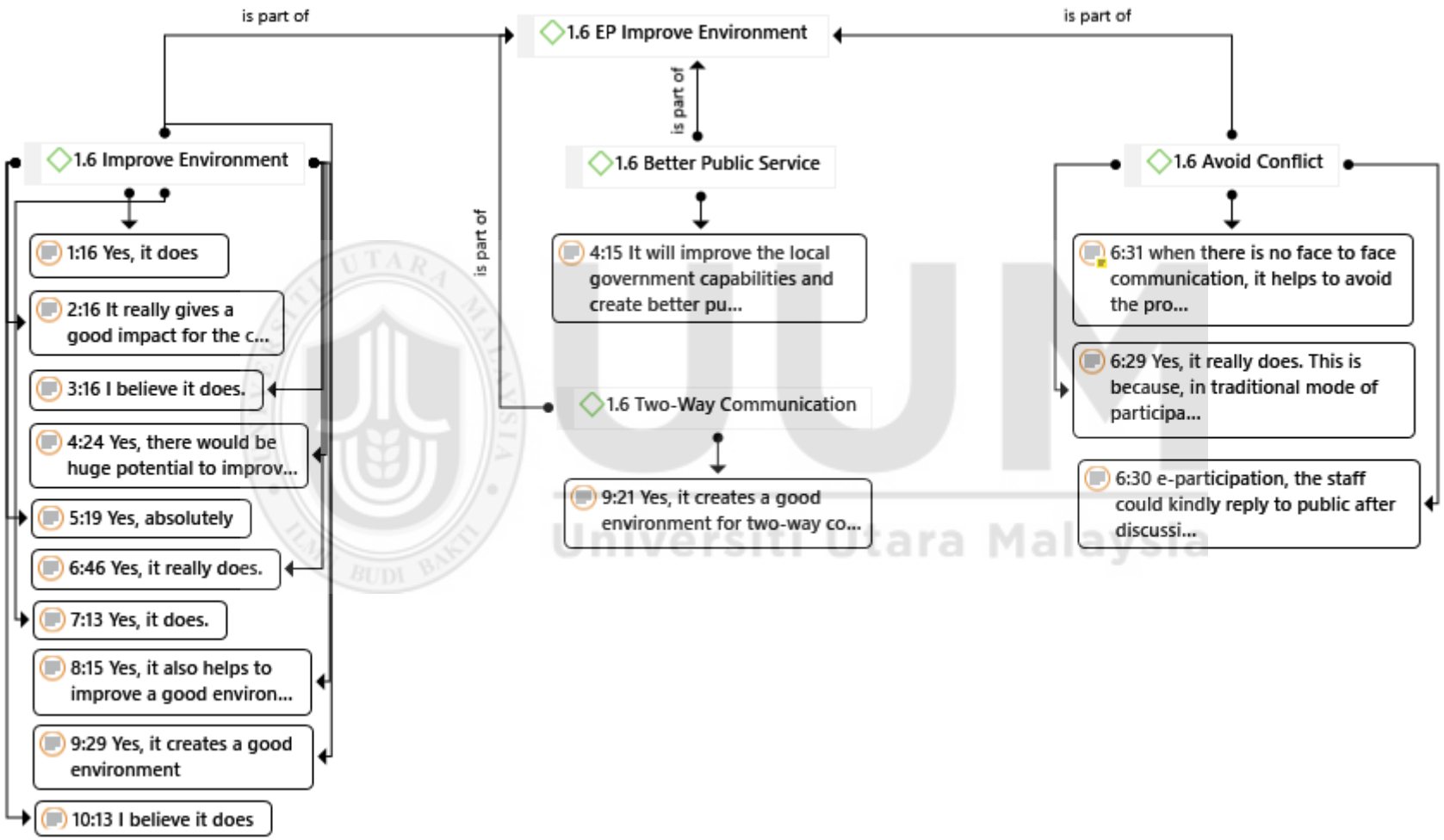

Figure 4.12 Provider's Perception on e-Participation for New Future Environment

4.3 The Implementation of E-Participation

This section discusses the findings concerning the e-participation implementation at Alor Setar City Council. A summary of the findings is presented in Figure 4.13 below, showing the various aspects of the e-participation implementation at the Alor Setar City Council from both sides of the group of informants. It is essential to examine the implementation aspects from the perspectives of the public as the users and the local authority as the provider of e-participation. Thereby a concrete understanding could be achieved. Accordingly, the detailed breakdown of the interviews responses for this research question is provided in Table 4.3.

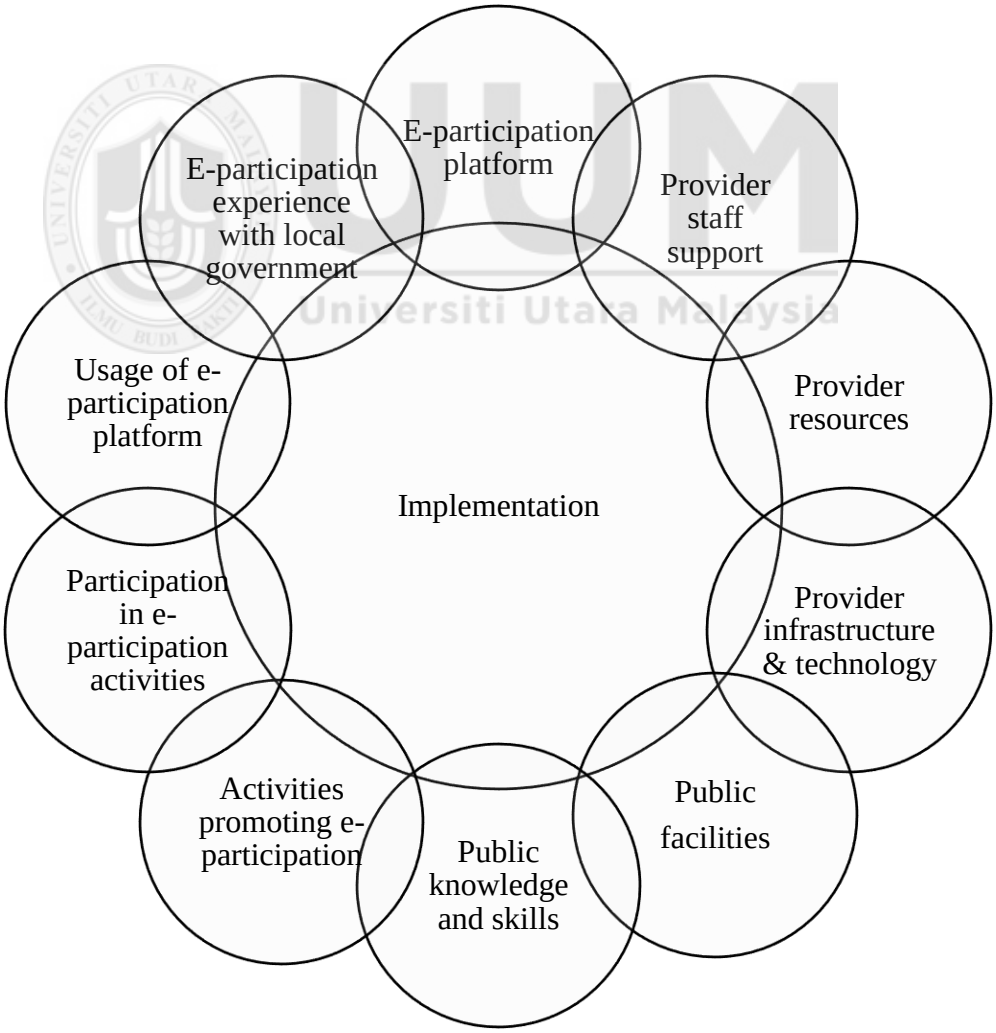

Figure 4.13 Implementation of E-Participation

Table 4.3
Findings on the Implementation of E-Participation

Theme	Aspect	Number of times mentioned	Who mentioned
E-participation platform	Various medium	19	01-001, 01-002, 01-003, 01-004, 01-005, 01-006, 01-007, 01-008, 01-009, 01-010, 02-001, 02-002, 02-004, 02-005, 02-006, 02-007, 02-008, 02-009, 02-011
	e-Aduan	2	02-010, 02-012
	e-Cakna	1	01-003
	e-Services	5	01-005, 01-009, 02-003, 02-005, 02-008
	Inactive e-Forum	4	01-001, 01-005, 01-008, 02-007
	Uninformed WhatsApp	1	01-006
	Other government agencies	1	02-013
	Not sure	1	02-014
Provider's staff support	Staff support	7	01-001, 01-005 01-006, 01-007, 01-008
	Older staff lack support	4	01-002, 01-003, 01-009, 01-010
	IT illiterate staff	4	01-003
	Staff internal dissatisfaction	3	01-006
Provider's resources	Adequate resources	3	01-001, 01-003 01-006
	Inadequate resources	9	01-002, 01-005, 01-006, 01-007, 01-008, 01-009, 01-010
	Intra organization problem	3	01-004
	Strengthen the resources	2	01-002
	Time constraint	1	01-007
	Unsupportive older staff	1	01-010
	Unreceptive staff	2	01-002

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Theme	Aspect	Number of times mentioned	Who mentioned
Provider's infrastructure and technology	Infrastructure and technology availability	10	01-001, 01-002, 01-003, 01-005, 01-006, 01-007, 01-008, 01-009, 01-010
	Outdated specifications	4	01-004
	Infrastructure and technology constraints	9	01-001, 01-002, 01-005, 01-006, 01-007, 01-009, 01-010
Public facilities	Computer and internet	13	02-001 - 02-013
	No facilities	1	02-014
Public knowledge and skills	Have knowledge and skills	11	02-001, 02-002, 02-003, 02-004, 02-005, 02-007, 02-008, 02-010, 02-011, 02-012, 02-014
	Do not have knowledge and skills	2	02-006, 02-013
	Know using computer	1	02-009
	Do not know using computer	1	02-006
Activities promoting e-participation	No e-participation activities	15	01-001, 01-002, 01-004, 01-005, 01-006, 01-007, 01-008, 01-009, 02-004, 02-007, 02-009, 02-010, 02-012
	Digital divide programme KPKT	2	01-005
	Information on the council's website and Facebook	5	01-001, 01-004, 01-006, 01-010
	Campaign	1	02-009
	Corporate unit responsibilities	1	01-003
	Online business activities	1	02-007
	Entrepreneurship Workshop	1	02-010
	Do not know	9	02-001, 02-002, 02-003, 02-005, 02-006, 02-008, 02-011, 02-013, 02-014

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Theme	Aspect	Number of times mentioned	Who mentioned
Participation in e-participation activities	Not related	16	01-003, 01-004, 01-007, 01-008, 01-009, 02-001, 02-002, 02-003, 02-004, 02-005, 02-006, 02-008, 02-010, 02-011, 02-012, 014
	No participation	3	02-007, 02-009, 02-013
	Active and interested public	5	01-002, 01-005, 01-006, 01-010
	Target group	2	01-001, 01-010
Usage of e-participation platform	Actively used	9	01-001, 01-002, 01-003, 01-004, 01-005, 01-006, 01-007, 01-008, 01-010
	Most popular medium	2	01-002, 01-005
	Inactive e-Forum	1	01-005
	Low e-Payment	2	01-009
E-participation experience with local government	e-Participation experience	5	02-001, 02-007, 02-010
	Never participate	11	02-002, 02-003, 02-004, 02-005, 02-006, 02-008, 02-009, 02-011, 02-012, 02-013
	e-Services platform	5	02-003, 02-004, 02-005, 02-008, 02-014
	Other governmental agencies	1	02-012
	Traditional participation	3	02-004, 02-006, 02-010

4.3.1 E-Participation Platform

The e-participation implementation encompasses various aspects. One of them is the e-participation platform. Figure 4.14 and Figure 4.15 below present the findings from both groups of informants regarding the e-participation platform. All the informants

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from the provider group highlighted several e-participation platforms provided by the local authority, among the available platforms, including email, e-Aduan, Facebook, and WhatsApp. Only one of the providers acknowledge the Telegram application. However, most providers do not recognise the availability of Instagram and Twitter on the council's website (Alor Setar City Council, 2019). Meanwhile, eight public informants indicated their knowledge of e-participation platforms, namely email and e-Aduan. On the other hand, even though one of the informants did not recognise these two platforms as other informants, she was the only one acknowledged on WhatsApp, and with five other informants, the Facebook application was also identified. Additionally, the forum application was recognised by one of the public informants. All these were remarked as follows:

> *"For now, we have the e-Aduan and WhatsApp." (Informant 01-001)*
>
> *"The council had provided email, e-Aduan, WhatsApp and Facebook." (Informant 01-002)*
>
> *"We have WhatsApp, email, Facebook and e-Aduan." (Informant 01-003)*
>
> *"We have email, WhatsApp and e-Aduan. The complaint from e-Aduan that we get generated from the system and sent to us according to the department." (Informant 01-004)*
>
> *"We have e-Aduan, e-Bayar (electronic payment services), Facebook, WhatsApp and Telegram." (Informant 01-005)*
>
> *"From what I know, we have e-Aduan and Facebook." (Informant 01-006)*
>
> *"Currently we have Facebook, WhatsApp, email and e-Aduan." (Informant 01-007)*
>
> *"We have e-Aduan, WhatsApp, email dan Facebook." (Informant 01-008)*
>
> *"Basically, we have email and e-Aduan from the council website. On media social we have Facebook, and the latest one is WhatsApp." (Informant 01-009)*

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"For now, we have email, e-Aduan, Facebook and WhatsApp. Our contact number is 019-5211123." (Informant 01-010)

"From the local government webpage, I know there is an email and e-Aduan that the public could use to send their complaint. Besides, there is also a Facebook page for the public to voice out their opinion." (Informant 02-001)

"Email, forum and online complaint." (Informant 02-002)

"I think they have email, Facebook and online complaint." (Informant 02-004)

"Email, e-Aduan…" (Informant 02-005)

"I think email, online complaints, and Facebook." (Informant 02-00 6)

"I think they have provided the complaint, email and other social media such as Facebook." (Informant 02-007)

"For participation, I think they have email and e-Aduan." (Informant 02-008)

"WhatsApp and Facebook." (Informant 02-009)

"I know there is Facebook, email and e-Aduan only." (Informant 02-011)

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Nevertheless, among all the informants from the provider group, one of them appeared to be unaware of the availability of WhatsApp applications as he responded to the researcher as follows:

"Oh, really? I didn't notice that we also have WhatsApp." (Informant 01-006)

In the meantime, only one of the providers addressed the e-Cakna platform, a mobile web that the public could easily download and file the complaint either in written form or graphic to the local council. The informant claims it is a great application because

all the complaints were systematically managed and directly sent to the responsible local authority. The detailed response was as follows:

> *"Previously, during my visit at Subang Jaya Municipal Council (MPSJ) when I was working at Langkawi, there is one system under the Ministry of Housing and Local Government called e-Cakna. It is a mobile web that the public needs to download and register to make any complaints. The public can send the picture through this application, and the system will detect their coordinates. Then, the system will coordinate and send the complaints to all the local government authorities in Malaysia. It is a good application." (Informant 01-003)*

As highlighted in previous literature, e-Cakna was rebranded as iKepoh. Currently, it is known as i-Tegur, the rebranded version of iKepoh. i-Tegur is an initiative developed by the ministry to facilitate the public's complaints to the local authorities (PBT) through a mobile application. i-Tegur was developed purposely to give the best service to the public and create a good relationship between the PBT and the citizens through a user-friendly channel. Through this channel, the public could easily send their complaints where the government could manage and monitor the complaint effectively. This application also helps the top management of the PBT and Ministry of Urban Wellbeing, Housing and Local Government (KPKT) simplify access to public complaints through the same resources. i-Tegur plays an important function for the public to send their complaint through mobile without physical constraint. It is also responsive in efficiently providing feedback and monitoring the local authority's complaint statistics (KPKT, 2018).

In addition, three of the public informants addressed the e-Services platforms, mostly related to online payment services, including the assessment tax payment. Two provider group informants indicated that the public could make the necessary payment

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through an e-Payment application (e-Bayar). As shown on the official website of the Alor Setar City Council, the e-Payment application was located under the e-Services platform (Alor Setar City Council, 2019). In the meantime, among three of these public informants, one of the informants believed that e-Services platform applicable for a particular individual such as online tender application. However, Mohsin and Raha (2007) underlined that e-services are not part of e-participation. Still, it is one of the applications under the e-government initiative that enables citizens and businesses to conduct transactions electronically. All the responses were remarked as follows:

> *"For our department, we have e-Bayar, which public can make the payment through online." (Informant 01-009)*
>
> *"We have e-Bayar (electronic payment services)…" (Informant 01-005)*
>
> *"e-Services is for certain group people. For example, in term of tender application." (Informant 02-003)*
>
> *"…and e-Services such as the assessment tax." (Informant 02-005)*
>
> *"Another platform is more towards e-Services." (Informant 02-008)*

Subsequently, while one public informant believed in the availability of the online forum, one other informant, on the other hand, expressed her uncertainty. However, three of the informants from the provider group confirmed that the e-Forum platform on the portal was inactive. As remarked by the informants:

> *"However, I'm not sure about the forum." (Informant 02-007)*
>
> *"e-Forum that provided on the council website is not actively used." (Informant 01-001)*
>
> *"We also have e-Forum, but it was not actively used." (Informant 01-005)*
>
> *"We also have e-Forum, but it is not active." (Informant 01-008)*

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Besides, among the public informants, two informants stated that e-Aduan was the only platform they could recognise. One of them had the experience of using it other than the available platform. These were remarked by the informants as follows:

> *"I only know about the e-Aduan because I have been used it. I don't know about WhatsApp or another platform." (Informant 02-010)*
>
> *"I think through the council website, and they do have the e-Aduan." (Informant 02-012)*

On the other hand, two informants appeared to lack knowledge and understanding when one of them declared that she was unsure. Meanwhile, another informant mistakenly stated that the e-participation platform includes government agencies and programs.

> *"KPDNKK, Rakan Cop, SADA." (Informant 02-013)*
>
> *"I'm not sure." (Informant 02-014)*

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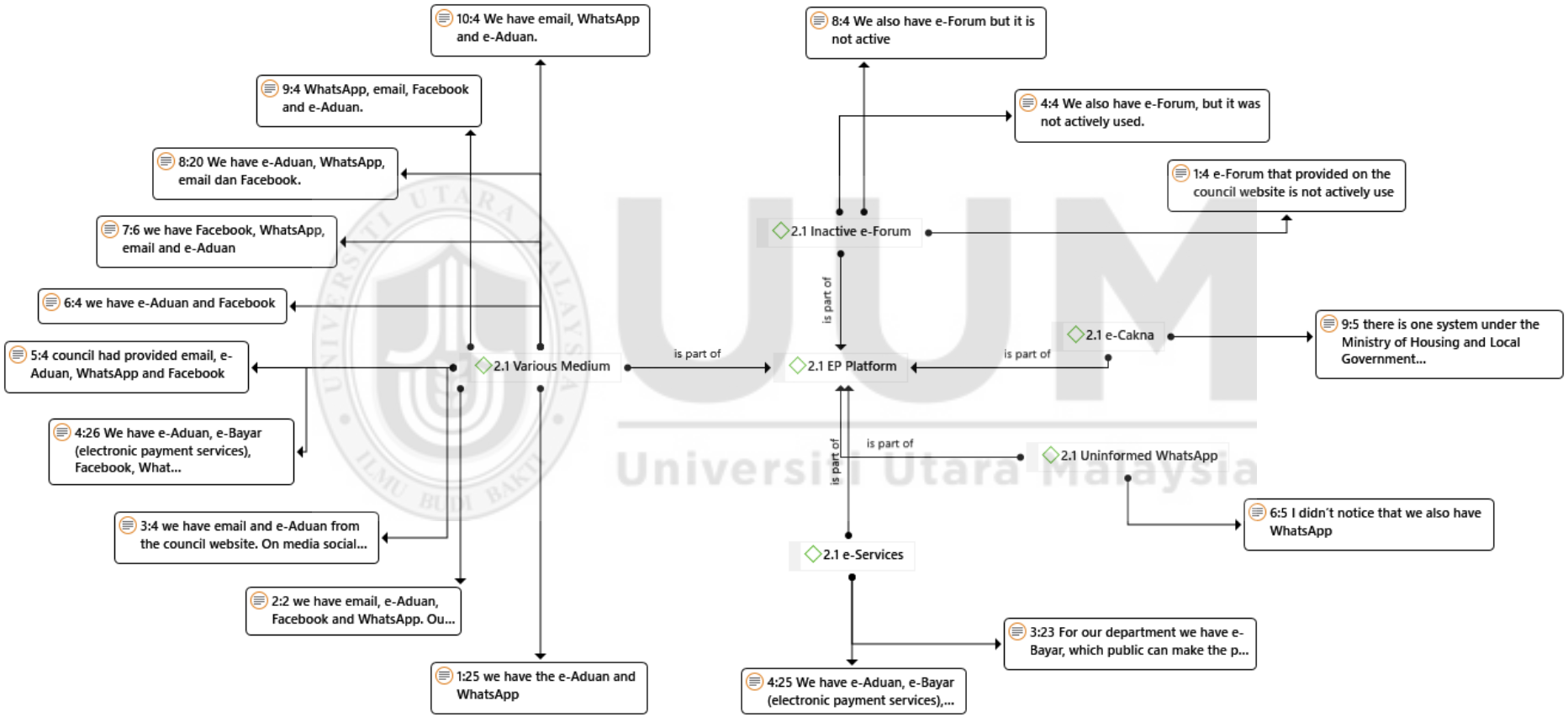

Figure 4.14 Provider's E-Participation Platform

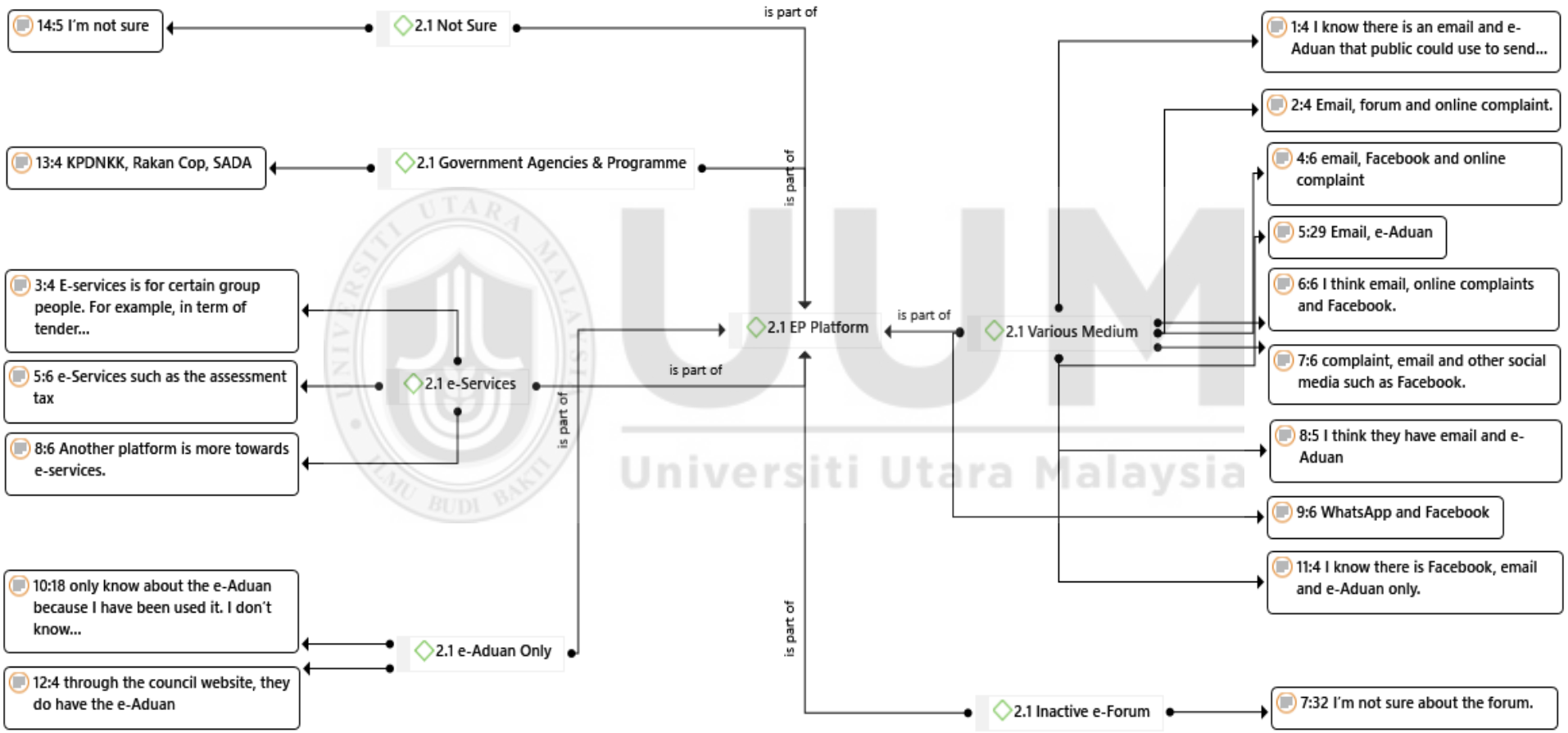

Figure 4.15 Public's Perception on E-Participation Platform

4.3.2 Provider's Staff Support

The local council, as the provider, plays a significant role in supporting the successful e-participation implementation. Therefore, it is essential to know how far the staff at the local council had been involved in supporting the e-participation implementation effort. Figure 4.16 below illustrates the summary of the findings. Results from the analysis showed that out of all ten informants, one of the informants believed that the staff was currently in the direction towards supporting the e-participation. Meanwhile, five other informants concurred that the staff had shown their support in e-participation since they had the necessary training on the ICT and appropriate knowledge and awareness in handling the e-participation platform. Besides, some staff is also concerned about shifting the manual practices commonly used in the council to online practices. The detailed responses were remarked by the informants as follows:

> *"From my knowledge, all the staff support the e-participation effort because they have an exposure and awareness regarding the subject matter and know about the e-Aduan and WhatsApp application for the public to participate." (Informant 01-001)*

> *"As far as I'm concerned, the staff are now going towards supporting the e-participation." (Informant 01-002)*

> *"From my perspective with current circumstances, I believe that the staff supports the e-participation effort. They also have the necessary knowledge because they have been given appropriate training on the ICT." (Informant 01-005)*

> *"I believe there is no issue with the staff because they know. The staff already complained that some of the services should be done online, but it is still done manually. Even for any department that did it online, the form still needs to be filled out. Maybe, commonly people are comfortable with that practices. For example, in most departments, we keep the hard copy and soft copy records for reference and the audit purposes." (Informant 01-006)*

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"Basically, the staff shows their support towards e-participation because they have been given appropriate training. For example, in the council, we have the e-Kasih, a programme under the Ministry of Housing and Local Government that aims to eradicate urban poverty. In this programme, the needy people will be assisted, but first, they must register online, and the staff will update the system. However, most other procedures still have been done manually than online." (Informant 01-007)

"I can see that all the staff support the e-participation because they do know and they know to operate the e-Aduan." (Informant 01-008)

As the staff showed their support, they expressed dissatisfaction with the council's low internet access. As a result, the staff wasted their valuable time in the day-to-day activities, especially during the peak time when many users logged on at once, causing the slow internet connection. Therefore, unreliable internet access within the organisation affects how the council staff communicates and performs their work. This response was addressed by one of the informants as follows:

"But the truth is, it is tough because there is another restriction. Our internet access is slow. It consumes time even when we want to access a website or email the staff. So, when it comes to working, the staff are sometimes frustrated because it makes their job take so much time. In the early morning, the internet speed is good. However, during the peak time around 9.00 to 10.00 o'clock and above, it becomes slow because users are increasing. Therefore, if the internet connection is upgraded, I believe it helps the staff perform their job better." (Informant 01-006)

Following, among six informants, one informant further clarified that although the staff is now in the direction towards supporting the e-participation, not all the staff did, especially the older staff. The older staff appeared to lack interest in modern technology. Therefore, it is impossible for this group of staff to easily comprehend and master the applications than the younger staff could. Meanwhile, two other informants concurred that even though the staff knows how to use the internet and support e-

participation, not all the older staff know how to operate the technology. Subsequently, one other informant validated that not all the staff support the e-participation effort because there always be either who support or who does not. Certainly, the older group of staff are the one who does not support them. Largely, if all responses from these four informants were compared, only this informant was assertively confirmed that not all the staff in the council support the e-participation effort. The detailed responses were as follows:

> *"However, staff who are 40 years above seems lack of support and less interested on the technology and modern gadgets. The younger staff are more interested. They can learn and adapt the modern technologies and applications in no time." (Informant 01-002)*
>
> *"So far, all our staff know how to use the internet. But of course, the younger staff are more knowledgeable and faster learners than older staff." (Informant 01-004)*
>
> *"In my point of view, the staff may support the e-participation effort. But from what I see, the main problem is not all the staff at the council know how to operate the technology, especially those who are much older." (Informant 01-009)*
>
> *"From my knowledge, not all the staff support the e-participation effort. There would be two different groups, either support or not. The group of staff that does not usually support who are much older." (Informant 01-010)*

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However, among all the informants, one informant was uncertain. It is because most of the staff at the department comes from a lower-middle-income background, including the landscaping and groundskeeping workers. According to the informant, some of this below-average groups of staff were IT illiterate. Therefore, they were unaware of the online medium technologies. Consequently, when it comes to any online-related activities, the staff would rely on their head of the department. This was remarked by the informant as follows:

"I'm not sure. But what I can say, the Corporate Unit is responsible for the external customer's satisfaction survey. Meanwhile, our unit is responsible for internal customer satisfaction. For the first time, in 2017, it was done online. At first, the staff was not welcoming because they used to do it manually. Therefore, we must continuously announce that the staff would fill up the survey. Most of our staff are ordinary people. Some of them might not be IT literate. For example, landscaping workers. Thus, after a few attempts with the help of their head of department, only we got full feedback." (Informant 01-003)

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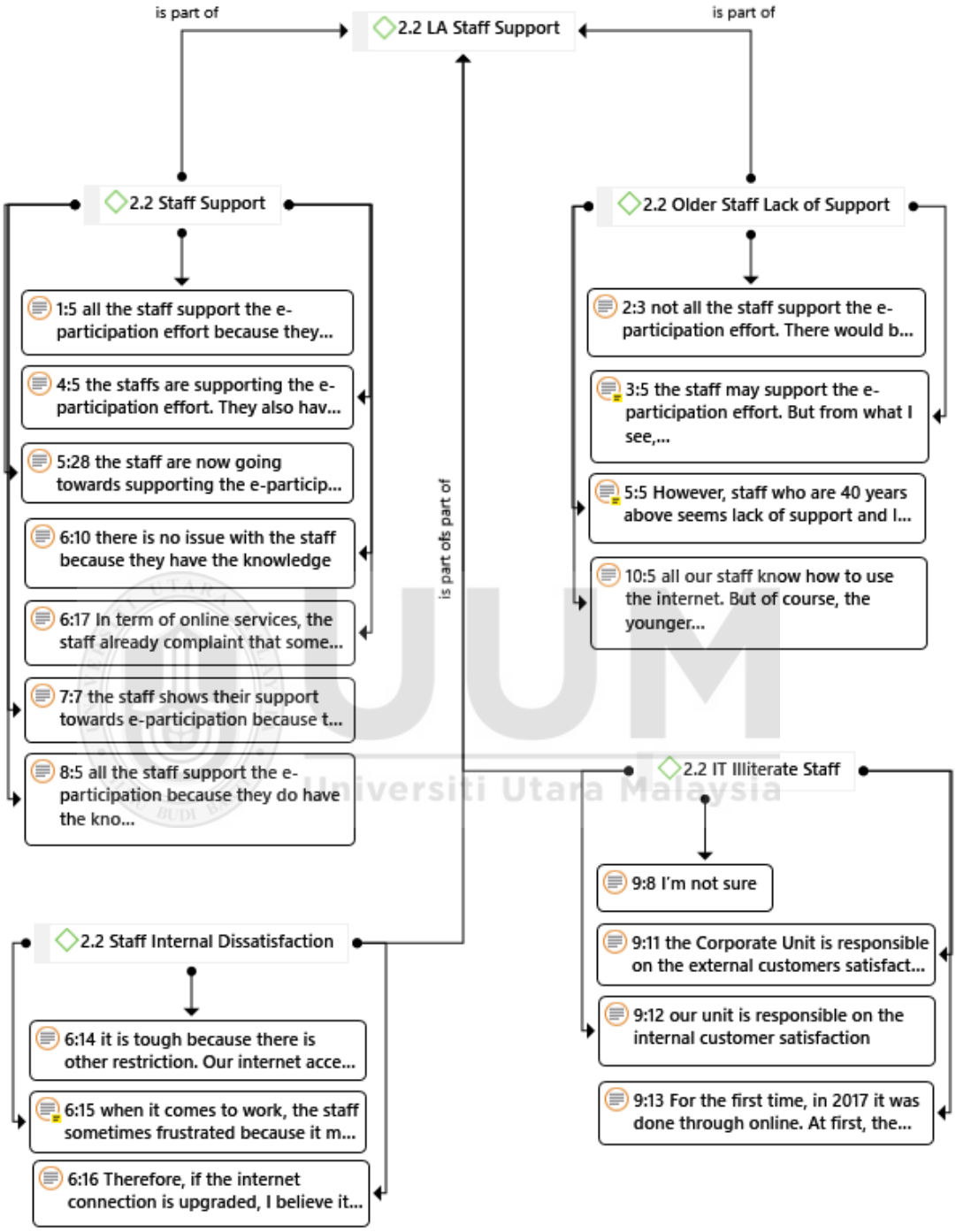

Figure 4.16 Provider's Staff Support

4.3.3 Provider's Resources

The providers were also asked to state their perspectives concerning the e-participation implementation resources. In Figure 4.17 below, the findings revealed that only three of the informants were profoundly convinced that the resources were available among ten informants. Specifically, one of the informants indicated the availability and adequacy of staff, financial and infrastructure. In comparison, one other informant pointed out the adequacy of the financial resources only. On the other hand, one other informant never declared that the resources were adequate. But he contended that the only resource that worked best was the staff among all the available resources. All the responses were remarked as follows:

> *"Yes, we have. We have the staff at the IT Department and adequate infrastructure as well as financial resources." (Informant 01-001)*
>
> *"I believe our financial resources are adequate." (Informant 01-003)*
>
> *"We have all the resources such as staff, internet and financial. In terms of staff, I believe it is good." (Informant 01-006)*

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As the council progressed towards e-participation, the council strived to strengthen its resources, including human capital, financial, technology, and infrastructure. This positive thought was remarked by one of the informants as follows:

> *"We are now going towards e-participation. So, we are striving to strengthen our human capital, financial, technology, and infrastructure." (Informant 01-002)*

However, the above informant and one of the earlier informants who pointed out that the resources were available but never declared adequate agreed that there were various restrictions. In the meantime, six other informants shared the same view. Most

informants doubted whether the available resources, such as staff, financial, infrastructure, and technology, was enough to support the implementation of e-participation. Most of the informants were also concerned about the technology and financial limitations. Due to the restricted finances, the council was forced to strive and improvise their fund every year. Even though they acknowledged that technology, particularly the internet, is the core in e-participation implementation, investing in the technology also required a huge amount of money that the council does not have. Therefore, the council could not provide good facilities and infrastructure such as internet and Wi-Fi connection to all the areas responsible. Furthermore, not all the staff and the computer in the council were equipped with the internet. These were remarked by all the informants as follows:

> *"In terms of finances, we are trying to improvise every year. We know that technology is the backbone for e-participation. But we also know that technology is expensive, and we need to invest so much money in it. But then, the council lacks the financial resources, so we are not affording to provide a good speed Wi-Fi to all the area in our responsibility. So, we have the resources, but it is restricted." (Informant 01-002)*
>
> *"Yes, we have all the resources needed to promote e-participation, such as staff, money, and technology. But of course, I cannot confirm that all these resources are adequate because we are lacking in terms of financial and technology." (Informant 01-005)*
>
> *"But in terms of the internet and financial, it is restricted. I do not really understand IT and its components. But when we face this kind of issue, I believe investing in IT is costly. However, our financial is inadequate." (Informant 01-006)*
>
> *"We have the resources, but we might lack in terms of cost…" (Informant 01-007)*
>
> *"I believe we have all the support. But we might lack in terms of financial resources." (Informant 01-008)*

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"Yes, we have all the needed resources to promote e-participation like staff, technology, and fund. But the main concern is whether all these resources are enough to support the e-participation implementation." (Informant 01-009)

"Yes, we have all resources, but there is always a limitation. Our financial resources are not adequate to support the high cost of the internet and the ICT. Thus, not all the staff and the computer in the council provided with the internet." (Informant 01-010)

In the meantime, out of ten informants, one of the informants addressed the intra organisation problem. According to the informant, the department could not effectively utilise the GIS application due to technical issues such as a weak server. GIS application is an integrated system that helps to manage geographical information. The same goes with the I-Plan, a system developed at the state level that facilitates the management, storing, updating, analysing, and providing the information and data on the land use in Peninsular Malaysia. As the council was unable to access the application due to a weak intra organisation system thus, it affected the quality of work among the staff in the council. Therefore, it is essential to have the best intra organisation facilities within the council, as remarked by the informant as follows:

"If our intra is tip-top, there would not be such a problem for our staff and us. But our intra is not that strong, so the system is slow and not friendly. In our department, we have the GIS. Do you know GIS? It is a system designed to manage geographical data. But unluckily our server is not strong. In the meantime, at the state level, we have the I-Plan. I-Plan is a system that store, manage, update, analyse and supply information and data on land use in Peninsular Malaysia. However, our intra are unable to reach for I-Plan. Therefore, it makes the work very hard and inconvenient because we cannot pass it on time when the report was asked." (Informant 01-004)

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Besides, it is unsurprisingly that the unsupportive older staff is one of the constraints in e-participation implementation. It was remarked by two of the informants as follows:

> *"…besides the lack of support from older staff, there are also some other problems." (Informant 01-002)*
>
> *"And as I said before, not all the staff in the council support the e-participation initiatives, especially who are much older." (Informant 01-010)*

Likewise, the unreceptive staff also contributes as one of the challenging factors to the successful implementation. The staff appeared to be too complacent and reluctant to any changes. Consequently, instead of stepping out of their comfort zone and taking up the opportunity to involve in any innovative changes, the staff expected and preferred others to take that responsibility, as remarked by the informant as follows:

> *"However, besides the lack of support from older staff, there is also some other problem. The staff is not receptive to change and too comfortable with the status quo. Therefore, when new things were introduced, they were not taking the initiative and would rather pass the responsibility to others. That is why sometimes any innovative application is hard to be implemented." (Informant 01-002)*

Finally, only one of the informants identified that time as one of the limitations among all the informants. Likewise, the researcher agreed that achieving a successful implementation, including e-participation, requires time and resources.

> *"…we might lack in terms of time to support the e-participation implementation." (Informant 01-007)*

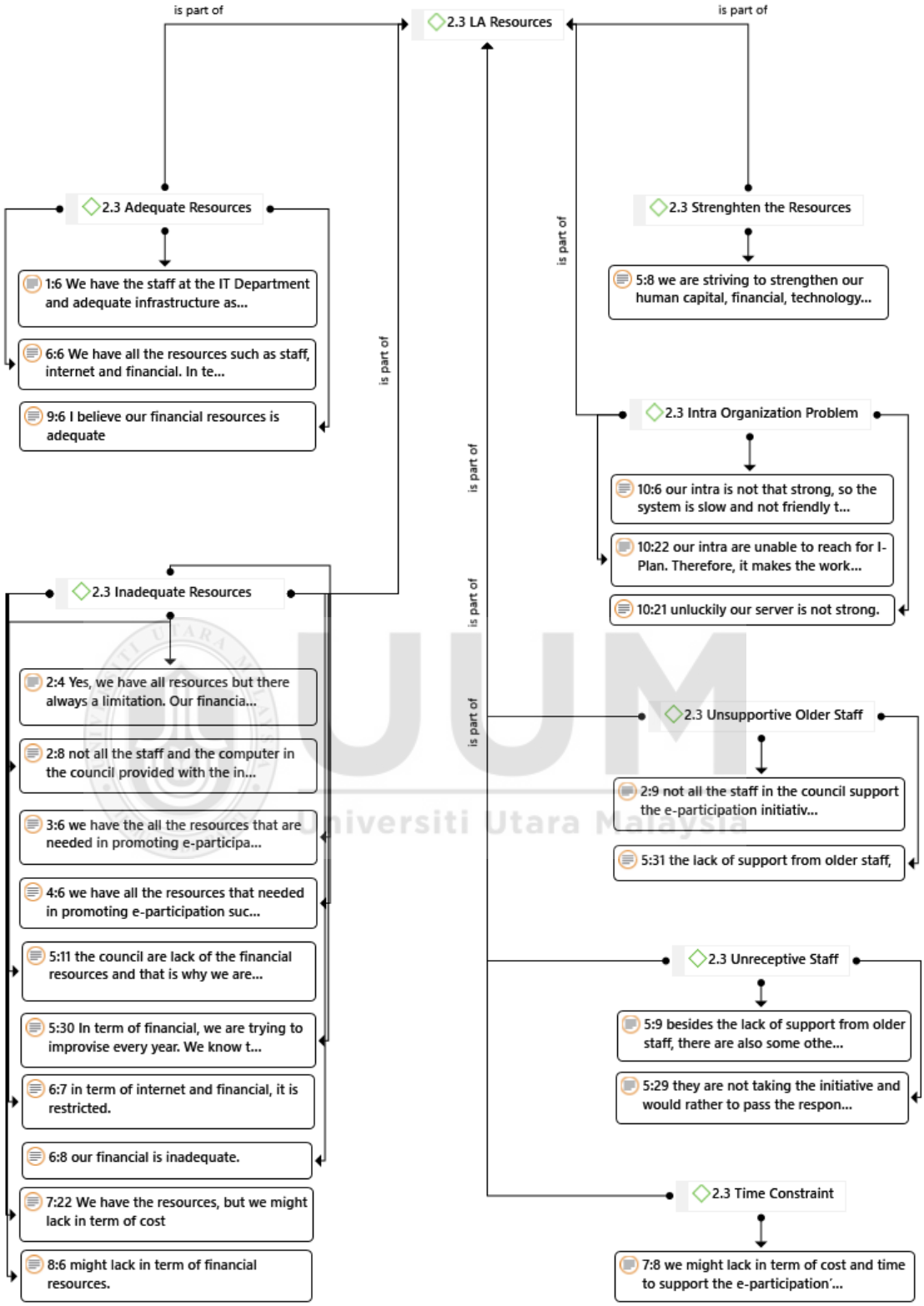

Figure 4.17 Provider's Resources

4.3.4 Provider's Infrastructure and Technology

As infrastructure and technology are core aspects of e-participation, the provider was specifically asked whether the infrastructure and technology support the e-participation implementation. The summarised the findings demonstrated in the following Figure 4.18. The result of the analysis revealed there are nine of the informants indicated that the infrastructure and technology for e-participation are available, whereby two of the informants firmly stated that:

> *"Yes, I believe we have." (Informant 01-003)*
>
> *"Yes, we have the internet to support e-participation." (Informant 01-008)*

However, seven other informants concurred with several issues regarding this matter. One of the informants thoroughly explained that the IT department in the council had performed their role in managing the infrastructure and technology for e-participation implementation. In the meantime, through the adaptation of e-PBT, the service delivery in the council had undergone a tremendous transformation since most services could be done online. However, the staff and the infrastructure and technology such as computer and internet are available. Still, this informant and other informant acknowledged that the quality of the council ICT infrastructure was lacking. One of the major issues is the low quality of internet access. The council could invest in increasing the internet speed. Still, due to the high cost of the council's limited revenue, the council only utilised the available resources provided by the ministry. Additionally, one of the informants confirmed that not all the council computers were equipped with the internet. All the responses were remarked by the informants as follows:

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"Yes, we have. But sometimes, the internet access with slow speed is one of our biggest problems." (Informant 01-001)

"Yes, we have the IT department to manage all the infrastructure and the technology to support the e-participation implementation. We have a computer with the internet provided to all the staff. We are transformed from the time-based concept to the web-based, more convenient concept. In fact, in the past, we did not have what we have now called e-PBT, an online system created for the public to interact electronically with the services provided by the local authorities. Now, most of the services can be done online. But of course, we cannot be 100 per cent paperless because there is still a manual record to generate for the report. Although we have the infrastructure and technology, the low internet speed is the problem. We know that on that part, we need to improve it." (Informant 01-002)

"As I said earlier, we have the staff to support the e-participation effort. But, in terms of money, infrastructure and technology, we are still lacking. The internet is provided, but the speed is not high. The cost of the internet is very expensive. For example, if the council wants to increase the internet speed by 10MB, the council must invest around RM100-200K. But the council does not have that much money. Therefore, we utilized what has been provided by the ministry." (Informant 01-005)

"Yes, we have the internet, but the issue is accessed." (Informant 01-006)

"Our facilities and infrastructure in e-participation are there. But the quality is quite low." (Informant 01-007)

"The technology and other IT infrastructure for e-participation like internet and computer in the council are there. But in terms of quality and speed, there is a need for improvement." (Informant 01-009)

"We have the infrastructure and the technology. But our ICT is not 100 per cent reach the high-quality standard, especially in term of speed and not all the staff's computer in the council provided with the internet." (Informant 01-010)

Likewise, as emphasised earlier in the previous question, one other informant continued to underline the issue related to the weak intra organisation. According to the informant, an outdated specification affects the service delivery quality in the organisation as downloading or submitting the online form has been complicated,

especially when the system goes down. Thus, it is important to ensure the specification is updated and the intra organisation system enhanced. However, it is hard to anticipate the desired result as the council strived and invested in improving the system, then other unforeseen problems appeared. Therefore, the response was remarked as follows:

> *"Our specification is dated. It supposes to be new and up-to-date. If our intra is strong and the system is excellent, everything would be easy. However, even the public wants to download or submit any form is difficult. The OSC Online, for example, people complain that by the time the due date is approaching, and they must submit the form, the system is down. So, they need to log in and fill up everything again, starting from A-Z. Therefore, the top management should invest in enhancing the system. However, once we invest, sometimes other unexpected problem arises. So, it is unpredictable." (Informant 01-004).*

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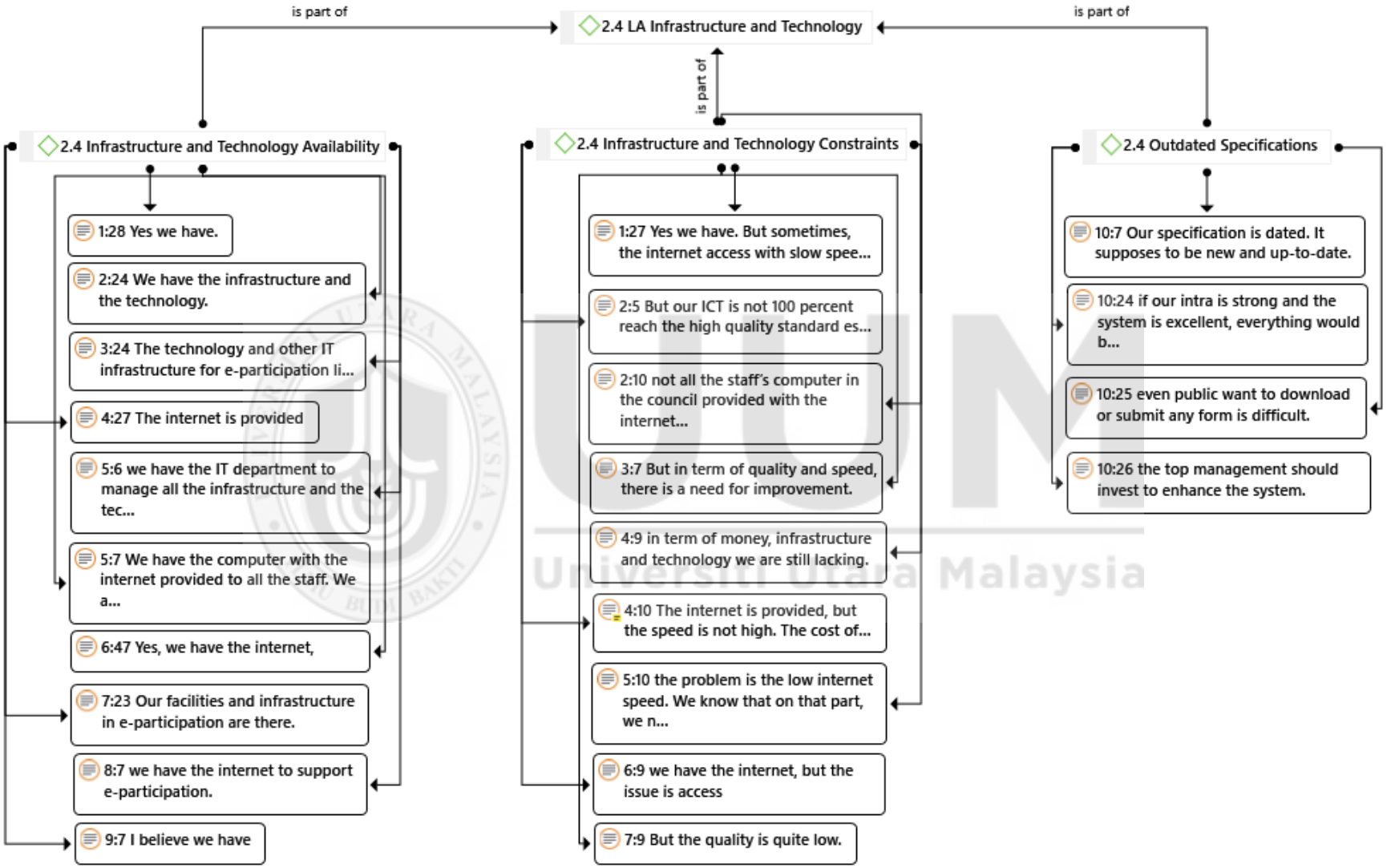

Figure 4.18 Provider's Infrastructure and Technology

4.3.5 Public Facilities

Public facilities are one of the requirements in e-participation. As shown in Figure 4.19 below, most informants owned basic facilities. Four of the informants answered that they had the facilities. However, among eight other informants with facilities such as computers and the internet, one of the informants further mentioned that these facilities were necessary only for the children's needs. Meanwhile, one of the informants mentioned that she had a laptop and smartphone.

> *"Yes, I have." (Informant 02-001, 02-002, 02-003 & 02-007)*
>
> *"Yes, I have all the facilities such as computer and internet." (Informant 02-008)*
>
> *"Yes, I have the computer and internet facilities." (Informant 02-004, 02-005, 02-009, 02-011 & 02-012)*
>
> *"Yes, I have the computer and internet at home for the needs of the children. But I'm not using it, only them that used it."(Informant 02-006)*
>
> *"I have the computer and internet to take part." (Informant 02-010)*
>
> *"Yes, I do. Smartphone and laptop." (Informant 02-013)*

However, one of the informants stated that she does not have the facilities.

> *"I don't have." (Informant 02-014)*

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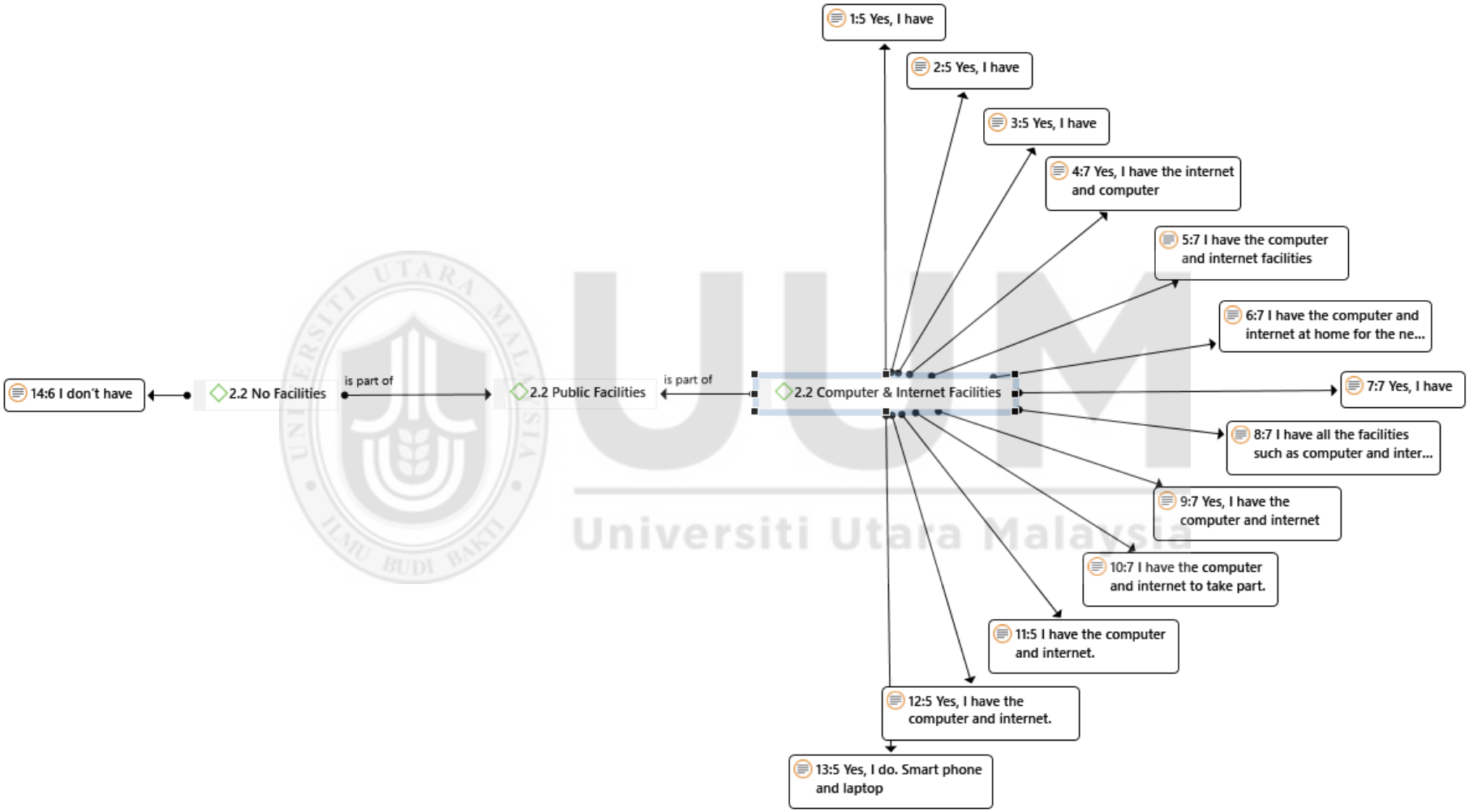

Figure 4.19 Public Facilities

4.3.6 Public Knowledge and Skills

Since the public is the main user of e-participation, their knowledge and skills in e-participation are essential. Figure 4.20 below presents the summary of the findings on public knowledge and skills in using the e-participation platform. The results show that eleven of the informants affirmed that they have the knowledge and skills. Among all these informants, some simply admitted without further explanation, while others declared having the basic knowledge using the only. On the other hand, while two of them disclosed their knowledge of using the online platform, both confessed that they hardly participated and did not need to do so. All the responses were remarked as follows:

> *"Yes, I have." (Informant 02-001, 02-003, 02-008, 02-011 & 02-014)*
>
> *"I have only the basic knowledge." (Informant 02-002)*
>
> *"Yes, I know how to use online platform. But I don't have the need to participate." (Informant 02-004)*
>
> *"Yes, I have the knowledge and skills to use the e-participation platform." (Informant 02-005)*
>
> *"I'm not an expert. But I have the basic knowledge and skills in using the technology and simple platform." (Informant 02-007)*
>
> *"Yes, I have the knowledge and skill." (Informant 02-010)*
>
> *"To some extent, I know about the use of the online platform. But I rarely participate." (Informant 02-012)*

In the meantime, one informant does not respond on the knowledge and skills in using the e-participation platform. But he acknowledged that he knows how to use the computer and internet, as he remarked:

> "*I know how used the computer and internet." (Informant 02-009)*

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Additionally, two of the informants verified that they do not have the necessary knowledge and skills as both were remarked:

> *"I don't have any knowledge or skills." (Informant 02-006)*
>
> *"No." (Informant 02-013)*

Accordingly, one of the informants who do not have the knowledge and skills using the e-participation platform further verified that he lacks computer skills since he mostly used manual practices during the services. The response was remarked as follows:

> *"When I was working, mostly everything was done manually. So, using the computer is also a problem to me." (Informant 02-006)*

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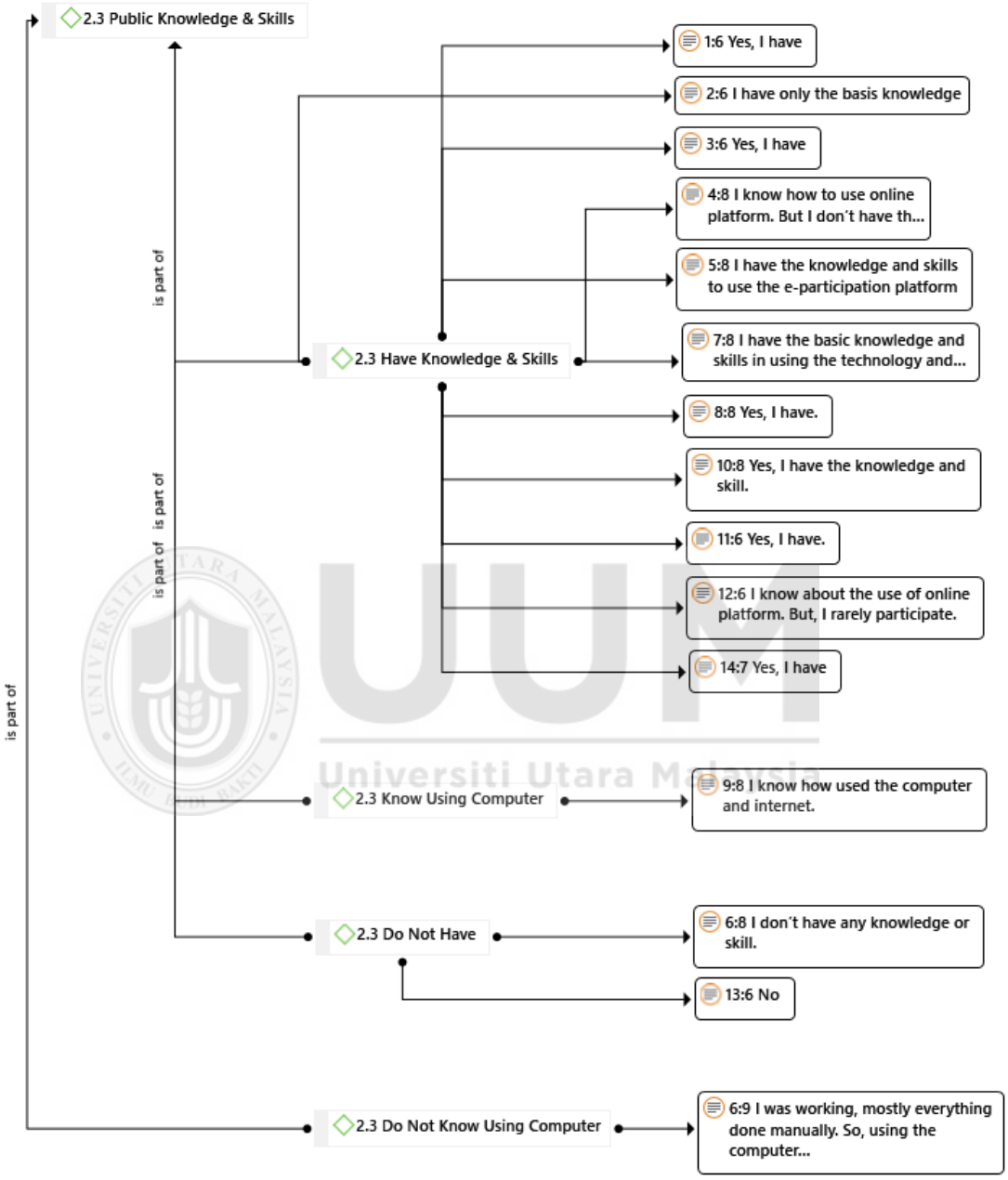

Figure 4.20 Public E-Participation Knowledge and Skills

4.3.7 Activities Promoting E-Participation

Since e-participation is one of the platforms currently necessary for public participation, there is a need to investigate whether there are any activities in promoting e-participation offered by the local authority. Figures 4.21 and 4.22 below summarise the findings of e-participation activities from both groups of informants. The result revealed that e-participation activities had scarcely been organised. One of the informants from the provider group verified that there are no specific e-participation activities that he could recognise. There was only one programme purposely to bridge the digital divide among the community was held by the local council as requested by the Village Development and Security Committee (JKKK). In cooperation with the Ministry of Housing and Local Government (KPKT), under the responsibility of the IT department, this programme helps to guide the people related to the ICT and deliberate on other issues. This was remarked by the informant as follows:

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> *"There are not many activities held to promote e-participation by the council. From what I can recall, one programme under the Ministry of Housing and Local Government (KPKT) was implemented by MBAS. It was held at Peoples Community Centre at Kuala Kedah. The programme was focused on narrowing the digital divide. It is a good activity to educate the people. At the same time, it is also useful for the council to gather information and feedback from them on other issues. This programme was requested by the JKKK (Jawatankuasa Kemajuan dan Keselamatan Kampung) itself to the council. Then, the council (MBAS) requested the KPKT. Sadly, this is the only programme that I can recall. There would be great if we can continue this kind of programme for the public." (Informant 01-005)*

In the meantime, most other informants from the provider group and five from the public group confirmed that no e-participation activities were ever organized in formal or informal settings. The council provided no workshop or training programme to

educate the people regarding e-participation. One of the provider group informants further indicated that we might not reach that standard because our e-participation is still weak. In the meantime, one of the public informants believed that computer and internet skills workshops provided only for the public authority within the organisation, but not for the lower-level citizen. All the responses were remarked as follows:

> *"In terms of e-participation, the authority never have a formal activity in promoting e-participation. There is no workshop or training to educate the public that ever being held." (Informant 01-001)*
>
> *"To be certain, there are no activities either formal or informally that purposely to educate staff or public about e-participation that ever been conducted by the council." (Informant 01-002)*
>
> *"There is no specific activities or workshop on e-participation." (Informant 01-004)*
>
> *"Currently, we don't have any activities related to e-participation. Besides, we still not very strong in e-participation." (Informant 01-006)*
>
> *"We don't have formal activities like workshop or meeting in promoting e-participation." (Informant 01-010)*
>
> *"We do not have any e-participation activities." (Informant 01-007)*
>
> *"There are no activities that directly promote e-participation in the council…" (Informant 01-008)*
>
> *"I don't think there are specific activities in promoting or educating the public about e-participation…" (Informant 01-009)*
>
> *"In my knowledge, I don't think there are any e-participation activities." (Informant 02-004)*
>
> *"I am sure there are no activities for e-participation in the local government." (Informant 02-007)*
>
> *"I believe the government department has held a workshop regarding the computer and internet. However, there is no workshop to increase the knowledge on e-participation for the level lower of the citizen." (Informant 02-009)*

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"From my knowledge, there is no e-participation activities." (Informant 02-010)

"I never know there are any activities on e-participation provided by the local government." (Informant 02-012)

However, there is no answer given by one of the informants from the provider group. The informant appeared to lack knowledge as she mentioned all that related to public participation or e-participation, which was not under her responsibility. It is under the Corporate Unit as this unit is responsible for the Local Agenda 21. This was remarked as follows:

"Anything on public participation or e-participation was in charge by the Corporate Unit. It is under the Local Agenda 21." (Informant 01-003)

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Meanwhile, nine other public informants declared that they are either uncertain or do not know about the e-participation activities. Even one of the informants falsely assumed that Meet the Customer Day, known as *Hari Bertemu Pelanggan*, is one of the e-participation activities. All the responses were remarked as follows:

"I don't know if there are any e-participation activities provided by the local government." (Informant 02-001)

"No, I don't know about that." (Informant 02-003)

"I don't know." (Informant 02-002, 02-006, 02-011 & 02-014)

"I'm uncertain on the e-participation activities because I have never participated. I only know about the e-participation platforms." (Informant 02-005)

"I have no idea." (Informant 02-008)

"I don't know. I think of it is Hari Bertemu Pelanggan." (Informant 02-013)

Even though there are no e-participation activities, as mentioned earlier by eight of the providers' group informants, all the informants further explained that e-participation was available on the website and online. Therefore, the public could independently explore the local council's official website and Facebook to obtain the necessary information. These were remarked as follows:

> *"Council usually promotes the e-participation through the website and during the Hari Bertemu Pelanggan. Through these, the public could get the information on the medium of participation that provided." (Informant 01-001)*
>
> *"For e-participation, it depends on the individual initiative to explore and read on the council's website." (Informant 01-004)*
>
> *"We only have the advertisement through web or Facebook." (Informant 01-006)*
>
> *"I don't think there are specific activities in promoting or educating the public about e-participation other than just information dissemination that public can make their complaint through online." (Informant 01-009)*
>
> *"Usually, all the promotion can be found in the council website." (Informant 01-010)*

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In the meantime, few informants from the provider group highlighted that the local council continued to utilise the traditional medium of participation, such as the Town Hall Meeting and *Hari Bertemu Pelanggan*. Even though there are no specific e-participation activities, the public can still attain related information about e-participation mediums during these programmes. As remarked by the informants as follows:

> *"Council usually promotes the e-participation through the website and during the Hari Bertemu Pelanggan. Through these, the public could get the information on the medium of participation that provided." (Informant 01-001)*

"But we did conduct the Town Hall Meeting with the public." (Informant 01-002)

"We only have the traditional Town Hall Meeting." (Informant 01-004)

"There are no activities that directly promote e-participation in the council except for the Town Hall Meeting. It was held three times in a year with the targeted group in the face-to-face setting." (Informant 01-008)

At the same time, three other public informants also further indicated other activities that they recognised. For example, one informant believed that probably there are campaigns about e-participation being held as he remarked as follows:

"…But I think campaigns are being held." (Informant 02-009)

Following, one informant believed that the local council had implemented the entrepreneurship programme as she remarked as follows:

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"*… there is a workshop on the entrepreneurship." (Informant 02-010)*

Meanwhile, one informant perceived that other than e-participation, online business activities such as online marketing are significant. However, the informant was uncertain whether the local government initiated it. This was remarked as follows:

"Mostly, there are activities involving the online business. For example, rural farmers might not need online business. But, for modern farmers nowadays, online marketing is needed to sell their produce. But I am not sure if it is implemented in the local government." (Informant 02-007)

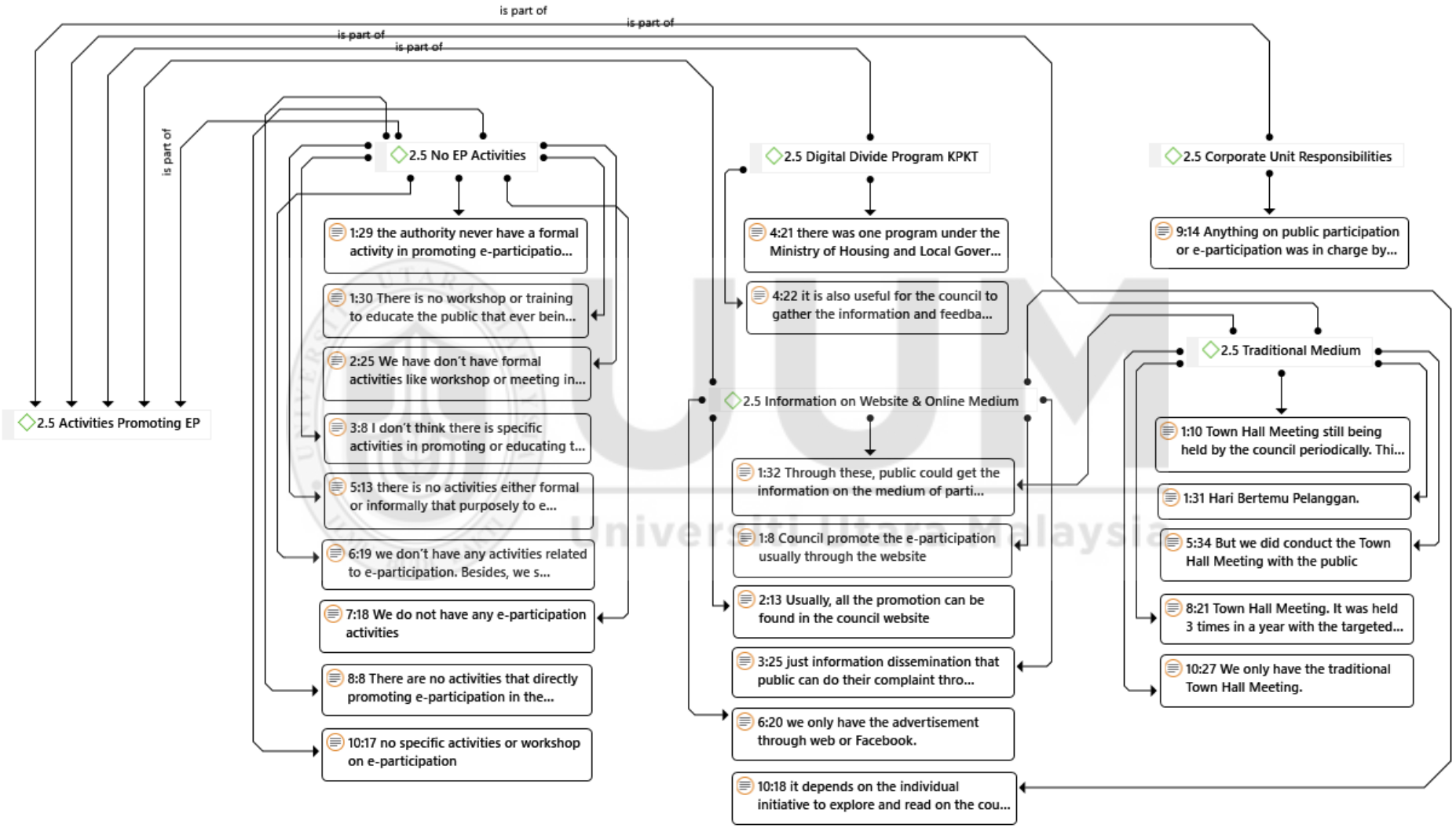

Figure 4.21 Provider Activities in Promoting E-Participation

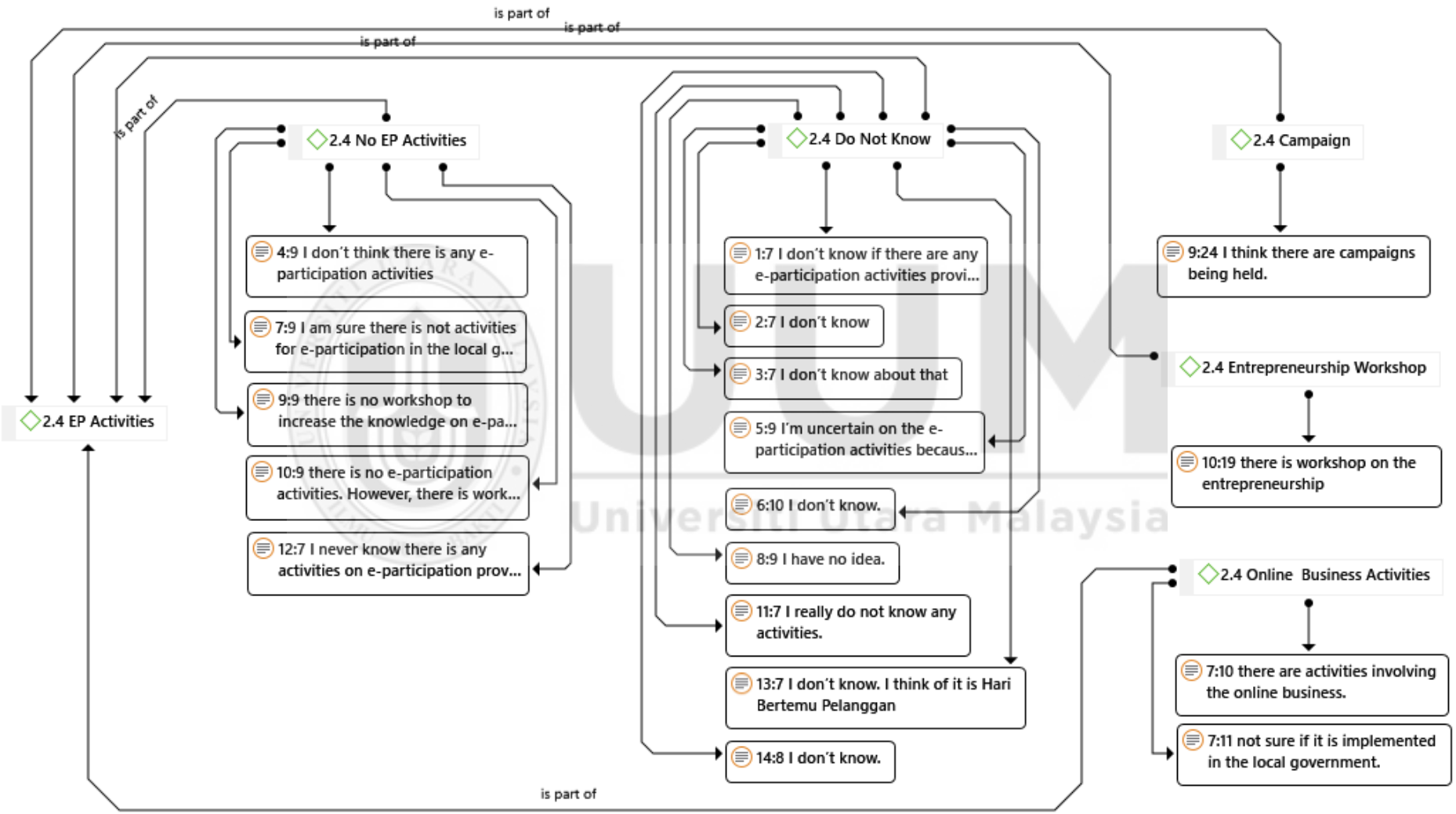

Figure 4.22 Public Knowledge on E-Participation Activities

4.3.8 Participation in E-Participation Activities

Figure 4.23 and Figure 4.24 below demonstrate the findings on public participation in e-participation activities from the provider and public perspectives. Consistent with the previous question about e-participation activities, since most providers declared no e-participation activities were provided, the findings found that public participation in e-participation activities was not related, especially to five of the informants. As these five of the informants earlier admitted, either there are no e-participation activities; or the lack of awareness on e-participation activities as it is not under the responsibility of the informants; or the necessary information on e-participation are available through the website and other online media as well as during the traditional medium of participation; therefore, they are not responded to the question. Yet, among all ten informants, only one informant acknowledged the programme that aimed to bridge the digital divide in the community through ICT. Even though this programme is open to all, the participation mostly comes from the local community within the area who are interested and had the opportunity to participate. This was remarked as follows:

> *"This activity opens to the public. But mostly it involves the local people at that location and people who have the time and are interested in joining." (Informant 01-005)*

Besides, although there are no e-participation activities available, three other informants still pointed out their opinion on this matter. One of the informants highlighted the e-participation platform in the council is largely utilised by the public who is actively involved with the council and has the needs. In the meantime, one other informant believed that if e-participation activities were available, it would usually involve the people who were genuinely interested in participating because not everyone could participate due to the work and time restrictions. For instance, active

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activists participated because they could afford the time and maintained their passion and interest as people from developed countries are also very active. Additionally, one other informant underlined that since most of us still lacked comprehensive awareness and understanding of the operating method of e-participation, we lacked public participation through e-participation and lacked on the activities in promoting e-participation. But, comparing these to the developed countries, their public maintained an active role in traditional or advanced participation methods. The public also devoted their effort to organising the activities related to e-participation and developing the website as an online hub for the community. Therefore, the informants believed this is one of the best practices to learn and apply. Largely, all these informants were convinced that e-participation would usually involve an active and interested public, as remarked as follows:

> *"Unfortunately, we do not have the e-participation activities. We still lack active e-participation. In the meantime, most of us still do not understand and do not know the modus operandi of e-participation. Of course, the foreign public is more actively engaged either in the traditional or advanced method of participation. In e-participation, for example, their people actively organized the workshop and built up the community web on their own. So, we should learn what is good from other countries and apply." (Informant 01-002)*

> *"I believe if we have the e-participation activities, with the restriction of work and time, people who will always participate someone who has the interest. For example, like an activist, they participate because they have the time, interest, and passion for fighting. Likewise, in the developed country, their people are very active." (Informant 01-006)*

> *"In terms of e-participation platform that provided, it usually involves public who actively involve with the council (active users) and the public that have the needs to participate." (Informant 01-010)*

In the meantime, two informants confirmed the traditional medium of participation available in the council mostly involved the selected target group, such as entrepreneurs, because mostly they were invited earlier by the area officer. Therefore, the meeting was purposely held to discuss and solve the issues faced by these selected target groups. These were remarked by the informants as follows:

> *"Town Hall Meeting usually involve the public with the target group for example entrepreneurs and others." (Informant 01-001)*
>
> *"In terms of Town Hall Meeting, it involves selected target groups such as entrepreneurs and other professional groups with the department director and head. The area officer invited the target group within their area through the invitation letter and banners. We will listen and note down their problems during the meeting and respond to them either directly or later. The foreign Town Hall Meeting is different. The public will voice their problem during the meeting, and the council will only listen without any two-way communication. Then, the council will hold another session for explanation and solution." (Informant 01-002)*

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Like the provider group's finding, this question is unrelated to the public group. Most of the informants stated that there were no e-participation activities or were unaware. Still, three of the informants responded that they never participated as previously they had assumed that Hari Bertemu Pelanggan was one of the e-participation activities, and there are campaigns about e-participation being held. Furthermore, among these informants, one of the informants further underlined that she was only involved in online activities related to the profession. Therefore, the responses were as follows:

> "*No." (Informant 02-009 & 02-013)*
>
> *"No. But I am always involved in the activities related with my profession, such as online learning." (Informant 02-007)*

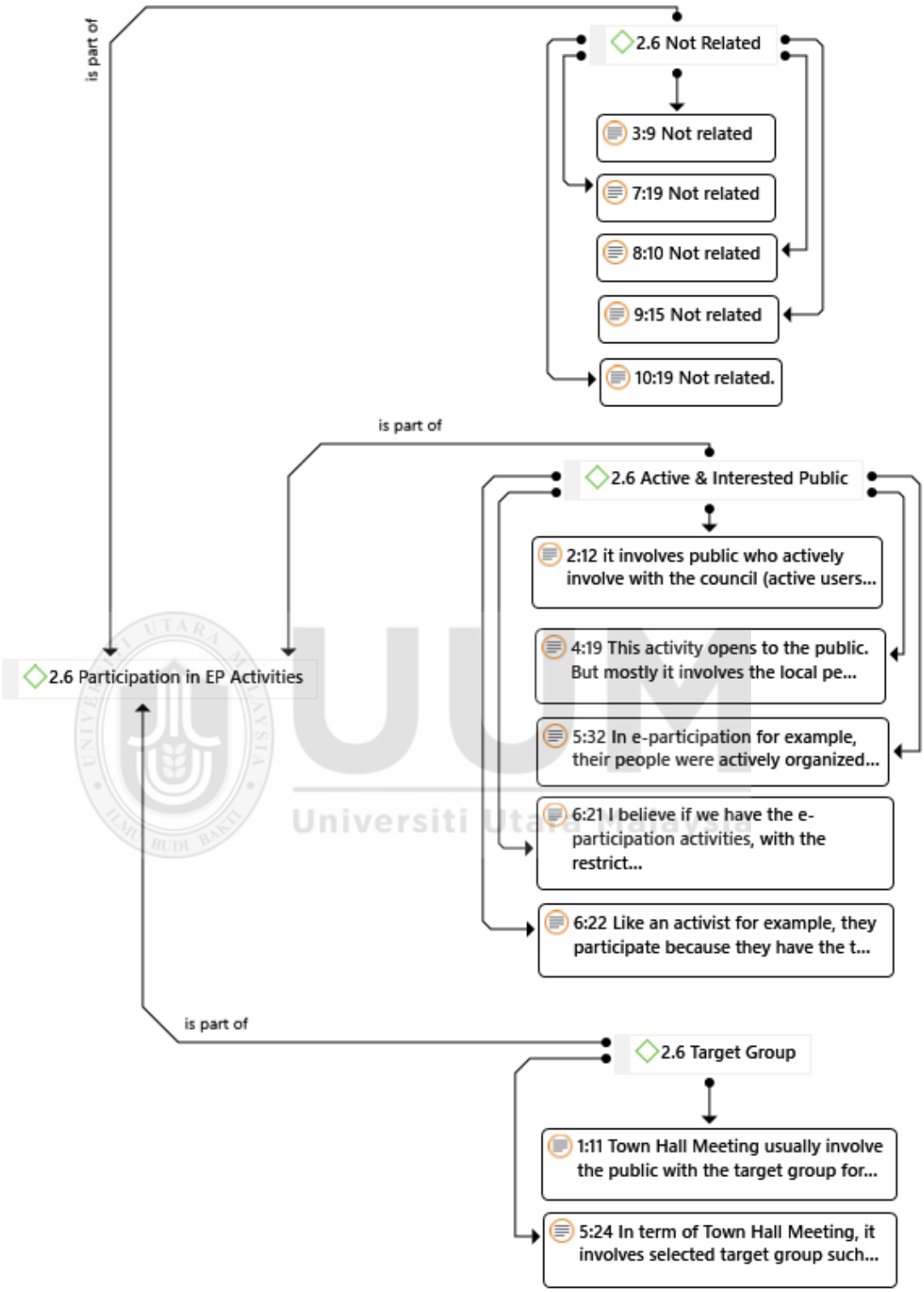

Figure 4.23 Provider's Perspectives on Participation in E-Participation Activities

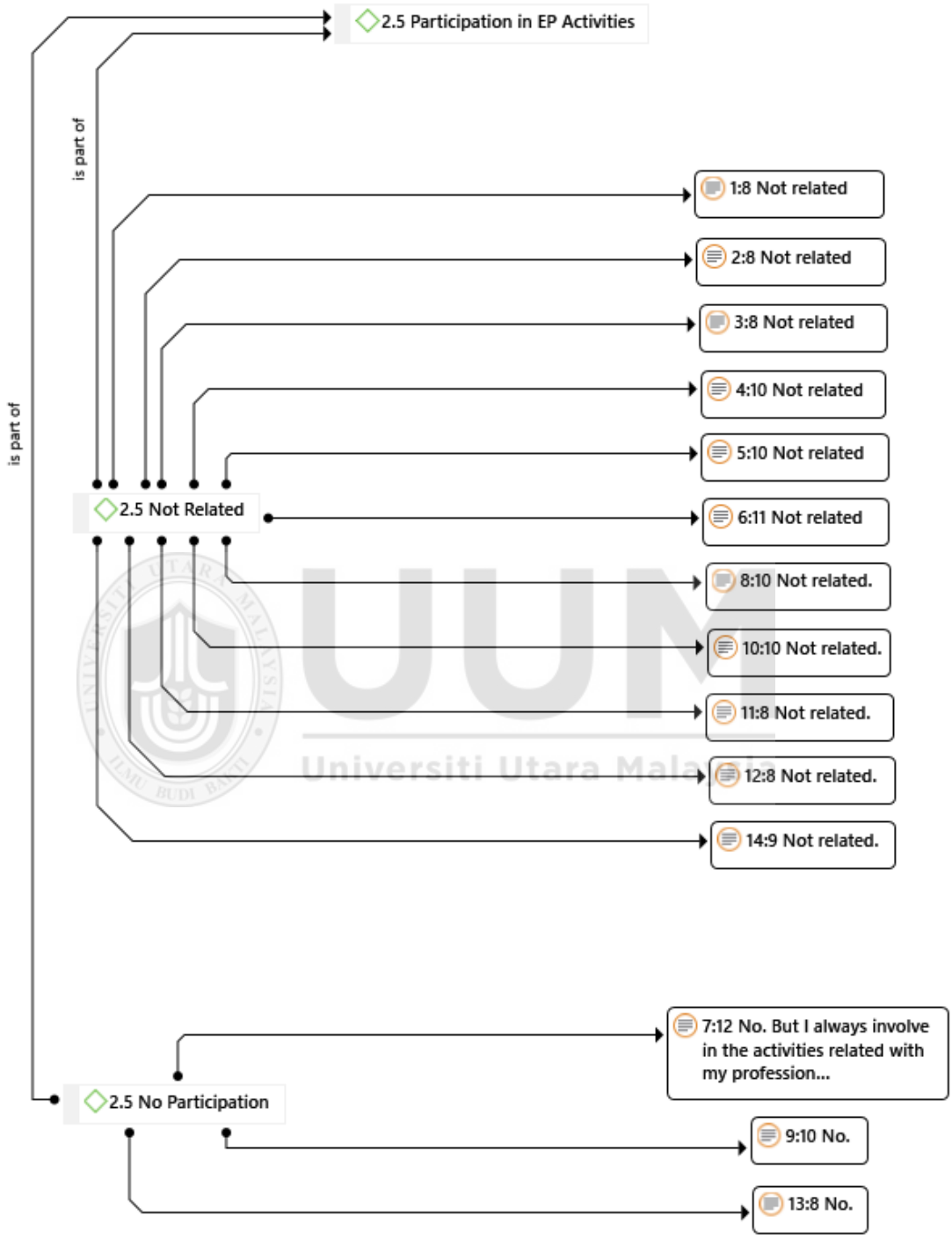

Figure 4.24 Public Participation in E-Participation Activities

4.3.9 Usage of E-Participation Platform

The provider also was asked whether the public actively used the e-participation platform that provided in participating with the council. The summary of the findings demonstrated in Figure 4.25 below revealed that nine informants certainly believed that the e-participation platform in the council is actively used. The council frequently received complaints from the public through all available platforms, including e-Aduan, WhatsApp, Facebook, and email. Some informants recognised that e-Aduan is the most actively used among these platforms. At the same time, some other informants specified that WhatsApp is mostly used. The detailed responses were remarked as follows:

> *"Yes, they do. Both e-Aduan and WhatsApp was actively used by the public in terms of daily basis." (Informant 01-001)*
>
> *"We received the complaint daily through all medium such as Facebook, email, and e-Aduan. But the frequency rate is relatively low compared to WhatsApp." (Informant 01-002)*
>
> *"So far, e-participation in the council is quite high. However, I'm not sure in terms of the rate because it is under the responsibility of the Corporate Unit." (Informant 01-003)*
>
> *"Usually e-Aduan is the most actively used. Public complaint almost everything to the council. Maybe because we are the closest to the people." (Informant 01-004)*
>
> *"Facebook and WhatsApp were actively used…" (Informant 01-005)*
>
> *"e-Aduan is 100 per cent active." (Informant 01-006)*
>
> *"Yes." (Informant 01-007)*
>
> *"Yes. WhatsApp is the most actively used." (Informant 01-008)*
>
> *"Yes. e-Aduan and WhatsApp was actively used by the public." (Informant 01-010)*

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In the meantime, among the informants, one of the informants who assumed e-services as one of the e-participation platforms identified the low usage of e-Payment services. According to the informant, the usage of electronic payment services in the council is still low at 20 per cent. The informant believed that younger users are mostly used rather than middle-aged or elderly users. As much as these users prefer the traditional method of participation, they are also comfortable making the payment by walking into the council or the bank. Unsurprisingly, the younger users are more technologically savvy than the elderly users. However, the informants could understand that online payment mistakes and security issues had contributed to the public's low usage of electronic payment services. This was remarked by the informants as follows:

> *"In terms of e-participation platform, only 20 per cent of the payment are made online. Therefore, I assume that the public is not actively using it. As I said, our department mostly received the payment by cash. Public either walk-in and pay at the counter or any representative bank. Most of it comes from middle age or older people. People 50 years and above are much more comfortable walking in either to make the payment or complaint to the council. I assume that 20 per cent of online transactions are from the public who much younger and know how to operate the technology. I believe that when dealing with money transactions online, the public is possibly concerned about mistakes or security issues. Thus, that is why online platform usage is low." (Informant 01-009)*

Two of the informants further recognised that the WhatsApp application is the most popular medium among the public due to its conveniences since any complaints could be easily conveyed only through smartphones. It was remarked by the informants as follows:

> *"WhatsApp is the most popular one that used by the public may be because it is quicker and easier." (Informant 01-002)*

"…WhatsApp is the most popular one. I think maybe because it is more convenient compared to other mediums because they can send the complaint only through their smartphones." (Informant 01-005)

Besides, only one of the informants posited that e-Forum is an inactive platform, as he remarked:

"e-Forum was not actively used." (Informant 01-005)

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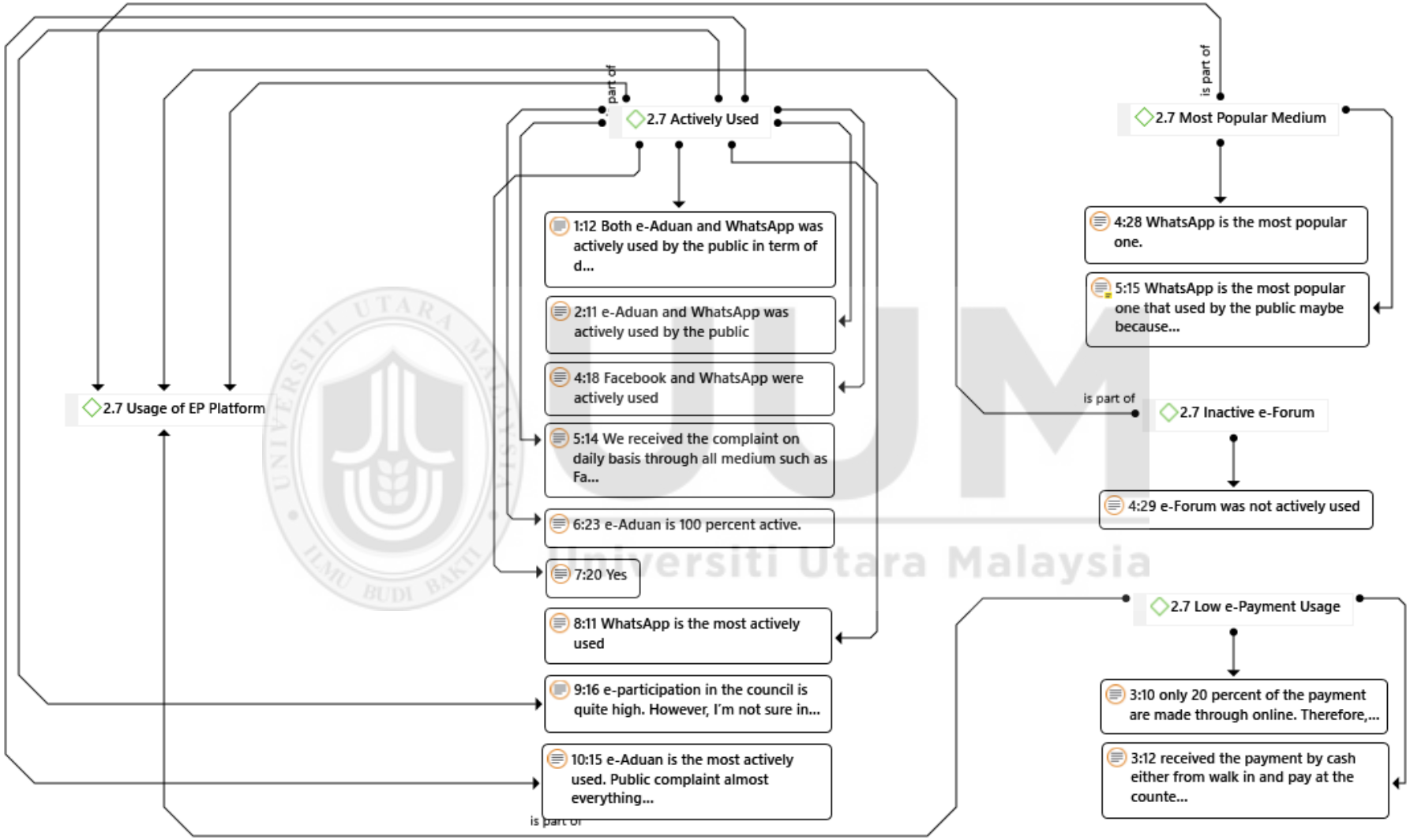

Figure 4.25 Usage of E-Participation Platform

4.3.10 Public E-Participation Experience with the Local Government

The shared experience in participating with the local council through the e-participation platform was also examined to understand the current circumstances. The summary of the findings is illustrated in Figure 4.26 below. Out of fourteen of the informants, only three of the informants had the experience. One of the informants filed the complaint through e-Aduan and two through email to the responsible local council regarding their problems. From their responses, one of the informants appeared to be satisfied with the quick response from the council but not for one of the informants when there was no feedback ever since. The detailed responses were remarked as follows:

> *"Yes, I have once. At that time, I was doing an internship in Kuala Lumpur. So, every day I use the train. But the problem is, every month the train is broken down at least twice. Therefore, my friend and I sent the different complaints online. We quickly responded from the Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL). But I noticed that DBKL's reply to our complaints is different. I think that is good because it is not an automatically generated message from the system. I believe behind the system, someone is responsible for administering and monitoring the public complaints." (Informant 02-001)*
>
> *"In term the local government, I used to file the complaint through email to the Sungai Petani Municipal Council (MPSP) regarding the issues on my neighbourhood." (Informant 02-007)*
>
> *"Yes, I have been using the e-Aduan in communicating with the local government. I made the complaints last year, but until today there is no response from the council." (Informant 02-010)*

But other eleven informants acknowledged that they never had e-participation experience with the local council. Four of the informants simply answered that they never participated without further clarification. Three of them stated that they did not need to participate. Finally, two of them indirectly answered that they only used the e-services. In the meantime, one of the informants was concerned about the online

security issues and the risk of personal data breaches. One of the informants highlighted that a representative usually conveyed all the complaints to the council on behalf of the community. Due to that, the informant never bothered to participate. All the responses were remarked as follows:

> *"I have never participated because I do not need to participate." (Informant 02-002).*
>
> *"I have never been directly involved with the local government." (Informant 02-003)*
>
> *"I'm never participating through online. I'm kind of worried with the internet security error and the leaking of the personal data." (Informant 02-004)*
>
> *"Yes, I have been using the online medium in the local government. But it is more to the e-services like the online assessment tax payment. It does not involve any online complaints." (Informant 02-005)*
>
> *"Never." (Informant 02-006)*
>
> *"I have never participated with the local government because I don't have the needs." (Informant 02-008)*
>
> *"I have never been participating online because any issue in my community will be represented by the representative like the committee members (AJK). The AJK will either call or walk into the council to the complaint." (Informant 02-009)*
>
> *"Never because I have no issue that I encounter or the needs to participate." (Informant 02-011)*
>
> *"I have never been participating with the local government." (Informant 02-012)*
>
> *"No." (Informant 02-013)*
>
> *"Only in the online recruitment." (Informant 02-014)*

The informants that only experienced using the e-services than e-participation platform underlined a few e-services applications that they used to. Two of the informants used online recruitment. Then, two other informants used the e-

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procurement application due to the operational needs, including tender application and submission. In the meantime, one other informant used the e-payment facilities, especially for the assessment tax payment. These were remarked by the informants as follows:

> *"But when I was working as a consultant, I always use the e-services platform to send the tender application online." (Informant 02-003)*
>
> *"But I used to apply for the job vacancies and download the form." (Informant 02-004)*
>
> *"Yes, I have been using the online medium in the local government. But it is more to the e-services like the online assessment tax payment." (Informant 02-005)*
>
> *"I have never participated with the local government because I don't have the needs. But in my former working experience as a consultant at Planning and Architecture Company, I have always been to the council to submit. I used to retrieve the council's e-services platform related to the tender." (Informant 02-008)*
>
> *"Only in the online recruitment." (Informant 02-014)*

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Furthermore, three of the informants mentioned that they used to participate with the local council through the traditional method of participation than e-participation. All these informants made the complaints either through a phone call, written or attending to the council. Yet, one of the informants mistakenly assumed that the complaint through SMS (Short Messaging Service) was traditional participation. But it is one of the digital applications even though it is not as advanced as other e-participation tools. These were remarked as follows:

> *"I usually make the complaints in writing form and put in the suggestions box or personally meet with the local council officer." (Informant 02-004)*
>
> *"Never. But I used to call the local council to complain about a tree. Then, the council asked to attend the office to fill up the complaint*

form. And after one to two weeks, the JKR called me for the tree cutting process." (Informant 02-006)

"I am also used to make the complaint traditionally through SMS and walk-in on the issue of a giant tree and wild bushes in my neighbourhood. However, up to now, there is no response." (Informant 02-010)

Eventually, one of the informants pointed out the experience in communicating with other government agencies than the local council itself, as he remarked as follows:

"I have been sent a complaint through email to other government agencies." (Informant 02-012)

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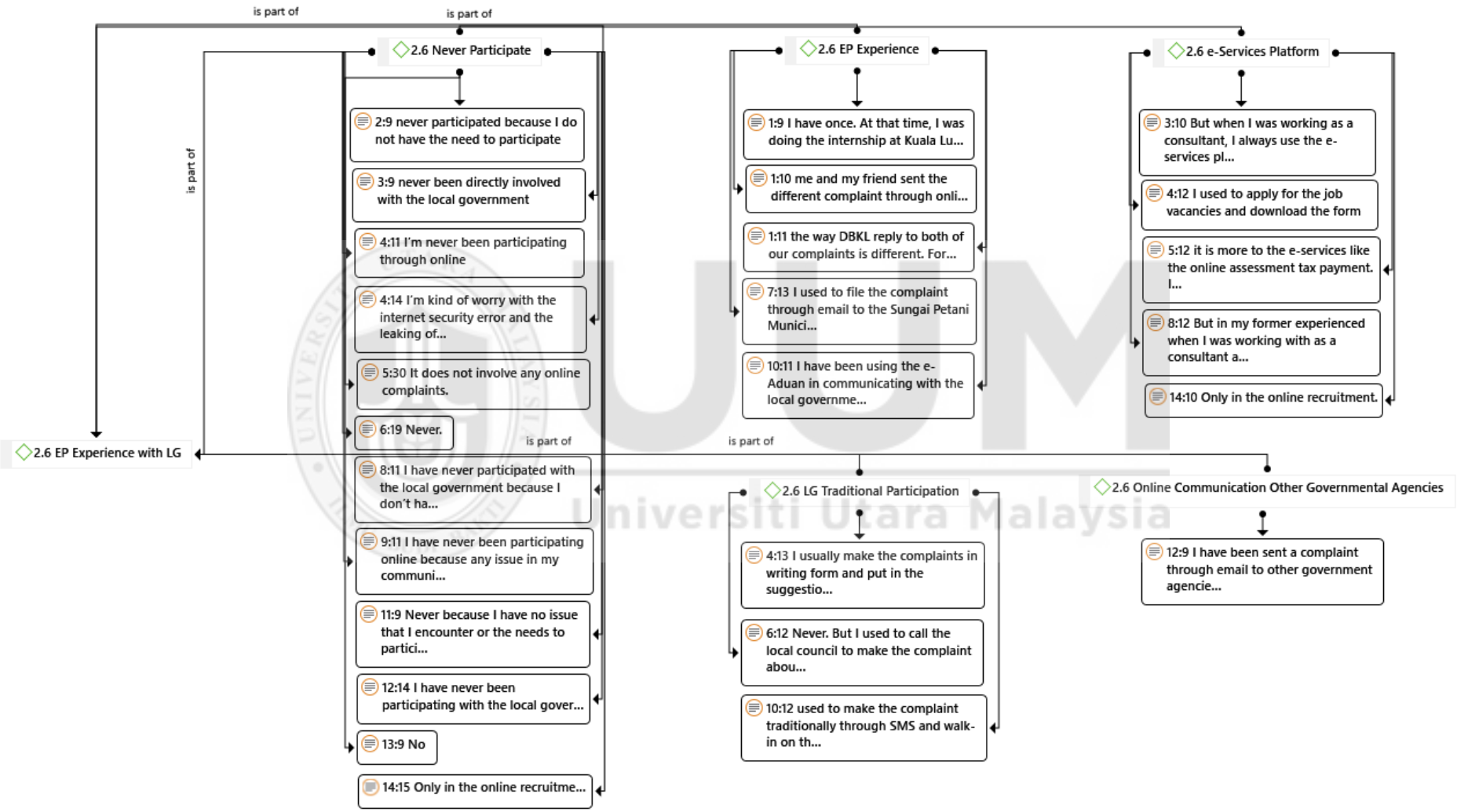

Figure 4.26 Public Experience in E-Participation

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4.4 Challenges Facing the Implementation of E-Participation

This section discusses the findings concerning the challenges facing the implementation of e-participation at Alor Setar City Council. A summary of the findings is presented in Figure 4.27 below to show the various challenges to the e-participation implementation at the Alor Setar City Council. Accordingly, the detailed breakdown of the interviews responses for this research question is provided in Table 4.4.

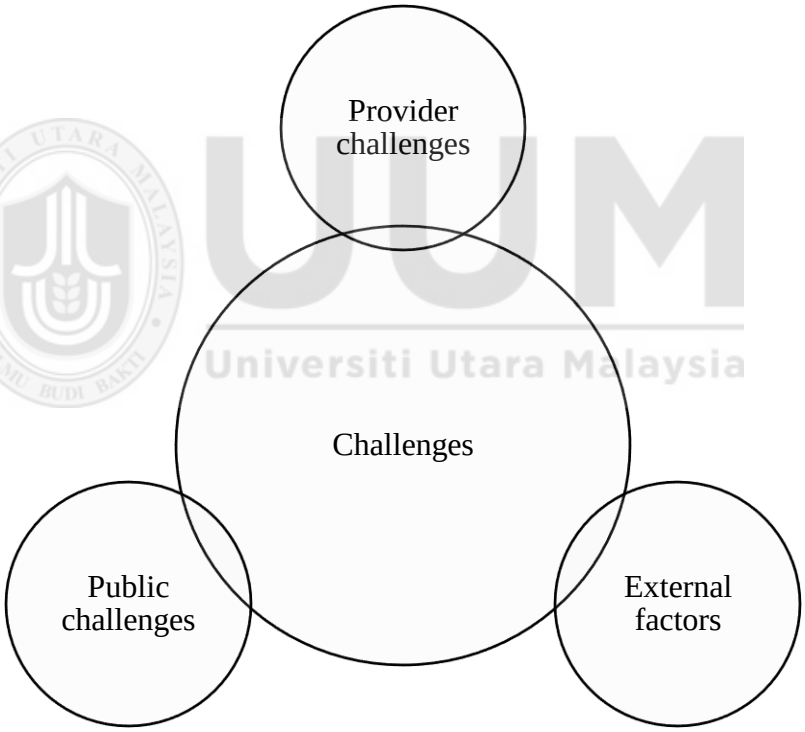

Figure 4.27 Challenges in E-Participation Implementation

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Table 4.4
Findings on the Challenges in E-Participation Implementation

Theme	Aspect	Number of times mentioned	Who mentioned
Provider challenges	Public knowledge, awareness and understanding	7	01-002, 01-003, 01-005, 01-007 01-008, 01-009
	Demographic and social differences	2	01-006, 01-005
	People's mentality and attitude	6	01-001, 01-006, 01-010
	Staff attitude, knowledge and skills	4	01-002, 01-007, 01-009, 01-010
	Lack of needs	1	01-005
	Weak intra-organisational system	2	01-004, 01-006
	Technology and issue of access	1	01-006
	Lack of law enforcement	1	01-006
	Technical constraints	2	01-004
	Financial constraints	3	01-002, 01-008
External factors	Social background	1	01-005
	E-participation promotion	1	01-010
	Public & local authority role	2	01-001
	No external factors	4	01-001, 01-003, 01-004, 01-006
	Not sure	4	01-002, 01-007, 01-008, 01-009
Public challenges	Demographic and social differences	16	02-002, 02-003, 02-005, 02-008, 02-009, 02-011, 02-012, 02-013
	Lack of facilities and infrastructure	12	02-004, 02-007, 02-009, 02-011, 02-012, 02-013, 02-014
	Lack of knowledge, awareness and skills	9	02-001, 02-002, 02-006, 02-007, 02-009, 02-011, 02-013
	Mentality, interest and preferences	4	02-001, 02-003, 02-007, 02-011
	Council response and website accessibility	2	02-004, 02-010
	Lack of needs	1	02-005

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4.4.1 Provider Challenges

Several challenges had been addressed by the local authority as a provider of e-participation implementation, as shown in Figure 4.28 below. First and foremost, most of the informants were concerned about public attitude, knowledge, awareness, and understanding. Six out of ten of the informants viewed that the lacked knowledge, awareness, and understanding, especially in IT and e-participation, would hinder the success of e-participation implementation. In the meantime, it is also a big challenge when the public fails to understand how the council functions and the restriction that the council has faced in implementing any development project for the public. These responses were remarked as follows:

> *"Public is not an IT literate. It would be better if the public had the knowledge and awareness and develop the web on their own and be the watchdog for the council. At the same time, the public does not understand the council's financial constraints. Public asked for the development, but they must understand that it is not easy to develop a new system." (Informant 01-002)*
>
> *"For me, to make the public understand is tough. The public must understand that not all complaints can be resolved immediately. It is because some of the issues are not within the scope and jurisdiction of the council." (Informant 01-003)*
>
> *"The main limitation and challenge would be the knowledge and awareness of the public. So, how can we successfully implement e-participation and encourage our people to participate online if our people are lack knowledge and awareness?" (Informant 01-005)*
>
> *"The main limitation is knowledge from public..." (Informant 01-007)*
>
> *"I believe the main limitation is lack of public knowledge and awareness." (Informant 01-008)*
>
> *"The main limitation and challenges in implementing e-participation is public awareness and knowledge. Lack of awareness and knowledge of the public about e-participation would greatly affect the success of e-participation." (Informant 01-009)*

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Next, challenges in terms of demographic and social differences. Two of the informants had raised this issue since there is a gap between people who have the knowledge and awareness about e-participation and who do not have due to the factors such as age and geographical area. Older people and people from rural areas might find it more difficult to accept e-participation than young people and people from urban areas. Even at some point, people who live in the urban area still lack knowledge and awareness on e-participation. The detailed responses were remarked as follows:

> *"Do you sure that people living in the rural area understand e-government and e-participation? I believe even people from urban areas also may not have ample knowledge about it. So, how can we successfully implement e-participation and encourage our people to participate online if our people are lack knowledge and awareness?" (Informant 01-005)*

> *"Young people might be easy to accept. But old people in the rural area could be different." (Informant 01-006)*

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Subsequently, people's mentality and attitude were also addressed as significant challenges. People's negative behaviour is critical to the council rather than communicating their real problem. As people's acceptance is one of the important conditions in e-participation, the mentality and mindset also should be aligned. People's mentality or way of thinking do not depend on the lifestyle setting because even people from the urban area are lack awareness, ill-informed, and prejudiced. This third-class mentality could be seen in current circumstances when people do not care for their waste. Hence, with the first-class mentality, any implementation could be possible even in e-participation, as one of the informants thoroughly remarked. The detailed responses from the informants were as follows:

"As what I said earlier, the problem is public sometimes use the e-participation platform to critic the council than to channel their complaint in the right manner." (Informant 01-001)

"…the most challenging is people's mindset and attitude. If the public could accept e-participation, that would be good. I see our people are even from the urban area, but the mentality is different from Singapore or Japan. Mentality plays the most important role in any aspect. For example, the Japanese can clean all the waste after an event because of their mentality. On the other hand, we have charged RM500 per month for the cleanliness permit to all bazaar Ramadhan traders. So, after the bazaar, they left all waste just like that. And what is wrong if they collect their waste and put it in a plastic bag so that the council could easily pick it up. But that is not happening because their mentality had set. They already paid the fees, and the council should do the job. The same goes for the recycling programme. Previously, the council had announced an RM1000 fine for the unseparated trash. Nowadays, the E-Idaman tried to educate people to sort out and separate their trash according to the material to preserve our environment so that the recycled trash will be easily collected. But both programmes were not accomplished like in Singapore. This recycling programme tried to minimize the amount of waste on the waste disposal site. But it ends up being so much recycled waste that could be found on the site. Therefore, it needs to be educated early in this social context because educating an adult is tougher. But, if this mentality and attitude have not been changed, it is hard to implement anything." (Informant 01-006)

"In my opinion, the main challenges come from the staff and public. The negative attitude from both would be the main challenge to implement e-participation." (Informant 01-010)

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Also, it was revealed from the interview that one of the setbacks to the success of e-participation implementation is the lacked attitude, knowledge, and skills from the staff. The negative attitude proved that when the staff is too pleasant, they are not ready to change and step out of their comfort zone. In the meantime, as far as public knowledge is important, the staff must also be knowledgeable and skilful about e-participation. Therefore, the staff in the council also play the major role that would greatly affect the success of e-participation implementation, as remarked by the informants as follows:

"The staffs are also challenging since they are too comfortable and do not want to change." (Informant 01-002)

"The main limitation is knowledge from the public as well as staff at the council." (Informant 01-007)

"But I also do not deny that lack of knowledge and skills of the staff about e-participation also one of the important factors that challenge the success of e-participation implementation." (Informant 01-009)

"In my opinion, the main challenges come from the staff and public. The negative attitude from both would be the main challenges to implement e-participation." (Informant 01-010)

Moreover, public lack of needs could also be one of the challenging factors for the unsuccessful e-participation, since most of the public would involve only when necessary, either for the job or business opportunity. One informant remarked:

"...public will involve only when there is a need for example job vacancy and business opportunity." (Informant 01-006)

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Furthermore, two of the informants viewed that the intra-organisational system within the council itself is weak, dated, and ineffective. Even the quality of the internet speed within the organization is also bad. Therefore, it is concerned that the council intra-organisational system is not solid to support the e-participation implementation, as remarked by the informants as follows:

"The main problem is our intra, it is not up to date, and the internet speed is low." (Informant 01-004)

"I believe our system is not that strong for e-participation." (Informant 01-006)

Likewise, the deficiency of the technology and the issue of accessibility faced by the council would also contribute to low e-participation, as remarked by one of the informants as follows:

> *"Even though we have the limitation in terms of technology and the issues of access, that could be slowly improved. I believe when the technology is improved, the participation will increase." (Informant 01-006)*

For instance, the lack of law enforcement also could be one challenge in e-participation implementation. However, as one of the informants perceived, the implementation would be effective if the law had been rigorously imposed. The response was remarked as follows:

> *"One other thing is law enforcement. We have the law, but our enforcement is not strong. Singapore can fine $300 for any cigarette butt littering because they have a strong enforcement." (Informant 01-006)*

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In addition, one of the informants was concerned that technical constraints might restrict the e-participation implementation. For example, the department must abide by certain rules, regulations, and processes, which could not be performed solely online. Below is what had been remarked:

> *"In terms of law, we need to comply with the Town and Country Planning 1976 (Act 172). For example, any given notice should be by hand with the signature. If not, the notice left behind must be proof by a picture with a date. We cannot simply send the notice through email because if something happens and we do not comply with the law, the council would not be entitled to anything. So, this kind of technical problem that limits us to be 100% online." (Informant 01-004)*

Finally, the financial constraints. As pointed out by one of the informants, the council's earnings were invariably equal due to the fixed taxes rate since 1993. Consequently, the council had to compromise with the rising expenses within the tight budgeting for all the development projects. However, people might not realize what the council had faced in providing the development for the people's needs. Thus, financial is also one of the main challenges in e-participation implementation and remarked as follows:

> *"The main problem is financial and public. At the same time, the public does not understand the council's financial constraints. The public asked for the development, but they must understand that it is not easy to develop a new system when the council's revenue remains the same, but our expenses are increasing. However, the council is not allowed to increase the taxes. That is why our assessment rate is still the same from 1993. So, with that financial constraints, the council try to coordinate the development needs." (Informant 01-002)*

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Overall, other than public challenges address by the provider which includes demographic and social differences, lack of knowledge, awareness and understanding as well as negative mentality and attitude, there are main challenges that the government have to focus on the Alor Setar City Council. Lack of attitude, skilled and knowledgeable manpower, weak intra-organisational system, financial and technical constraints as well as issues of access and technology are among the focal barrier in the Alor Setar City Council that the government must overcome, in supporting a successful e-participation implementation.

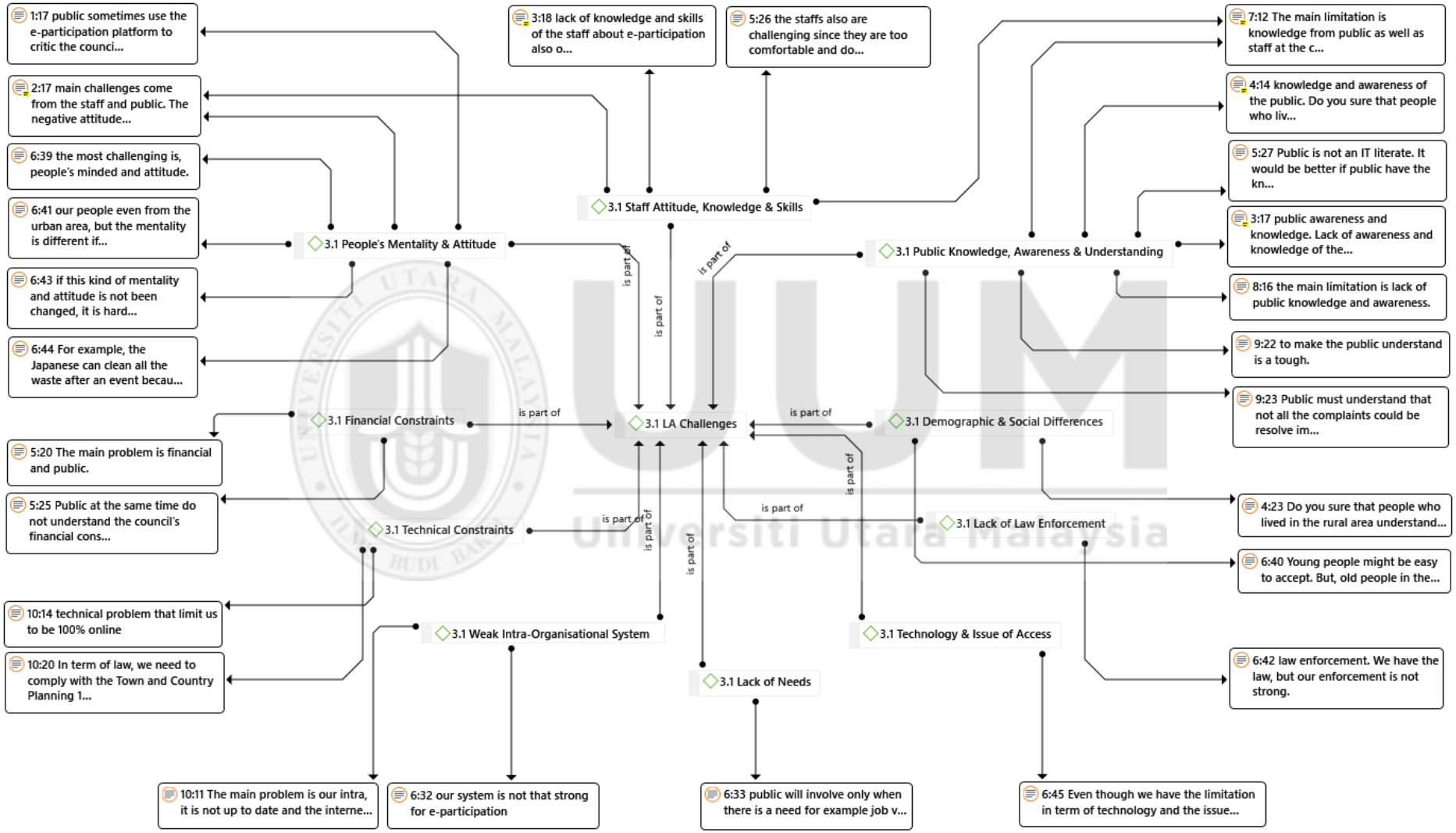

Figure 4.28 Provider Challenges in E-Participation

4.4.2 Public Challenges

The interview with the public informants also found various challenges in e-participation implementation. These challenges are perceived either from the public's experience or their perspectives. These challenges were divided into six sub-elements: demographic and social differences; lack of facilities and infrastructure; lack of knowledge, awareness, and skills; mentality, interest, and preferences; council response and website accessibility; and lack of needs, as shown in Figure 4.29.

Primarily, most of the informants addressed that demographic and social differences would be the main challenges. Differences according to age, geographical areas, educational level, occupational class, and income create inequalities in individual ability and ICT usage. Furthermore, the ageing population, low level of education, low-income status, and lack of good facilities and infrastructure such as poor internet connection, especially in the remote area, had rendered most rural people ICT illiterate. Therefore, this gap caused some people to remain uninformed and lag in most development aspects. Unsurprisingly, this is also contributed to affect the e-participation implementation as remarked by the informants as follows:

> *"I believe that not everybody has internet access, and not everybody could go actively online. Youngsters nowadays might be much more knowledgeable in terms of online. But, some people, for example, the villagers who work as farmers or rubber tappers, do not know how to send their complaint or check it online. For example, in my village, any information will be updated to all at the mosque by the village head (ketua kampung)." (Informant 02-002)*
>
> *"Maybe it is hard to capture different people with different levels of age, educational background, and interest." (Informant 02-003)*
>
> *"The main challenges in this matter are the age divide between young and old people; location between urban and rural areas, and facilities between who have and who doesn't. Most older people don't have the skill to use the internet like young people. The old people are much*

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more comfortable with the traditional method of participation." (Informant 02-005)

"In some areas, especially in the rural, there is no Wi-Fi or internet coverage, or some of it is low. Sometimes people are not afforded to have a computer. In the meantime, cybercafes in rural areas are also limited and costly. The rural community centre also does not provide the public with a good quality of internet." (Informant 02-007)

"It is hard to capture the public to participate because people are different in terms of status and level of education. Therefore, not everybody would understand. Some people might not be working and live in the rural area." (Informant 02-008)

"There is also the issue of divide between urban and rural, educational level or the class of occupation. E-participation for the working people might not be an issue. But for the group of people such as housewives and other lower class, the level of knowledge, understanding, and awareness might be different." (Informant 02-009)

"Between old and young people or urban and rural area, not everybody has the exposure." (Informant 02-011)

"The divide between urban and rural is huge. In the rural area, the internet access is weak." (Informant 02-012)

"The lack of internet connection especially in the rural area is one of the biggest problems." (Informant 02-013)

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The next challenge is facilities and infrastructural issues. Good facilities and infrastructure such as the internet are important requirements in e-participation. However, not everybody has it due to many reasons. Some people still lack the facilities such as computers and do not afford to pay for the high cost of the internet. The low quality of internet speed and interrupted internet connectivity due to cable theft, especially in rural areas, is a constant threat. The quality of facilities and infrastructure is also different between the urban and rural areas. These challenges were emphasised by the informants as follows:

"The internet access would be a huge problem." (Informant 02-004)

"The biggest challenges are in terms of the facilities. In some areas, especially in the rural, there is no Wi-Fi or internet coverage, or it is low. Sometimes people are not afforded the computer, or mostly nowadays, people tend to buy smartphones. Therefore, the proper facilities are not there. In the meantime, cybercafe in rural areas is also limited and costly. The rural community centre also does not provide the public with a good quality of internet." (Informant 02-007)

"In terms of hardware and facilities such as the internet is constantly interrupted." (Informant 02-009)

"Not everybody has the facilities." (Informant 02-011)

"In the rural area, the internet access is weak. Make worse, the cable theft always happened in the rural area. For example, in my own experience, at my village at Alor Janggus." (Informant 02-012)

"…the lack of internet connection especially in the rural area is one of the biggest problems." (Informant 02-013)

"The slow internet connection." (Informant 02-014)

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Furthermore, challenges in terms of lack of knowledge, awareness, and skills. Public limited knowledge, awareness, and skills related to IT specifically, but also in other aspects such as the public participation itself and the role and function of the council in society. Some middle-class and lower-class people especially do not know how to participate and understand how the council works. Indeed, they lack skills since they are not computer or IT literate. To a large extent, these challenges prevent the people from actively participating generally and through e-participation. The detailed responses were remarked by seven of the informants as follows:

"The lack of awareness and knowledge among society might be the main challenges." (Informant 02-001)

"…some people might not concern or assume that online-only apply for certain services. People also think that anything they could complain to the police authority because they did not know the role and function of the council." (Informant 02-002)

"The biggest challenge is public knowledge and awareness. Most of the people do not know or have the knowledge in this matter." (Informant 02-006)

"…knowledge and awareness among people on IT is not encouraging as much as the people in a developed country." (Informant 02-007)

"E-participation for the working people might not be an issue. But for the group of people such as housewives and other lower class, the level of knowledge, understanding, and awareness might be different." (Informant 02-009)

"Not everybody has the knowledge to participate." (Informant 02-011)

"I think not everybody is an IT savvy. Public sometimes does not know using the website." (Informant 02-013)

Additionally, mentality, interest, and preferences are also determined as challenges. Third-class mentality still prevails in our society. Some people showed less interest, lacked responsibility, and depended on others to participate. But, some of them participate if there is a reward. In the meantime, some people prefer to participate in the traditional way rather than online because they feel much more satisfied and comfortable, especially older people. Therefore, people's mentality, interests, and preferences also determined Malaysia's acceptance and success of e-participation implementation. The responses were as follows:

"Some of the people do not have the effort and tend to let go of taking the responsibility to participate because they tend to assume others will do." (Informant 02-001)

*"It is hard to capture different people with different levels of age, educational background and interest. People will love to participate if they gain something from it." (Informant 02-00*3)

"…it also depends on our experience and preferences. Some of us do not prefer to do everything online. The old folks, for example, are satisfied to have a direct conversation and communicate their problem to the officer because they know someone has listened to them." (Informant 02-007)

"The most important, our mentality is different with the developed country." (Informant 02-011)

In the meantime, two of the informants experienced the issue of slow response from the council and website accessibility issues. If these issues are not resolved, it would be a challenge for the public to participate actively in e-participation.

"Sometimes the website itself is hard to get through." (Informant 02-004)

"The main problem that I encounter is the slow response. I believe the execution should be improved." (Informant 02-010)

Finally, the lack of needs also challenges the e-participation implementation. E-participation could be unnecessary for some people, especially non-working young people. The non-working young people might not encounter many issues compared to others. Therefore, the lack of needs would result in the lack of participation, as remarked by one of the informants:

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"Young people, on the other hand, is limited in terms of participation because they might not need to do so since they are not yet working. So, the young people might not have any issues to complain." (Informant 02-005)

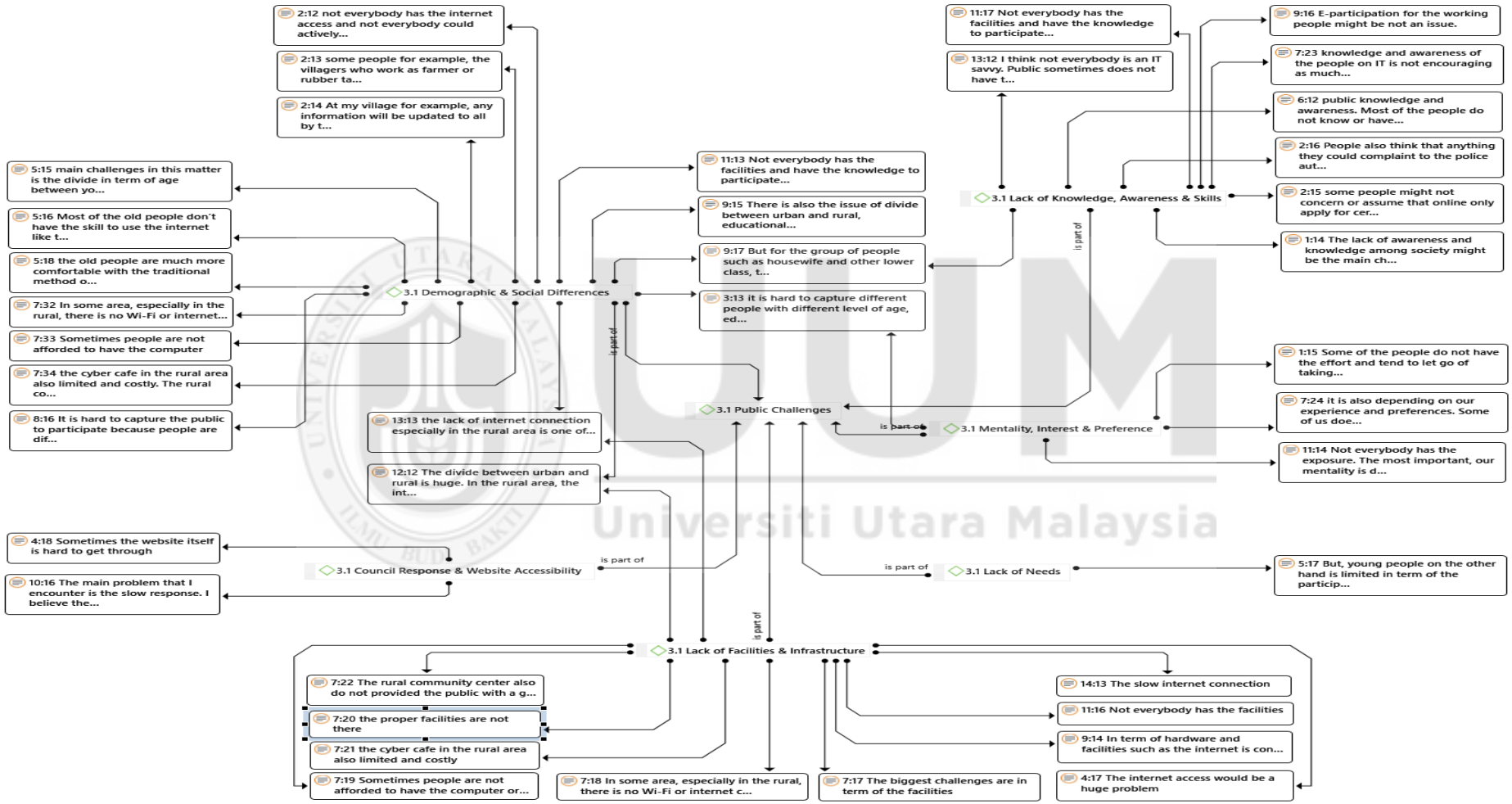

Figure 4.29 Public Challenges in E-Participation

By and large, both provider and public addressed various challenges in the e participation implementation. Both of the groups of the informants appear to be concerned about the same issues such as demographic and social differences, public knowledge, awareness, understanding and skills, and public needs. The provider also posited on the issue of people's mentality and attitude. Correspondingly, the public informants further stated that people's mentality, interests, and preferences would also be challenged.

However, as the provider highlighted the challenges from the public, there were also significant challenges from the provider's side. They acknowledged that the challenges in staff attitude, knowledge and skills, weak intra-organisational system, lack of law enforcement, and the technical and financial constraints they had faced within the council would also contribute to the ineffectiveness of e-participation implementation. Moreover, the public informants emphasised the facilities and infrastructure issues. But only one of the informants from the provider recognised the technology and accessibility issues. Lastly, the public informants also underlined the lack of council response and web accessibility as important factors that would discourage the public from participating in e-participation.

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4.4.3 External Factors

This study also seeks to explore how the informants, as the provider in e-participation, perceived the external factors that would affect the evaluation of the e-participation implementation. Figure 4.30 below shows the. Even though most informants were unsure of the external factors, some tried to point out their opinion. For example, one of the informants perceived that social background differences among the people

would encumber the successful implementation, particularly when involving the technology. The detail responds remarked as follows:

> *"I'm not sure about this. But can I say that social background could be the factor? Social background such as urban and rural; rich and poor; young and old; educated and less educated people would have a huge influence especially when we want to implement something related to the technology." (Informant 01-005)*

Meanwhile, one of the informants observed that lack and ineffective promotion on e-participation might be one of the factors that failed to support the e-participation implementation in achieving the objectives. The response was remarked as follows:

> *"I'm not sure about the external factor that affects the evaluation of e-participation implementation in the local government. But I think lack of promotion may be one of the factors. The council did promote for e-participation, but it is not achieved." (Informant 01-010)*

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Whereas there are no external factors that would affect the evaluation of e-participation implementation, it largely depends on how the local authority as the provider and public as the users to play their active role in this matter, as remarked by the informant as follows:

> *"I am not sure about that. I think there is no other factor. To get effective participation, it should come from both sides of the party. The public should accept and participate, and the council should support the implementation." (Informant 01-001)*

However, there are no external factors that would contribute to the unsuccessful of the e-participation implementation, as were confirmed and remarked by other three of the informants as follows:

"I think there is no external factor that would affect that participation's evaluation." (Informant 01-003)

"I think other external factors would not be an issue." (Informant 01-004)

"I'm not sure, but I think there is no external factor that would affect the evaluation of e-participation." (Informant 01-006)

In the meantime, other four of the informants were uncertain on the external factors that would affect the e-participation evaluation, as their responses were remarked as follows:

"I'm not sure about that." (Informant 01-002, 01-007 & 01-009)

"I don't know other external factors that would affect the e-participation evaluation." (Informant 01-008)

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Above all, four informants appear to be unaware and uncertain regarding the external factors affecting the e-participation evaluation. Meanwhile, four other informants were convinced that there are no external factors. Still, one among the other three of the informants further voiced his opinion on the effective role of the local authority and public. While only two of the informants perceived that social background differences and lack of promotion from the council could be the external factors influencing the evaluation of e-participation implementation.

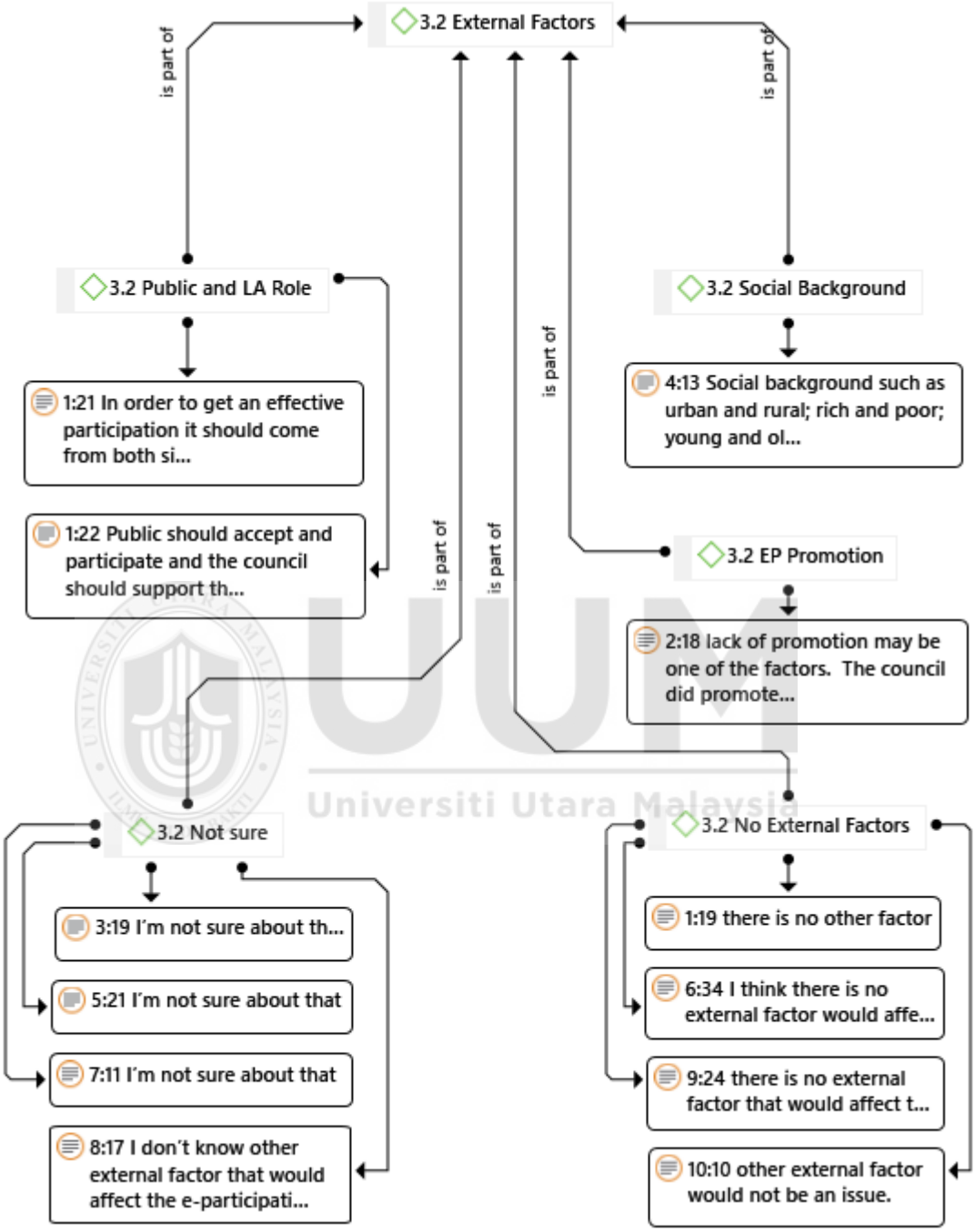

Figure 4.30 External Factors in E-Participation

4.5 Suggestion on the Enhancement of E-Participation

This section discusses the findings on the suggestion to enhance e-participation at Alor Setar City Council. The findings presented in Figure 4.31 below show the suggestions for enhancing e-participation implementation at the Alor Setar City Council from the provider and public perspectives. Accordingly, the detailed breakdown of the interview response for this research question is provided in Table 4.5.

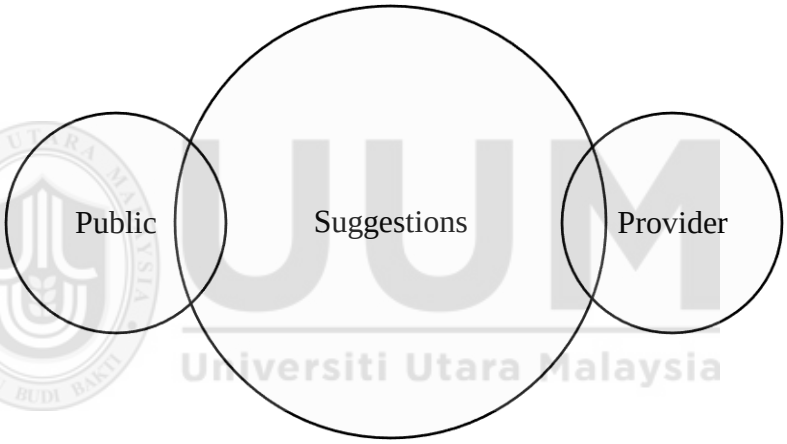

Figure 4.31 Suggestions in Enhancing E-Participation Implementation

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Table 4.5
Findings on the Suggestions in Enhancing E-Participation Implementation

Theme	Aspect	Number of times mentioned	Who mentioned
Provider suggestions	Improve facilities and infrastructure	3	01-005, 01-007, 01-010
	Publicity and education	7	01-001, 01-004, 01-006, 01-008, 01-009, 01-010,
	Top management role	1	01-002
	Staff enhancement	1	01-009
	Public and staff attitude	3	01-006, 01-010
	Friendly application	1	01-005
	User's profile	2	01-003
	Public suggestion and compliments	1	01-006
Public suggestions	Local government support in increasing public knowledge and awareness	8	02-001, 02-004, 02-006, 02-009, 02-010, 02-011, 02-013
	Increase the quality of technology and infrastructure	4	02-004, 02-006, 02-012, 02-014
	Enhance local government resources and skilled workforce	3	02-005, 02-009
	Improve the quality of service delivery and local government response	6	02-004, 02-005, 02-006
	Local government top management active role	1	02-009
	Local area and local leader empowerment	8	02-002, 02-005, 02-007, 02-009
	Interesting and interactive website	3	02-003, 02-008
	Public responsibilities	4	02-001, 02-008
	Preliminary survey	2	02-007

4.5.1 Provider Suggestions

The interview analysis found there are various suggestions from the local authority perspectives. The majority of the informants suggested that publicity and education are important in enhancing e-participation implementation. The public should be exposed to knowledge and awareness about e-participation to understand how e-

participation works. It could be done if the council plays its role by involving the public. Align with that, the publicity on e-participation also needed to keep the public informed and updated. All these suggestions were pointed out as follows:

> *"Knowledge and awareness about e-participation should start from school. When the public has the exposure in the early stage, thus it will be much easier for the public to participate through certain applications." (Informant 01-001)*
>
> *"I believe the council should increase the publicity on e-participation so that public would know." (Informant 01-004)*
>
> *"There is a need to educate the public from time to time on e-participation." (Informant 01-006)*
>
> *"E-participation should be actively spread to the public so that they could know how they can participate and communicate with us." (Informant 01-008)*
>
> *"I really hope that the council could actively promote and educate the public about e-participation. Currently, I can see a lack of promotion on e-participation. The council should not assume that everybody knows. Therefore, the council should reach out to the public, get the information, and from there the council could come out with an appropriate plan or activities." (Informant 01-009)*
>
> *"The council should go out and together with the public in the e-participation programme." (Informant 01-010)*

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In the meantime, the best available facilities and infrastructure supporting the successful implementation of e-participation should not be ignored. These were suggested by two of the informants as follows:

> *"I would suggest that the government give attention to the infrastructure, for example, increasing the internet's speed. An excellent infrastructure would be the most important step in e-participation implementation." (Informant 01-005)*
>
> *"The best ICT infrastructure should be provided." (Informant 01-010)*

Furthermore, top management also plays the most important role in this subject matter. Commitment and transparency from the top management could determine the specific direction that every member could work together towards achieving the goal. The informant's detailed response was as follows:

> *"I think, for e-participation to be successful, it should come from the top to down. If the top management is conflicting, it is hard for the lower-level management to follow. So, the top management must be transparent. When top management is committed to imposing something, every department would be consistent. I truly respect the developed country. They are very transparent, there is no hidden agenda, and amazingly, they can do it. They walk the talk. They had proof that they practised what they had said. For example, during the Junichiro Koizumi held the prime minister position, Japan's government announced the budget and bonus for all the government servants. Therefore, all Japanese people know how much their prime minister and cabinet members get paid. They are so advanced. Every layer of the government is transparent, and that is why their people could know, voice out their opinion and ask anything. It is not only because of e-participation. It is because the top management is committed. It would be hard if we, the lower-level management and people could not ask anything from the top management." (Informant 01-002)*

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Other than that, one of the informants voiced his concern about the staff enhancement. However, besides other important resources, there is no doubt that a strong, knowledgeable, and skilled workforce is one of the prerequisites to support the e-participation implementation.

> *"…the most important is, the council must strengthen the available resources, especially the staff." (Informant 01-009)*

Moreover, e-participation could be improved if both public and staff change their negative attitude. On the other hand, the public should be independent and actively play its role. Even though the local council plays the primary role, the public's

voluntary action involving and arranging the e-participation activities could be necessary to support the e-participation implementation. As the informants remarked as follows:

> *"Public should positively see e-participation. Purposely, e-participation is a tool to help the public. I hope the public can accept e-participation well. The public also should play an active role. They should not depend on everything on the council. They should come forward and discuss with the council if they want to organize any activities. The council would be glad to assist on anything needed because it will benefit the community." (Informant 01-005)*

> *"Public, as well as staff, should change their negative attitude." (Informant 01-010)*

Additionally, one of the informants suggested that a friendly application that is simple, convenient, and easy to understand should be developed so that people with limited knowledge and skills could still operate it and participate.

> *"I would also like to suggest that one easy and friendly application for the public to participate should be built up. So that, even people with the lack of knowledge and skills can still learn, understand and use it." (Informant 01-005)*

Similarly, there is a suggestion that the user's profile should be implemented. It is an essential element to consider because it helps recognise the customer's profile with specific needs and propose the relevant content. It is also an efficient way for the council to inform and update their customer electronically. This response was remarked by the informant as follows:

> *"In the future, the council should create the user's profile. Currently, most internet users are from gen Y and Z. The older people are low. Thus, from that, we can identify our customer's data. For example, our taxes payers should provide us with an email so that the council*

can email them the bills. Currently, the council is not responsible for sending the bill to the customer. So, it would be their responsibility to take note. Therefore, maybe this would help the council be paperless and efficient." (Informant 01-003)

Ultimately, one informant surprisingly stated that besides all the complaints and negative comments that they have been received, the public is welcome to share their ideas and suggestions on what to be improved. He further remarked that they would be delighted if the public could also compliment the council on symbolising gratitude and appreciation for their hard work and good efforts.

"…the council always received complaints and critiques from the public. But we never received any suggestion for improvement of services or facilities. I would also like to suggest if sometimes public also could send the compliments to the council. So that, after all the hard work, the council feel appreciated." (Informant 01-006)

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4.5.2 Public Suggestions

The analysis from the interview also found that there are various suggestions from the public perspective in improving e-participation in local government. First, most informants believed that the local government should increase general knowledge and awareness on e-participation. The public suggested that the local government educate and encourage understanding through various mediums such as social media, campaigns, and workshops. In the meantime, the e-participation programme for the public could start from the school level and the smallest level of the local government through leader empowerment. It could be held anywhere at the centre of public attraction. These views were highlighted by the informants as follows:

"I think the local government should make an advertising campaign about e-participation through the social media because currently the social media play as one of huge influencer." (Informant 02-001)

"…the local government should organize a workshop to raise public awareness. Because, as far as I know, there is no workshop on e-participation for the public. Publicity for the public also lacking." (Informant 02-004)

"The most important is, the local government should give the awareness to the people thorough campaign or roadshow at public places and schools and educate the people how to use the e-participation platform in communicating with the local government." (Informant 02-006)

"I think the government should improve the awareness about IT among the public. The initiative does not have to start from the top level of local government itself. But it could start at the lowest level through the local leader." (Informant 02-007)

The knowledge and awareness for the public are also important. So, for the public to understand, the education should start from the school, and the mass media should play their role in giving the public exposure." (Informant 02-009)

"It is important to enhance the awareness among the people because without it people could not wisely use the e-participation platform." (Informant 02-010)

"I believe it needs the support from both sides. Public should have the awareness and the local government should give the exposure to the people." (Informant 02-011)

"More campaigns to enhance public awareness should be conducted to educate the public on how to involve actively in improving the performance of local government." (Informant 02-013)

Second, the quality of technology and infrastructure for e-participation should be enhanced. The public suggested that the local government ensure the facilities and infrastructure for urban or rural areas are provided. The informants itemised the facilities, including the excellent speed of the internet, the enhanced infrastructure of the internet community centre, and updated information on the e-participation application on the local government website. All these suggestions were stressed by the informants as follows:

"The quality of the internet and response from the local government should be enhanced." (Informant 02-004)

"The local government authority should play their active role and improve the implementation aspect either in the urban or rural area." (Informant 02-006)

"I think 1Malaysia Internet Centre should be enhanced in terms of its infrastructure quality. The local authority website should also be updated so that the public would know the online application provided." (Informant 02-012)

"The internet connection should be expanded to every corner in the states." (Informant 02-014)

Third, two informants addressed enhancing the local government resources and skilled workforce. A young, passionate, knowledgeable, and skilled workforce are the advantages that could help to support the e-participation implementation. In addition, a strong workforce with a sound working system and systematic process in the organization would serve the public effectively. The detailed responses were as follows:

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"…the old or aged staff at the local council should be replaced by the young fresh IT graduates that could bring a much better idea in improving the current system, more passionate to work and have the knowledge on IT." (Informant 02-005)

"…the local government should provide skilled workers who could serve the public and respond fast. In today's trend and with time, everything is fast. I believe the young people would not have any issues in this matter. Instead, this is a good platform. Because sometimes, the response from the call is prolonged and passes here and there. So, I believe that the system, the human resources, and the people should work together." (Informant 02-009)

Fourth, as e-participation is an electronic medium of participation, the local government needs to improve the quality of service delivery and response. Therefore, the government should be very responsive, as pointed out by two of the informants:

"...response from the local government should be enhanced." (Informant 02-004)

"The local government should enhance the quality of delivery. The response should be quick. For example, the LHDN is very quick in giving the response. Any excess tax payment is refunded within one to two weeks. But until now, any matters related to the Land Office take so much time to settle, and it is still done traditionally. With the current technology, it could be easier to do it online. The system should be upgraded, and any updates or information could be sent online or SMS in auto-reply mode. So, create one client charter and follow that charter in terms of the time response so that the Customer Service Unit that deals with the public would have the standard to follow. In the end, we would know whether the KPI is achieved or not." (Informant 02-005)

"The quality of response also should be improved for e-participation evaluation." (Informant 02-006)

Fifth, the active role of top management in the local government also should not be neglected. It was emphasised that the top management is responsible for tackling the e-participation implementation problem. Thus, the top management must go outside from their working environment and meet with the public so that they would understand the current circumstances, as proposed by one of the informants:

"The top management in the local government should go out there and examine on the issues of facilities for e-participation. Don't just stay in the office." (Informant 02-009)

Sixth, empowering the local leader in the smallest local area is pertinent. At this point, the local leader, such as the chief officer, village chief, or the Village Development and Security Committee (*JKKK)*, could be an intermediator between the local government and the public. With an adequate facility available, the local leader could help the community in their area channel the complaints to the council. The community could also ask for help from the local leader related to the ICT. In the

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meantime, there should be a particular meeting place where the public could get the information in terms of ICT or e-participation. The necessary programmes and activities must be organised within the smallest local area because they are much closer to the public. All these suggestions were mentioned by the informants as follows:

> *"I suggest in every rural area, penghulu or the JKKK should be provided with the internet and other facilities. Therefore, in any issues they could channel to the council." (Public 2).*
>
> *"…any programme related to the ICT could be done in the smallest local level such as a county. At this point, penghulu or the JKK could play their role to channel the complaints from the villagers in their community. Likewise, in the e-Kasih programme under the ICU that purposely to helps the needy people and asnaf, the government could help the people who do not have the facilities to participate in this programme through the help from penghulu or the county officer." (Public 5)*
>
> *"The initiative does not have to start from the top level of local government itself. But it could start at the lowest level through the local leader. A local leader such as Penghulu or Ketua Kampung could actively play their role. These local leaders could help their community with the online transaction and others. I believe there are parents in the rural area who have a son or daughter that study abroad. So, the local leader could help the parents who want to communicate but do not have any facilities, skills, or knowledge. At first, people will learn from it, and later, slowly, they could try to operate themselves. The same goes for other necessary dealings with the local government. It would be much more convenient and fast." (Public 7)*
>
> *"…in the village or community, there should be a specific venue for the public to get information on e-participation or how to operate the computer. Maybe it could create awareness, and the process would be much faster. The local area is the most important because it should start from the smallest level. Public access might be limited if it starts far-off the local level." (Informant 02-009)*

Seventh, an interesting and interactive website is equally important in e-participation implementation because it helps to invite and attract the public to use it. The public

also could easily participate with less direction. These views were expressed by two of the informants as follows:

> *"The website is the most important. I suggest the website should be interesting in capturing the public's attention. It is good to give the benefit to people. It is just the matter to capture people's attention." (Informant 02-003)*

> *"The presentation should be interesting. People would participate if it is simple, easy and interactive. If it is flat, people tend to avoid." (Informant 02-008)*

Eighth, two informants perceived that public responsibilities are key elements in e-participation evaluation. It is discouraging that the people are uninformed and unresponsive. The people also show less concern unless it is beneficial to them. All of these contribute to the unreceptive attitude. Therefore, the public should pursue the knowledge and awareness on e-participation to understand the needs and involve with the council. The responses were remarked as follows:

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> *"…people should increase their knowledge through reading to expose themselves about e-participation." (Informant 02-001)*

> *"The presentation should be interesting. People will participate if it is simple, easy, and interactive. If it is flat, people tend to avoid it. But Malaysian are not very responsive to surveys except for their self-interest. If it is not beneficial to them, they will not commit. Based on my own experience, it is hard to get public involvement either in the face-to-face interview or survey. So, people who do not participate are not understood, are not interested or think it is beneficial. People who understand and have the specific purposes will only give their commitment." (Informant 02-008)*

Ninth, one of the informants proposed the necessity of the preliminary survey. The preliminary survey in e-participation would help the government reach out to the public and acknowledge the current circumstances or issues in this subject matter.

Moreover, this survey is valuable to equip our young generation with the necessary needs for the future of e-participation. Generally, this preliminary survey is the important step to support effective implementation and achieve the aims, as precisely stated by the informant as follows:

> "…*sometimes the government might have a good plan. But the enforcement might be lacking. Therefore, it does not reach the target group—for example, the provided computer and internet facilities at the community centre. But I don't know how effective it is, and either the community uses it because some of it was abandoned. Why is this happening? What is the problem? In addition, the main objective of e-participation is to involve the public. So, the government should study which area mostly consists of the younger population with the necessary needs. Therefore, through these young generations, the knowledge and awareness on IT and e-participation could be provided and effectively used for the long term advantage of the future generation." (Informant 02-007)*

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Overall, various suggestions were pointed out from both informants. The public informants suggest improved facilities and infrastructure, publicity and education programme, top management role, human resources, public and staff attitude, friendly application user's profile, and public suggestion and compliments. Furthermore, from the public perspective, the informant suggested that the government should support in increasing public knowledge and awareness, increase the quality of technology and infrastructure, enhance the local government resources and skilled workforce, improve the quality of service delivery and response, local government top management active role, local area and local leader empowerment, interesting and interactive website, public responsibilities and preliminary survey. These suggestions are presented in Figures 4.32 and 4.33 below.

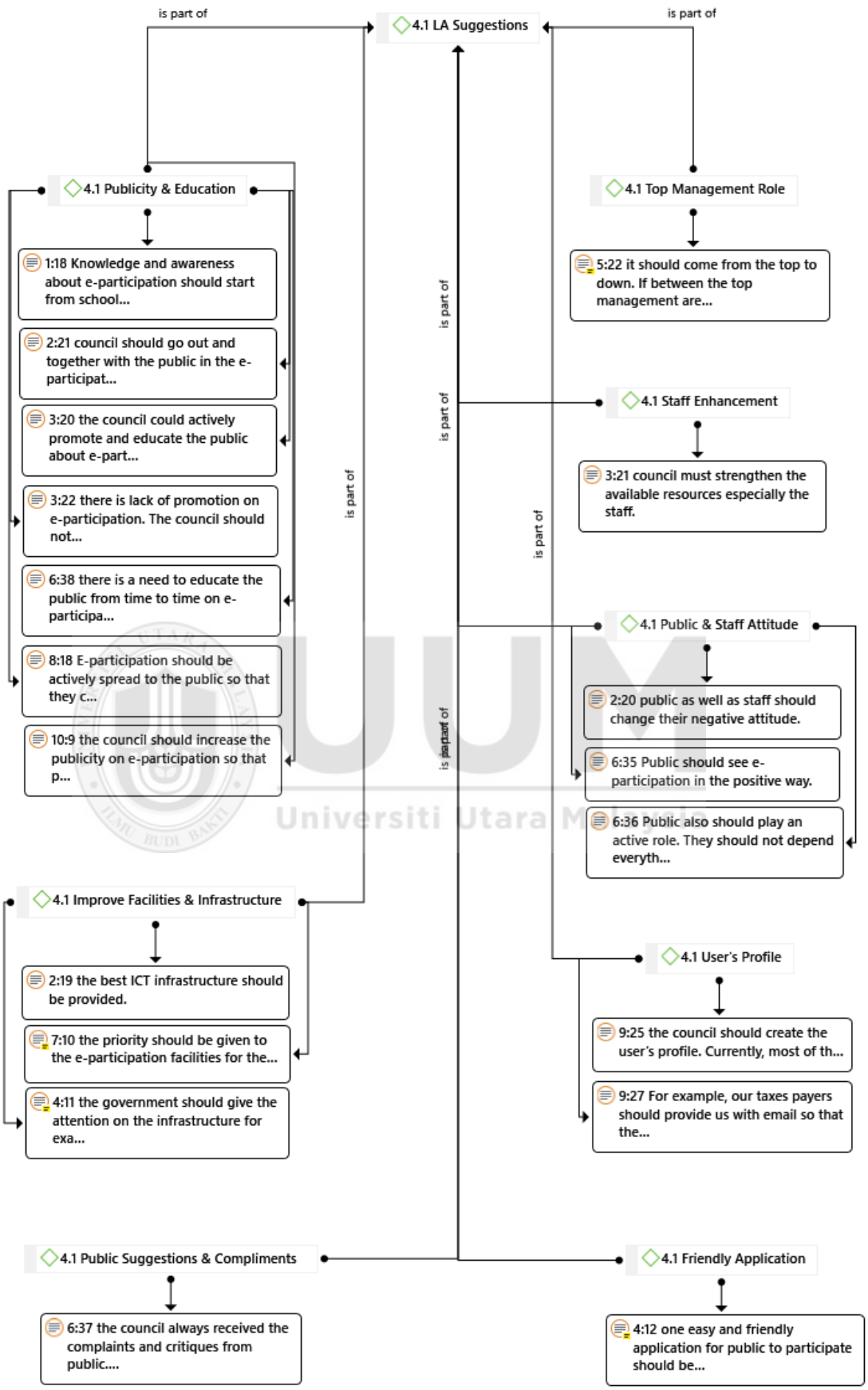

Figure 4.32 Provider Suggestions in Enhancing E-Participation

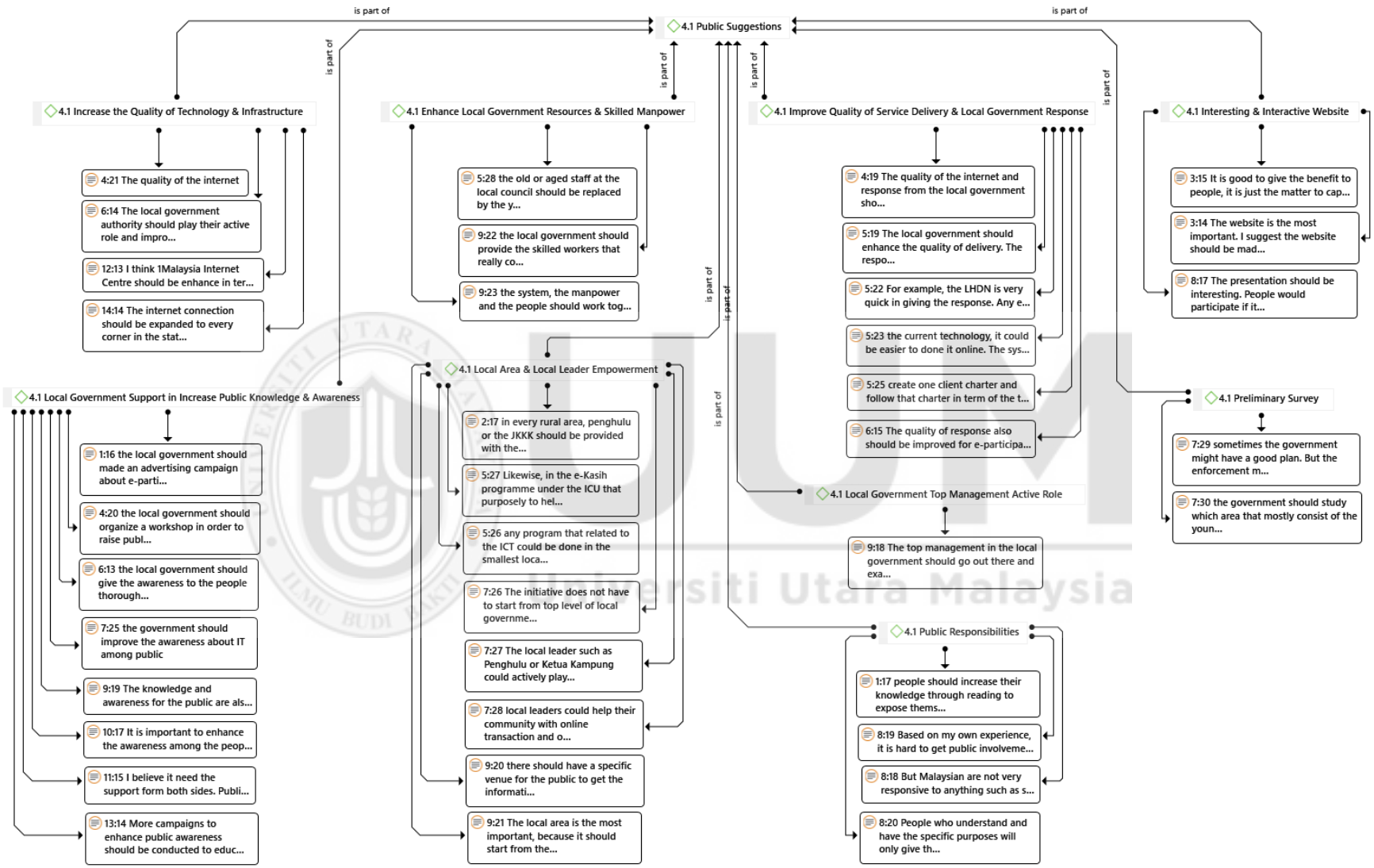

Figure 4.33 Public Suggestions in Enhancing E-Participation

4.6 Key Findings on the Evaluation of E-Participation

There are four research questions underpinning the current study. The questions are, first, to what extent is the awareness of e-participation among the public and providers at the Alor Setar City Council area? The second research question is: how is the e-participation implementation at the Alor Setar City Council area? The third research question is: what are the challenges facing the implementation of e-participation at the Alor Setar City Council area? The fourth and final research question is: how to enhance the e-participation implementation at the Alor Setar City Council area? Based on these questions as mentioned above, the answer to these questions is divided into four sections: public and provider awareness on e-participation, the e-participation implementation, the challenges facing the implementation of e-participation and the suggestions on the enhancement of e-participation in the research area.

4.6.1 Public and Provider Awareness on E-Participation

E-participation is not necessary since the traditional method of participation was sufficient and actively used by the public. However, most providers and the public had the knowledge and understanding of e-participation as an online medium of participation. Most of the public gains their knowledge through various mediums. For example, through the internet, reading, learning experiences and working field, and the information disseminated by the local government.

In terms of the needs of e-participation, most of the providers and public perceived that e-participation is significantly needed. Although it could not be relied on as a primary medium, it is unquestionably required as an additional medium for public participation due to its various benefits. It is a convenient platform that helps to support

effective public participation and enhance the public participation process. E-participation also helps diversify the mode of participation, and it is compatible in this present time with the advancement of technology. On the other hand, few public informants perceived it differently. It is believed that e-participation was an inadequate medium since it favours only those with the knowledge and awareness, not those with a low level of education. Additionally, it is beneficial only to a limited group of people, especially the younger generations. Other than that, as much as e-participation is needed, the quality of the government response is equally important.

In the meantime, in terms of e-participation in enhancing public participation, part of the public perceived with the sophisticated technologies and improvement on the system, e-participation would be a reasonable and necessary medium which help to enhance public communication and participation with the local authority. However, some public is concerned that due to the digital divide problem, e-participation could be challenging, especially for people from rural areas. Therefore, e-participation needs to improve implementation to reach a large group. Besides, enhancing public participation through e-participation can only be achieved if both public and provider give their full support and play their role.

Besides, various opinions on the expectation of e-participation were pointed out. Both the public and provider highly expected that e-participation would help to enhance public participation if the limitations and challenges faced by the public could be conquered. Additionally, it is also expected that e-participation supports effective engagement through the cooperation between the public and provider. In the meantime, the provider personally expected e-participation to enhance the council's

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efficiency and services through public input and recommendations. Therefore, the provider also expected that the public could benefit from the availability of an e-participation platform through appropriate usage. Meanwhile, the public expected that the implementation aspects could be enhanced for a successful e-participation adoption. The local government is also expected to enhance their quality of service and response and constantly promote e-participation to make the public acknowledge, understand, and encourage. Furthermore, e-participation is also expected to capture the public interest. Therefore, the website itself should be interesting and interactive.

The provider also agreed that e-participation significantly helps them serve the public effectively. The provider could monitor the public complaints anywhere outside the workplace and provide much faster feedback. Moreover, the e-participation platform is also convenient to the public as the communication process could efficiently and effectively be done online without being physically present at the council. Finally, all providers agreed that e-participation helps create and improve the new future environment for both providers and the public. Through e-participation, the provider could respond to the public complaints appropriately with accurate information. Thus, it helps create a positive environment for two-way communication and avoids conflict between the provider and the public for a better public service.

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4.6.2 The E-Participation Implementation at Alor Setar City Council Area

There were various aspects relating to the e-participation implementation at the Alor Setar City Council area from both sides of the group of informants. The current study concluded according to every single aspect as follows:

4.6.2.1 E-Participation Platform

Regarding e-participation platforms, most of the informants from the provider group highlighted several e-participation platforms available, including email, e-Aduan, Facebook, and WhatsApp. However, one of the providers was unaware of the availability of WhatsApp applications. In the meantime, only two different providers were acknowledged on the Telegram and e-Cakna platforms. In terms of the online forum, three of the providers confirmed that it was inactive. On the other hand, most public informants indicated their familiarity with email and e-Aduan.

Additionally, only six of the informants acknowledge the Facebook application. However, only one informant was recognised on WhatsApp. While one of the public informants believed in the availability of the online forum, on the contrary, one other informant expressed uncertainty. Unfortunately, two informants appeared to be lack knowledge in this matter as one of them was unsure. One other wrongly remarked that the government agencies and programmes were the e-participation platforms. Finally, two of the informants from the provider group and three from the public group indicated on the e-services platforms even though it is part of the e-government applications.

Although most of the informants from both groups acknowledged the primary e-participation platform, some of the informants from both groups did not know specific e-participation applications. Surprisingly, the e-Cakna or i-Tegur application was recognised by only one of the providers. Additionally, none of the providers recognised i-Sedar, an online complaints application in the council. On the other hand, Telegram, Twitter and Instagram were not recognised. Therefore, the current study

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concludes there is still a lack of knowledge regarding the e-participation platform among the providers and public.

4.6.2.2 Provider's Staff Support

In the context of staff support, a good half of the providers believed that the staff had supported the e-participation implementation. Some of them had urged to change the manual practices commonly used in the council to online methods. Some of them also expressed their dissatisfaction with the low quality of the internet in the council which affected their work and communication among the staff. In addition, the necessary knowledge, awareness, and training on the ICT and handling the e-participation platform had contributed to the staff support.

On the other hand, few providers validated that not all the staff showed their support. Unsurprisingly, the older staff appeared to be unsupportive since they were less technologically savvy than the younger staff. Consequently, their knowledge on how to use the technology was limited, and they were struggled to learn and adapt to technology and application than the younger staff. However, one of the providers was unsure since those from the department engaged in manual labour were minimally educated, especially in IT. Therefore, most of them used the manual procedure only and could not operate online-related activities.

4.6.2.3 Provider's Resources

The current study concluded that most resources were available but inadequate and restricted. Only one provider believed the resources, including staff, financial and infrastructure, were available and adequate. Meanwhile, two other providers identified

the adequacy of the financial and staff resources only, respectively. However, most providers highlighted the resource limitation in supporting the e-participation implementation, especially the financial and technology. Technology, particularly the internet, is the core in e-participation implementation. However, investing in technology also required a considerable amount of money that the council does not have due to the limited income. Therefore, not only good facilities and infrastructure to all the areas within their responsibility could not afford to be provided by the council, but not all the staff and the computer in the council were equipped with the internet.

In the meantime, other restrictions such as technical issues due to the weak server identified that the local council also lacks a sound intra organisational system as the essential resource. Additionally, the restriction of human resources such as unsupportive older staff and unreceptive staff towards any changes was also pointed out. Time was also lacking since achieving a successful e-participation implementation was time-consuming. Above and beyond, one of the providers was optimistic that the council currently strived to strengthen their resources, including the human capital, financial, technology and infrastructure towards e-participation.

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4.6.2.4 Provider's Infrastructure And Technology

Regarding the infrastructure and technology, although these aspects are available in supporting the e-participation implementation, there is still a various limitation. The poor quality of the ICT, especially internet access, is one of the main issues highlighted by most providers. One of the providers confirmed that not all the computers in the council were equipped with the internet. In the meantime, one other provider

acknowledged the need to increase the internet speed. However, due to the high cost with the limited revenue, thus the council had utilised the available resources provided only by the ministry. Similarly, although one other provider did not directly respond on the aspects of infrastructure and technology but continued to underline the issue related to the weak intra organisation, specifically on an outdated specification. Weak infrastructure within the council also contributes to the poor service delivery quality and affects the quality of work among the staff. Therefore, the current study concluded that the infrastructure and technology supporting the e-participation implementation were limited.

4.6.2.5 Public Facilities

Only one informant does not have the facilities in terms of public facilities. However, most of the public has access to basic facilities such as computers, laptops, smartphones, and the internet, which allow them to participate electronically. Therefore, the current study concluded that public facilities were not an issue, although one of the informants stated that the facilities were provided for the children's convenience.

4.6.2.6 Public Knowledge And Skills

Concerning knowledge and skills, the current study concluded that most public had the necessary knowledge and skills in using e-participation platforms. However, two of the informants that verified had no knowledge and skills in using e-participation platforms. One of them further stated the lack of computer skills since they familiar with manual practices only during their employment. Meanwhile, one of the informants who did not respond to this matter declared on the knowledge and skills of

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using the computer and internet only. Although most of the informants had the necessary knowledge and skills in this context, one posited the lack of need to participate, and one other declared the lack of personal participation. Essentially, knowledge and skills in e-participation platforms were not guaranteed for public participation.

4.6.2.7 Activities Promoting E-Participation

In terms of activities promoting e-participation, the current study concluded that the activities promoting e-participation by the local council were sorely lacking. The majority of the providers were confirmed that no e-participation activities were ever organised. Meanwhile, one of the providers has lacked awareness since e-participation was not under her responsibility. However, there is only one programme recognised by one of the providers. Even though it was not explicitly related to promoting e-participation, that programme purposely bridged the digital divide in the community. It guided the public on the ICT and other related issues.

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The necessary information on e-participation was available on the local council website and online mediums such as Facebook and during the traditional medium of participation such as the Town Hall Meeting and Hari Bertemu Pelanggan. In the meantime, align with the response from the providers, five of the public informants underlined that there are no e-participation activities ever conducted by the council. Furthermore, nine other public informants proved to be uninformed as they were unsure or lacked knowledge regarding this matter. However, one of the informants assumed that e-participation campaigns were being held.

4.6.2.8 Participation in E-Participation Activities

Previously, since both provider and public informants posited either there were no e-participation activities provided, or they were unsure and lack of knowledge, thus participation in e-participation activities was not related. However, the one and only provider who acknowledged the community programme that aimed to bridge the digital divide through the ICT informed that participation mostly comes from the local community within the area. The informants further highlighted that even though this programme is open to all, it constantly involves the public that interested and had the opportunity to participate. Accordingly, three other providers shared the same view and still pointed out their opinion regardless of the lack of e-participation activities. One of the informants believed that if e-participation activities were available, it would usually involve genuinely interested people because not everyone could participate due to the work and time restrictions. However, an activist, for example, could always make the time and seize the opportunity to participate due to their passion and interest.

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In the meantime, one other informant underlined that rationally public participation through e-participation was lacking since the activities promoting e-participation and the comprehensive awareness and understanding of e-participation from the public were also significantly lacking. On the other hand, compared to the developed countries, their public maintained an active role in either contemporary or traditional methods of participation. They also independently put an effort to organise the activities related to e-participation and developing the website essentially for the community. Above and beyond, as one other informant substantiated, even the e-participation platform in the council was used mainly by the public who have the needs and are actively involved with the council.

4.6.2.9 Usage of E-Participation Platform

Concerning the usage of the e-participation platform, it has been observed that the public actively used it as most of the provider declared that the council frequently received complaints through all available platforms, including e-Aduan, WhatsApp, Facebook, and email. Among these platforms, some informants recognised that e-Aduan is the most actively used, and others believed WhatsApp was the most popular one. Concurrently, only one of the informants posited on the inactive e-Forum platform among these informants. However, one of the informants who misinterpreted that e-service as one of the e-participation platforms had identified the usage of electronic payment services in the council is still very low due to the inconveniences, especially to the middle age or elderly group of users. The current study concluded that the public actively used the e-participation platform in the council.

4.6.2.10 E-Participation Experience with Local Government

Regarding e-participation experience, only three used to file their complaints through e-Aduan, email, and SMS to the respective local council. However, one of them had never received any feedback ever since. Lack of needs; a representative represented the community in any issues; used to the e-services only and the issues on online security and the risk of personal data breaches were some of the reasons for most informants who had no experience participating with the local government through e-participation. However, one of the informants had experience communicating with other governmental agencies. Few of the informants used to participate with the local council through the traditional method of participation only. Hence, the current study concluded that public participation through e-participation was noticeably limited.

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4.6.3 The Challenges Facing the Implementation of E-Participation

Regarding challenges in e-participation implementation, the current study concluded that both provider and public informants agreed on several issues. Firstly, it was a huge challenge that the public lacked knowledge, awareness, and understanding related to IT and e-participation specifically and failed to understand the function of the council and the restriction that the council had faced in the implementation of any development project for the public generally. Besides, not all public were IT literate or possessed the necessary computer skills, predominantly middle-class and lower-class families.

Following, demographic and social differences in terms of age, geographical areas, educational level, occupational class, and status of income among the public also contribute as a significant challenge to the successful e-participation implementation. These gaps and differences create inequalities of the individual ability in many aspects, such as ICT. An ageing population, low level of education, low status of income, and lack of appropriate facilities and infrastructure such as poor internet connection, especially in the remote area, had caused people from the rural as an ICT illiterate. Even at some point, people who live in the urban area still lack knowledge and awareness on e-participation. Consequently, some people remained uninformed and lagged in most development aspects.

Subsequently, it is the people's mentality, attitude, interests, and preferences. People's understanding and acceptance are critical conditions in e-participation. But, even people from the urban area proved to be prejudiced and lack awareness and knowledge of e-participation. People are also being negative and critical to the council rather than communicating their problems. In the meantime, the third-class mentality among the

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people contributes to a lack of essential social attitude and empathy. Therefore, some people showed less interest, lack of responsibility, and less care to participate. Besides, it would be hard to attract the old group of people who preferred and were satisfied with the traditional method rather than online participation. As pointed out by both informants, all these factors significantly challenge the e-participation implementation.

Next, the provider acknowledged that the council had to improve the technology and accessibility currently lacking in supporting the implementation. Likewise, the public informants also recognised the facilities and infrastructure issues since not all people have a computer and afford to subscribe to the internet. In the meantime, the accessibility issues, the low quality of internet speed, and the interrupted connectivity due to cable theft, especially in rural areas, are a constant threat to the e-participation implementation.

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Then, the lack of needs would also be a challenging factor. Participation could be unnecessary for some groups of people, especially the non-working young people, since these groups of people might not encounter many issues compared to others. In the meantime, most public involvement is only in the job or business opportunity and working needs.

Among the challenges highlighted above, the provider precisely verified on few other challenges, including the staff's lack of attitude, knowledge, and skills. The staff needs to have the necessary knowledge, skills, and positive attitude to support the successful implementation of e-participation. However, sadly the staff were too comfortable in

their comfort zone and showed a negative attitude towards changes. Besides, it is also challenging since the intra-organisational system within the council was weak, dated, and ineffective. Furthermore, the quality of the internet speed within the organisation is also poor. Therefore, the intra-organisational system was not solid to support the e-participation implementation.

In the meantime, law enforcement supporting the e-participation implementation is currently lacking. Accordingly, the implementation would be much more effective if the law had been rigorously imposed. Furthermore, the technical constraints would challenge the council's operation because specific rules and processes should be performed manually than solely online. Hence, technically, the e-participation implementation could be unfitted to a particular function. Finally, the council had no choice other than to compromise on the development project within the limited expenditures due to the financial constraints. While for the public informants, personal experience identified that the issues of slow response from the council and website accessibility would also affect effective participation among the public.

Above and beyond, the current study also examined the external factors that would affect the evaluation of e-participation implementation from the provider's perspective. Even though most of the provider either unsure or convinced that there were no external factors, two of the providers posited that social background differences and lack of effective promotions could affect e-participation implementation evaluation. Meanwhile, one of the providers believed if the local government and the public could understand and effectively play their role, the e-participation would succeed.

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4.6.4 The Suggestions on the Enhancement of E-participation

This study also valued the suggestions in enhancing the e-participation from the perspective of both informants. First, both provider and public informants agreed on improving e-participation facilities and infrastructure among all the suggestions. However, public informants further emphasised that the best technology, facilities, and infrastructure, such as good internet speed, should be available in urban or rural areas. Furthermore, the internet community centre and updated information on e-participation applications in the local government website should also be enhanced.

Second, the importance of increasing knowledge and awareness on e-participation. Hence, the provider suggested that it is essential to expose the public to awareness and understanding through the necessary education. The council is also responsible for constantly publicising e-participation to keep the public informed and updated. In the same view, the public also suggested that the council should actively educate and encourage the public through various mediums such as social media, campaigns, and workshops. The e-participation programme could be implemented for the public, starting from the school level, the smallest local government, or anywhere at the public place of interest.

The third is the active role of the top management. The provider believed that with the commitment and transparency from the top management, a specific direction could be determined so that every member of the organisation could work together towards achieving it. Meanwhile, the public emphasised the top management's responsibility to tackle the problem in e-participation implementation. Accordingly, the top

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management needs to work off the office environment and connect with the public to understand the current circumstances.

Fourth, a few providers and public informants were also proposed for staff enhancement. It is pertinent for the local government to strengthen the available resources, especially the staff, to improve the e-participation implementation. The skilled workforce should be in the council to serve efficient and effective services. Therefore, there is an urgency to replace the senior staff with the younger staff who are passionate, knowledgeable, and skilful, especially in IT, to support the success of e-participation implementation.

Fifth, to enhance the e-participation in the local government, few providers suggested that the public and staff in the council should change the negative attitude. Even though the local council plays the primary role of e-participation, the public should also actively play their role. Therefore, the public should be independent and take the initiative to come forward and cooperate with the council in arranging the e-participation activities that they feel necessary. In the meantime, public informants also believe the public is responsible for seeking knowledge and awareness on e-participation to understand the needs and be involved with the council. As a result, the public shows less concern in participation either due to the lack of knowledge, interest or less beneficial. Therefore, this unresponsive and discouraging attitude resulted in less commitment among the public.

Among all the suggestions above, the provider personally posited several other suggestions such as: developing a friendly application that is convenient and easy so

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that public with the limited knowledge and skills could be able to learn, understand, and utilise it in participating with the council; developing the user's profile so that from the customer's data and profile that has been recognised, the council could efficiently serve the users within their specific needs, keep them inform and updated as well as propose the relevant content electronically; and other than complaints or destructive comments, public are very much welcoming to share ideas or suggestions so that the council could work on what to be improved and perhaps with all the efforts and hard work that the council has put up, the public could also make the council feel appreciated through their compliments.

Besides, public informants also pointed out on other several suggestions from their perspectives, include: the council should improve the quality of service delivery and be highly responsive to the public; the local leader at the smallest local area should be empowered as an important intermediator between the local government and public so that the local community within their area could get the necessary information and assistance that related to the ICT or e-participation issues and the e-participation programme or activities should be organised within the smallest local area because it is much closer to the public; the website should be interesting and interactive to attract the public to use it with less direction; and finally, the preliminary survey in e-participation among the public would be an important step for the government to understand the current circumstances or issues in this subject matter as well as to support an effective e-participation implementation in achieving the aims.

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4.7 Conclusion

This chapter comprehensively discussed the findings of the research. The finding reveals a complex and interesting issue in the e-participation implementation within the research scope. The detail of the findings will be discussed in the next chapter.

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CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses and summarises the study results presented in Chapter Four. This chapter also considers the limitations, the practical implications, and the significance of the current study. The end of this chapter highlights the directions for future research and the concluding remarks.

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5.2 Discussion and Summarise of the Findings

The findings' summarisation covers all the elements that answer the main research objective: the evaluation of e-participation implementation at the Alor Setar City Council area. It comprises the awareness of e-participation, the e-participation implementation aspects, the challenges facing the implementation of e-participation, and the suggestions on the enhancement of e-participation from the perspective of both public and provider. The findings summarise as follows:

5.2.1 Public and Provider's Awareness on E-Participation

Despite the needs and motivation in implementing e-participation as highlighted in Chapter 2 unnecessary and lacking due to the sufficient of the current method of participation, the finding revealed that awareness and understanding of e-participation

were considered appropriate. According to Abdul Gafoor (2012), awareness refers to perceiving, feeling, or being conscious of circumstances or sense of the patterns. In this level of consciousness, the observer does not need to understand to confirm the understanding of data. In other words, it indicates that any knowledge holder must have consciousness, yet awareness itself does not imply any form of knowledge. Generally, awareness is related to the quality of being aware of something. In the meantime, Schipper (2014) pointed out that unawareness refers to the lack of conception rather than information.

Therefore, awareness in this study is much related to the idea and perspective towards e-participation without prescribed knowledge or understanding. However, based on the evidence from both group interviews, e-participation is essential, especially within the current context, since it diversifies the participation medium, which is convenient and necessary in today's modern digital era. In this regard, this finding concurred with the emphasises of Barber (2001) that various new forms of participation emerged along with the advancement of the technology, which means explicitly to improve citizen participation. In the meantime, Milakovich (2012) supported that the impressive growth of ICT has provided citizens with more ways to acquire information, stay connected to the government, and engage in government. Therefore, currently, if the government does not provide additional online applications and tools for citizen involvement, they are more likely to lag.

Similarly, Vaerst, Steffens and Lokaiczyk (2015) asserted that due to the internet's advancement, the interaction between government and citizens is no longer restricted to telephone or face-to-face communication, which is limited within its operating

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hours as we had before. Additionally, with Web 2.0, there have been significant developments, mainly with the introduction of internet-connected mobile devices. Therefore, now, a new and convenient medium of interaction is also offered through smartphone applications. However, the findings of this study also argued that e-participation could only act as an additional medium of participation concerning different individual preferences and more favourable only to specific groups of people. It strengthens the findings by Polat (2005) in her study, which found that e-participation should be used in conjunction with traditional engagement methods rather than as a substitute. Likewise, Alonso (2009) confirmed that there are no indications that e-participation could substitute the conventional participation instruments because knowledge and awareness in technology did not lead to higher interest in local public concerns. This study agreed that e-participation could not be the main or only medium for public participation due to various restrictions faced by the people and local government. Still, electronic technologies cannot be argued to assist the public, lawmakers, and government officials.

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Regarding e-participation outcome, since there is a lack of e-participation activities provided by the council, changes and benefits in terms of knowledge, skills, and behaviour among informants could not be determined. However, this study valued the informants' perception and expectancy of the intended e-participation implementation outcomes. Most of the informants expected that e-participation could help to enhance public participation through effective engagement. Kearns, Bend and Stern (2002) posited that e-participation might have real potential to facilitate, broaden and deepen public participation in various ways. E-participation can encourage involvement by making it more straightforward and accessible to obtain information. It also helps

broaden participation by creating new channels of democratic inclusion, which may make participation less intimidating and more inclusive of previously excluded or complex to reach groups. E-participation also helps expand public involvement in political processes by increasing the frequency and enriching the content of the dialogue between citizens, elected representatives and all levels of government (Kearns et al., 2002). However, few public informants believed e-participation would be an excellent medium to enhance public participation if the implementation improved. This finding is strengthened by Vaerst et al. (2015), which stated that the possibility of encouraging further public participation depends on the municipality's strategic approach. Vaerst et al. had proved in their study that appropriate and customised digital services such as concerns management platforms could indeed facilitate increased citizen participation.

Alongside the discussion, e-participation also significantly supports an effective service for both public and the provider. As much public could conveniently engage online without physically present at the council, providers could easily monitor the public complaints anywhere outside the workplace and serve the public with much faster feedback. These findings can expand further the idea concerning the present study proposed by Phang and Kankanhalli (2008) and Polat (2005), which stated the internet could support an effective e-participation due to the capacity to avoid offline physical barriers. Likely, people do not participate for conveniences such as lack of time or accessibility. Therefore, the internet could promote to extend the information channels, simplify the communication process and make the involvement easier, convenient, and straightforward for the public. In the meantime, Kearns et al. (2002) specified that it is worthless for the public to utilise this medium if the local

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government is not listening or responding to the information received via the internet. Therefore, it has been shown that commitments on responsiveness are crucial for the evaluation of e-participation, as found in further discussion in this current study.

Additionally, e-participation is expected to improve the future environment through effective two-way communication between the government and the public. According to Tai, Porumbescu and Shon (2019), the advancement of interactive technologies promotes two-way communication between citizens and government, shapes the direction towards new relationships and supports the transition from thin to a thick and robust democracy. In the meantime, there is no empirical evidence that e-participation could shape an excellent future environment since it helps to avoid the conflict between council and citizen through an appropriate response as perceived. However, this finding strengthens the prior studies, which emphasised that participant satisfaction is significantly influenced by government responsiveness and the quality of feedback to the participant's needs and input (Kweit & Kweit, 2004; Parasuraman Zeithaml & Malhotra, 2005; Webler & Tuler, 2000). Moreover, the high quality of interactions and communications indicated that the government is responsive to public concerns (Halvorsen, 2003).

The government's quality feedback, responses, and interaction would also help the citizens gain useful information that enhanced their understanding of government agencies and community issues (Sabatier, 1988). Besides, good feedback and responsiveness would actively encourage citizens to participate (Moon & Sproull, 2008). Accordingly, although these studies do not observe that e-participation helps lower the conflict through appropriate feedback from the government, it is proof that

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a good quality of feedback and responses positively contribute to the citizen's satisfaction. An accurate citizen's response would also reflect that the government was highly concerned, competent and responsible in performing its functions. Subsequently, e-participation is also expected to improve the future environment by providing better public service. According to Kailor, Deshazo and Van Eck (2001), e-democracy through information technologies improves public and government relations in public participation and public service delivery. However, Mahrer and Krimmer (2005) argue that, although e-participation goal mainly to encourage public engagement in democracy. Still e-participation always suffered from a “service first” and “democracy later” approach, which is like the purpose of e-government development. Correspondingly, this study found that the e-participation medium offered in the local council is primarily basic. The public can send their complaints without any deliberative process or two-way communication between the public and government.

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Overall, e-participation is perceived as an ideal implementation. Although it is enormously beneficial to the people, the findings of this current study argued that it could not replace the significance of the traditional method. Similarly, Kingston (2002) acknowledged that it is possible to offer the tools to allow the public to make better-informed decisions. Most importantly, though, it should not replace traditional participation. E-participation should be used to complement a range of participatory methods. E-participation will only work if the public wants to participate and believe that the elected official listens to their views (Kingston, 2002). Similarly, Polat (2005) found that the internet is mostly perceived as an information provision and service delivery tool. It is much less likely to be considered a medium for stimulating citizen

participation. Therefore, Polat revealed a strong belief that electronic participation should only be an addition to and not a replacement for traditional methods of participation.

However, the current study agreed that e-participation might not be the main platform, but it is significantly needed, especially in this digital age. The advancement of the internet and technology substantially plays an essential role to most people. We cannot deny that it tremendously affects and changes how we work and live our lives and impacts all aspects of the public and private sector worldwide. Therefore, this study believed that e-participation is necessary and cannot be overlooked, particularly today where IT and ICT are flourishing. Essentially, the public should take the opportunity to participate, and the government should play their role by listening and responding to the people's needs. But this study argued that e-participation could be the main platform in the future as our country's social, economic, technological, and mentality will have advanced significantly by that time.

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5.2.2 Public and Provider's Perspectives on E-Participation Implementation

From the public informant's perspectives, in terms of input in supporting the implementation of e-participation, this study found that computer and internet facilities among the public are not an issue since most informants own it. The Department of Statistics Malaysia (2020) had reported that the percentage of individuals using the internet increased by 5.4 per cent from 84.2 per cent in 2019 to 89.6 per cent in 2020. Meanwhile, the rate of individuals using computers increased by 7.9 per cent from 72.1 per cent in 2019 to 80.0 per cent in 2020. In addition, the percentage of individuals using mobile phones also increased by 0.3 per cent from 97.9

per cent in 2019 to 89.2 per cent in 2020. Today's world highly depends on technological capabilities, and it has been crucial at both micro and macro levels to respond to the current development. Therefore, unsurprisingly, the application of modern technologies significantly shapes various areas of our social life (Jovanović, Dlačić, Okanović, 2018). Above and beyond, technology, namely the internet, has evolved into far more than just a technical term. And currently, with over 4 billion people online today, the internet has become a necessity to most people, and we are also not excluded. Thus, it is not a surprise that most society today has smartphones connected to the internet.

Following, since the computer and internet facilities are not an issue, the current study found that the public has the necessary knowledge and skills in using e-participation platforms. Nevertheless, public participation with the local government through e-participation medium is significantly lacking since few informants had experienced it, while most never participated. Essentially, knowledge and skills in e-participation platforms were not guaranteed for public participation. These findings strengthen by a study from Alonso (2009) that knowledge and awareness in technology did not lead to higher interest in local public concerns. Likewise, Saebø et al. (2008) and Medaglia (2012) explicitly indicated that the evaluations of e-participation initiatives have consistently pointed out that setting up platforms for e-participation is not sufficient to encourage participation. In general, technology alone cannot be expected to improve civic participation. Additionally, as the current study found that e-participation was lacking due to lack of needs, Polat (2005) had pointed out that the potential role of the internet will become less significant if there is a lack of resources or motivation.

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In the meantime, other researchers argued on what possible effects increased internet use might have on citizens' civic and political engagement. Some argue that since the internet is mainly used for entertainment, citizens have less time to devote to social and civic activities; instead of, for example, joining civic groups, people choose to entertain themselves on the internet. Other scholars maintain that increased internet usage positively impacts civic and political engagement since the internet offers users an effective, time-saving way to get engaged in political questions. It has also been argued that the internet may encourage a broader set of citizens to get politically active. For example, in an analysis of 38 studies about the internet´s effect on political engagement, it was found that increased internet usage did not decrease citizens' political engagement. However, the study did not correlate between increased internet usage and substantial political engagement (Boulianne, 2009).

As established by the previous study, the public uses the internet for leisure activities rather than civic or official affairs. Unsurprisingly, the current study found that facilities, knowledge and skills on e-participation do not significantly contribute and influence public participation in the government. Although providers confirmed that e-participation platforms such as e-Aduan and WhatsApp applications are actively used daily, on the contrary, e-participation experience from the public itself is still lacking. The lack of e-participation is probably due to several factors such as lack of need, motivation or interest among the public, as addressed by Polat (2005). Yet, this study could not conclude the fundamental cause since there is no further question regarding this matter, which the following study could probably consider.

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In terms of input and output from the provider, the current study concluded that the activities promoting e-participation by the local council were proved to be sorely lacking. Furthermore, most of the providers were confirmed that no e-participation activities were ever organised. Thus, public participation in e-participation activities was not related. However, the only community programme that aimed to bridge the digital divide through ICT was acknowledged. To the best knowledge, little research has acknowledged programs to improve public awareness and knowledge on e-participation in our context. However, various training on public participation practices was available abroad, and one of the training providers globally known is the International Associations for Public Participation (IAP2) (https://www.iap2.org/).

However, various e-participation programmes could be found implemented in a developed foreign country. For instance, Denmark had implemented campaigns and awareness programmes for the groups that might have difficulties using digital communications through a dialogue session with various special interest groups, which consists of the elderly organisations, disability organisations, networks, organisations working with immigrants and social housing groups (Perez, 2015). Therefore, this study appreciates the Alor Setar City Council's efforts to provide community members with ICT-related activities. However, the local government should continue and increase the number of necessary programmes that could enhance the knowledge and skills of local citizens.

In terms of the availability and usage of the e-participation platform, it has been observed that the public actively used it as most of the provider declared that the council frequently received the complaints through all available platforms, including

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e-Aduan, WhatsApp, Facebook and email. Among these platforms, some informants recognised that e-Aduan is the most actively used, and others believed WhatsApp was the most popular one. The Alor Setar City Council presented various public complaint platforms available through the websites (Appendix C). However, except for Twitter, Instagram and Facebook, the information and access regarding other complaints platforms do not appear directly on the front page. The front page main column serves only as a daily update newsletter, including news, announcement, activities, and recent information. The public needs to click on the specific navigation bar to access these platforms.

Additionally, compared to the e-participation tools and platforms highlighted in the previous study, many other tools advance and uphold two-way communication, mostly limited at the Alor Setar City Council. Live chat and online discussion forums, for example, are still absent on the website of Alor Setar City Council. According to Kaur and Lodhia (2014) online forums are becoming a more popular and effective medium for stakeholder involvement in local authorities. The local authorities will be required to respond to any issues raised by the community when they ask for clarification or comments through these online forums. Failure to do so will have further implications, such as being reported to higher authorities, such as the federal government. This will damage the credibility of the local government, which raises other issues like accountability and transparency.

Taking an award-winning exemplary e-participation initiative, the Decide Madrid had used the most popular e-participation tools, including e-forum, e-consultation, e-voting, and online participatory budgets, which allow every citizen to start a debate,

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propose and leave a comment directly to the city council. Although the Decide Madrid needs improvement, it can be considered successful as the adoption continued even after the municipality's government had changed. Citizens and municipal personnel also agree this project is necessary, reflecting Decide Madrid's success (Royo, Pina & Rayado, 2020). Thus, this study believes the need for two-way communication should be considered at the Alor Setar City Council to open opportunities for better public participation. But firstly, it is crucial to tackling other contextual factors such as the social and economic background to improve the public capabilities.

Meanwhile, other aspects such as financial resources, technology and infrastructure, and staff support are justified as available but limited. Regarding the staff support, it is a concern that the lack of support from older staff, the unreceptive and e-illiterate staff is a challenge to support the e-participation implementation. Concerning this current finding, Milakovich (2012) stated that today's workforce consists of several generations, each with their own set of ideas, learning styles, requirements, and values, making managing such a diversified multi-generational workforce increasingly challenging. These generational disparities can result in conflict and frustration.

In contrast to the millennials, who are more technologically aware, the baby boomers favour traditional communication methods. As a result, individual adoption of new technology is not always straightforward. On the other hand, Milkovich believes that with the right training strategy, ICT may be utilised to bridge generational divides (Milakovich, 2012). This study agreed that by providing older employees with adequate training, they might favourably support and contribute to the success of e-participation implementation

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Humans are well known for being resistant to change (Milakovich, 2012). Resistance to change is one of the major obstacles to e-government implementation (Abdul Mateen, 2021; Amegavi, Aduo-Adjei & Owusu, 2017). People are more likely to oppose change to something unfamiliar. The success of new organisational innovations will always be in threat unless and until the organisational employees comprehend and support them. Thus, it is critical for the e-government initiative to be implemented incrementally because a radical approach could raise the possibility of failure (Amegavi, Aduo-Adjei & Owusu, 2017). Shark (2015) believes that the more consistent processes for learning about new technologies that the government can develop, the better it will be at making a crucial leap in new technology and system adoption.

Concerning the technological illiteracy among the staff, (Fiszbein, 1997) emphasised that the quality of their employees defines the capability of local governments in terms of skills and knowledge). Human resources should be able to use the latest technologies (United Nations, 2018). These technologies impact the skills and competencies of persons in charge of related digital communication and engagement (Beltrán, 2015). The lack of IT skills and competence among municipal workers, according to Kinemo (2019), is a barrier to building municipal capacity on e-participation. In the meantime, Chen and Rossie (1983) posited that accomplishing a programme requires a sufficient resource. Thus, funds are essential to support the resources, including workforces, facilities, and other related expenses. Therefore, inadequate funding will affect the implementation of a programme.

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Additionally, Yueping (2005) found that financial capacity is one of the factors that must be filled as a precondition to ensure the long-term development of e-participation. The municipality's e-participation performance is poor due to a lack of financial resources to employ and educate IT personnel. Therefore, long-term funding for software, infrastructure, and training municipal employees are required for e-participation (Kinemo, 2019). Meanwhile, Royo, Pina & Rayado (2020) specifically address the organisational and individual factors such as strong financial, human resource, and political support seem to be more important factors contributing to the success of e-participation initiatives than ICT related factors. As proposed, the Alor Setar City Council also believes that they should improve these aspects. However, this study argues that the ICT factor should not be neglected.

Finally, time is one of the important resources currently lacking in the Alor Setar City Council. This finding is not surprising because a successful e-participation is time-consuming. Like Yueping (2015), his findings found that increasing citizen participation through providing opportunities requires increasing the government capacity in terms of financial and human resources. But then, it is also necessary for the governments to allocate more time to involve citizens. Furthermore, Beltrán (2015) supported that one of the Colombian government's e-participation efforts called Urna de Cristal has yet to reach the greatest level of e-empowering. It is a difficult task that requires a significant amount of time and money due to underlying constraints. This study agreed that achieving a successful implementation, including e-participation, requires time and resources. Overall, much need to be improved by the Alor Setar City Council related to input and output in e-participation implementation.

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5.2.3 Public and Provider's Perspectives on the Challenges Facing the E-Participation Implementation

As e-participation serves great potential to enhance public participation and create an effective and efficient government, the challenges in e-participation continue to exist. Firstly, the public's lack of specific knowledge, awareness, and understanding of IT and e-participation posed a significant problem. Furthermore, the public was unaware of the council's role and the constraints it faced in implementing the development project for the benefit of the general public. Besides, not everyone in public was IT literate or had the essential computer abilities, particularly those from middle and lower-class households.

Following that, demographic and socioeconomic variations among the public in terms of age, geographical locations, educational level, occupational class, and income status also contribute as a major hurdle to the successful implementation of e-participation. These gaps and variations in various areas, including ICT, contribute to individual ability inequalities. People from rural areas have become ICT illiterate due to an ageing population, low levels of education, low income, and a lack of appropriate facilities and infrastructure, such as bad internet connection, especially in distant areas. Some people who reside in urban areas lack information and awareness of e-participation. As a result, some people remained uneducated and behind in most growth facets.

Alonso (2009) highlighted that the problem of equitable access and the digital divide includes low computer literacy levels. In this respect, one of the priority actions of the local government should be to initiate computer literacy programs that will help reduce

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the internet gap within neighbourhoods. Blanc (2020) posited that the digital divide had been a concern since the beginning of e-government. While many developing countries have legitimate worries about physical access to ICTs, the experience of developed countries has proven that other factors influence e-participation. However, it also demonstrates that developing countries, where lack of ICT infrastructure and access is a problem, may face even greater challenges in cultivating e-participation than developed countries.

Subsequently, the adoption of e-participation at Alor Setar City Council was also challenged by people's mentality, attitude, interests, and preferences. One of the most important requirements for e-participation is people's comprehension and acceptance. However, even city dwellers were prejudiced and lacked awareness and understanding of e-participation. Instead of communicating their difficulties, some people are being negative and critical of the council. Meanwhile, the people's third-class mentality also contributes to a lack of necessary social attitudes and empathy. As a result, several persons displayed a lack of enthusiasm, responsibility, and concern in participating. Furthermore, it would be difficult to recruit participants, particularly the older generation who favoured and were content with the traditional manner over internet participation. As both informants pointed out, all these variables pose considerable challenges to e-participation adoption.

However, people’s mentality, attitude, interest and preferences, awareness and knowledge on e-participation do not significantly contribute to the public’s support and involvement. Some informants had the knowledge and awareness yet recognised the need to participate. The OECD (2008) highlighted that different people perceive

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and act differently. There are four different groups of people whereas one: people who are willing and able. This type of person is highly interested in participation. In the meantime, with the skills and experiences, there is no limit for them to participate and actively contribute to the decision-making process. Second, people who are able but unwilling. These types of people have all the necessary resources to participate. Still, they are unwilling for several reasons: they are not ready, believe and trust the government, or do not have an interest in participating.

Third, people who are willing but unable. These people are interested in participating, but the barriers such as cultural or language barriers, geographical distance, disability or socioeconomic status have limited their opportunities. Fourth, people who are unwilling and unable. These people are unprepared to get involved due to the little background in democracy, participation or policy development. Still, they choose to stay away from participation and not speak out since they usually live simply. These types of people must be considered when adopting e-participation because citizens with different educational backgrounds, attitudes, interests and needs must be involved in policies development. Therefore, e-participation is also perceived as an effective service. It may be the case that people do not participate simply because of matters of convenience, such as lack of time or proximity. In that case, the Internet may enhance participation by making it easier and more convenient. However, if the lack of political participation stems from a lack of resources or motivation, the potential role of the internet will become less significant. (Polat, 2005).

Next, the provider acknowledged that the council had to improve the technology and accessibility currently lacking in supporting the implementation. Likewise, the public

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informants also recognised the facilities and infrastructure issues since not all people have a computer and afford to subscribe to the internet. In the meantime, the accessibility issues, the low quality of internet speed, and the interrupted connectivity due to cable theft, especially in rural areas, are a constant threat to the e-participation implementation. Kingston (2002) had pointed out that access is one of the most important issues, and problem populations fall into one of three categories: those who are financially unable or who are unwilling to connect; those with technological problems; and those who are physically disadvantaged concerning the medium.

Additionally, the next challenge is the staff's lack of attitude, knowledge, and skills. The staff needs to have the necessary knowledge and skills and a positive attitude in supporting the successful e-participation implementation. According to Milakovich (2012), technical expertise and specialised knowledge are acquired to accomplish this reform. The UN survey found the biggest barrier to digital government is insufficient training, accessibility and e-illiteracy (United Nation, 2018). However, sadly the staff were too comfortable in their comfort zone and showed a negative attitude towards changes. According to Polat (2005), resistance to change arises from the risks that come with it. Institutions are also difficult to change because they acquire non-native value and recognised legitimacy over time, repeating specific meanings and structures. Integrating current standards was an essential hurdle during building new institutions connected with electronic participation. Polat went on to stress the issue of mindset change, implying the difficulty of changing people's thinking as people have always preferred to do things their way. As what addressed by Polat, this issues significantly compatible with the findings of this study.

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Finally, the financial constraints. The Alor Setar City Council acknowledges they could not afford to invest in a new system as they must compromise on the development project due to limited expenditures. Milakovich (2012) found that limited budgetary resources are a constant barrier to e-participation implementation. Specifically, Yueping's (2015) findings show that one-third of municipalities lack sufficient finance to maintain and improve IT infrastructure. Besides, it is also challenging since the intra-organisational system within the Alor Setar City Council was weak, dated and ineffective. Moreover, the quality of the internet speed within the organisation is also poor. Therefore, the intra-organisational system at Alor Setar City Council was not solid to support the e-participation implementation.

Meanwhile, as underlined by one of the informants, this study agreed that the lack of law enforcement in supporting the e-participation implementation is a challenge to the evaluation of e-participation implementation. According to the Government Europa (2018), the success of e-participation projects in Denmark has been proved because of the mandatory law. Denmark makes receiving official letters online mandatory by law under the Digital Post initiative. Denmark has been surprised at how well this required approach has been received in everyday life, particularly among the elderly. Today, everyone in Denmark accepts that digital communication is the primary means of communicating with government officials. As a result, most Danes now use and receive official letters via the Digital Post system. Thus, this study agreed the implementation would be much more effective if law enforcement had been rigorously imposed. However, it is crucial to ensure citizen readiness and acceptance regarding knowledge and skills in our context (Government Europa, 2018).

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Furthermore, the technical constraints would challenge the operation in the council because certain rules and processes should be performed manually than solely online. Hence, technically, the e-participation implementation could be unfitted to a certain process. While the public informants, through personal experience, identified that the issues of slow response from the council and website accessibility would also affect effective participation among the public. Finally, both informants addressed the lack of needs as a challenging factor. Participation could be unnecessary for some groups of people, especially the non-working young people, since these groups of people might not encounter many issues compared to others. In the meantime, most public involvement is limited to job or business opportunities or working requirements.

Above and beyond, this current study also examined the external factors that would affect the evaluation of e-participation implementation from the provider's perspective. Even though most of the provider either unsure or convinced that external factors would not affect the implementation, two of the providers posited that social background differences and lack of effective promotions could affect e-participation implementation evaluation. According to McLaughlin and Jordan (1999), key contextual factors external to the programme and not under its control may influence its success positively or negatively and are critical features of the logic model.

This study believes that external factors such as social, economic, and politic would affect the implementation. For example, the low social and economic status might not be able to participate. However, as one of the providers perceived, this study agreed that the e-participation would succeed if the local government and the public understood and effectively played their role. The external factors are beyond the Alor

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Setar City Council control, but the Alor Setar City Council could control the input and output in e-participation implementation. Therefore, the Alor Setar City Council could increase their effort to enhance the organisational capacity in terms of resources and the capabilities of the public, especially underprivileged citizens, through appropriate programmes.

5.2.4 Public and Provider's Suggestions on the Enhancement of E-Participation Implementation

As the needs and benefits of e-participation are perceived, there are suggestions in enhancing e-participation propounded from both informants. First, suggestions concerning publicity and education in increasing public awareness. To keep the public informed and updated, e-participation must be published regularly. Additionally, the council should use multiple channels such as social media, campaigns, and workshops to educate and encourage the public actively. The public e-participation effort could begin at the elementary school level, the local government's smallest level, or any public site of interest. Strengthening these findings, Islam (2008) addressed that most e-participation efforts have failed due to a lack of understanding of supply and demand.

As a result, necessary steps should be taken to educate both parties about the initiative's mission and how it will benefit the stakeholders. Both offline and internet media should support these campaigns to raise awareness. Islam further argues that the promotional effort is more critical at the local community or rural level than at the upper or metropolitan level (Islam, 2008). However, this study argues that the responsibility for encouraging awareness in e-participation among the public does not

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solely depend on the government. As perceived by the public informants, This study strongly agreed with the suggestion that it would be much better if the public were responsible for educating and preparing themselves with the necessary information to be actively involved with the council.

Second, the quality of facilities and infrastructure such as the good speed of internet in the urban and rural area should be improved. These findings have been suggested in various previous research. In our context, the government put tremendous effort into providing citizens with good internet. Recently, through Jalinan Digital Negara (JENDELA), the government plans to expand the internet's reach to every corner of Malaysia in preparation for 5G technology (Jendela, 2020). Additionally, the government aims to enhance digital connectivity by the 12th Malaysia Plan (RMK-12) to accelerate technology adoption and innovation. In this plan, the government will ensure 100% 4G coverage in populated areas, wider 5G coverage, 100% urban and rural households subscribing to the internet (Economic Planning Unit, 2021).

However, the success of these initiatives might be less effective. Perhaps through effective implementation and strong commitment from all the stakeholders, these initiatives could be achieved. In the meantime, the public also suggests enhancing the infrastructure of the internet community centre and the local government website so that the public could be known on updated information on the e-participation application.

Third, staff enhancement. This study agreed that it is significantly critical for the local government to enhance the e-participation implementation by strengthening existing

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resources, particularly staff. The Alor Setar City Council should have skilled human resources to support an effective and successful e-participation. Human resources should have the ability to promote and use technologies, according to the United Nations (2018). Meanwhile, according to Kinemo (2019) and Yueping (2015), sufficient training would improve technical capacity to enable e-participation implementation. Surprisingly, the Alor Setar City Council is also suggested to replace the existing staff with considerably younger and more knowledgeable personnel.

However, it is unsurprising that older workers would have significant difficulties with modern technologies. Milakovich (2012) asserted that millennials are more restless than their predecessors than baby boomers, having grown up with the latest technology and electronics. They often look for jobs differently, intending to change occupations more frequently than before. Therefore, we must recognise the interconnectedness of technology's interconnected networks as our information technologies advance and merge. The state's local and federal workforce is rapidly changing, demanding the acquisition of new skills among the workforce.

Thus, the governments and organisations committed to change must develop innovative training methods, accommodate the needs of all generations in their workforce, and foster collaboration among them to improve performance and productivity. Regardless of generational disparities, new media technology can help individuals of all ages learn from one another (Milakovich, 2012). This study agrees that the Alor Setar City Council must continually improve the quality of their personnel through suitable training to prepare themselves. However, teamwork and knowledge sharing between younger and senior employees are equally critical.

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Fourth, both informants also urged the top management to play their role in supporting e-participation implementation actively. The relevance of top-level support for innovation and IT adoption success has been demonstrated in previous studies (Jarvenpaa & Ives, 1991; Standish Group, 1995; Norris, 1999). Doll (1985) was one of the first studies to highlight the relevance of top management support in the evaluation of information systems. Brown, Chervany, and Reinicke (2007) discovered that senior management support is critical for IT deployment success regardless of the information system implemented. However, there has been minimal research on top management support and e-government adoption. Chen and Perry (2003) conducted a study that examined IT outsourcing and e-government and found that top management support is important for its success.

Regarding IT outsourcing projects in local government, Chen and Gant (2001) assert that top management support provides the political will to get different departments to work together in government, essentially breaking down the silos of government. In addition, top management support can deal with any organizational resistance to change. Ebrahim and Irani (2005) argued that top management support is especially critical for e-government adoption because of the scale of changes required to advance e-government. Quiyan (2011) found that e-government adoption depended on city council support. When executives and leadership in government understand the use and potential of e-government, they can translate this into greater success in adopting and implementing e-government. When e-participation is taken seriously and when there is significant citizen support for e-participation, elected and appointed officials are more likely to support e-participation, and positive impacts from e-participation are more likely to occur (Reddick & Norris, 2013).

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The role of top management in achieving a favourable influence on e-participation implementation was agreed upon in this study. It's because e-participation has been criticised for prioritising service delivery over democracy, as addressed by Polat (2005). However, this study believes that the government's top management has a high obligation to make e-participation an appropriate platform for increasing democracy and people's involvement. Whether e-participation is used for service delivery or local democracy, it will be determined by top management's vision and direction.

Fifth, the local leader at the smallest local area should be empowered as an important intermediator between the local government and public so that the local community within their area could get the necessary information and assistance related to the ICT or e-participation issues and the e-participation programme or activities should be organised within the smallest local area because it much closer to the public direction. Sixth, the council should improve service delivery quality and be highly responsive to the public. This study believes that good feedback and responsiveness will actively motivate citizens to participate, as Moon and Sproull (2008) mentioned. Although e-participation takes place over the internet, the local government should not overlook the value of feedback and response. The responsiveness and great quality of the response to the public concerns would reflect the viability of e-participation in general and the government's efficiency.

Seventh, suggestions on the interesting and interactive website and user-friendly applications. Milakovich (2012) posited that diverse content should become available in shifting to the digital democracy. However, simply uploading the information to a website is insufficient. Many websites limit their usefulness in increasing public

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participation due to the lack of content, poor design and passive nature. Therefore, in websites and application development, it is essential to consider the needs of end-users because an easy and friendly interface increases its effective usage. Additionally, the present study by Vaerst, Steffens and Lokaiczyk (2015) strengthens that the more user-friendly citizen service is, the more citizens turn towards these possibilities for interaction or even participation. In the meantime, Akdogan (2010) had specifically indicated in her prior research that the website should be made mobile-friendly and easy to use, with high-quality multimedia design and content relevant to the young generation since currently the most common demographic use modern ICT is the youth.

In the meantime, Kim and Lee (2012) proposed that the government leaders emphasise the importance of a systematic assessment method for evaluating the user-friendliness of e-participation applications. However, Kim and Lee contended that the perception of an interesting and interactive e-participation website that is easy to use is not enough to encourage and trigger the intention to use the application among citizens. Perhaps other factors are fundamental to the participation, rather than the technological means, that can produce a stronger motivation in the citizen to use e-participation, such as confidence in the government and the sense of community.

Eight, suggestion for the public and provider to change the negative attitude. The success of the e-participation initiative relies on the acceptance of people. Therefore, both should have a positive mindset to accept and support the changes for the benefit of all. The provider had also encouraged the public to come together with the council to collaborate and share the idea on the appropriate program. The bottom-up initiative

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related to e-participation is limited to the best knowledge in our context. However, this study believes that with the public's knowledge, skills, opportunity, and guidance from the Alor Setar City Council, the public could be an active partner in e-participation initiatives.

Ninth, regarding developing the user's profile, Simonofski, Snoeck, Vanderose, Crompvoets and Habra (2017) also suggested that citizens' profiles, motivation, and relevance for involvement should be classified. Since the citizens are the end-users, thus their profile, digital literacy, skills, and representativeness will all impact the implementation of participation. Consequently, perhaps through an organised data and profile, the Alor Setar City Council could have a comprehensive understanding of serving and improving citizens within their specific needs.

Tenth, the preliminary survey in e-participation among the public would be an essential step for the government to understand the current circumstances or issues in this subject matter to support an effective e-participation implementation in achieving the aims. This study agreed that there is a crucial need to examine the citizen's demand and perspective, especially related to the public generally. However, issues concerning the restriction of non-elite citizens from participation have always been raised in policymaking, particularly prevalent in developing countries. As a result, most elites initiate policies based on their perspectives, experiences, visions and economic interests, despite their limited knowledge, experiences, and concern for the difficulties and needs of rural life, which is home to the substance of the population. (Sabo, Siti Alida & Rozita, 2014).

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Gauld, Goldfinch and Horsburgh (2010) addressed that most studies related to the e-government concern on the supply and technical issues rather than citizens' demand. In the meantime, Blanc (2020) specified the demand for e-participation remains low in many cases. Among various studies, Saebø, Flak and Sein (2011) asserted that e-participation initiatives fail to maintain citizen interest. Furthermore, Toots (2019) studied specifically recognised even developed countries such as Estonia had experience failures in e-participation initiatives. Toots recommend it is important to understand the stakeholders and the needs of stakeholders and examine whether the system fulfil the stakeholders' needs. Municipalities should prioritise citizens' needs in designing an effective e-participation tool (Costopoulou, Ntalianis, Ntaliani, Karetsos & Gkoutzioupa, 2017).

Finally, besides sending their complaints, one of the providers had suggested that the public are much welcome to send their suggestions and compliments to the Alor Setar City Council. This suggestion might seem trivial. However, the researcher agreed that compliments would make the government feel appreciated and perhaps it could help encourage effective services. But at the same time, the government also needs to be responsive to the public.

5.2.5 Diagram Summarisation of Findings

Additionally, this study would also like to reflect overall finding into the diagram form. Possibly, this infographic summarisation would make the key finding of this study more engaging and easier to understand for the all reader. The summarisation diagram are as follows:

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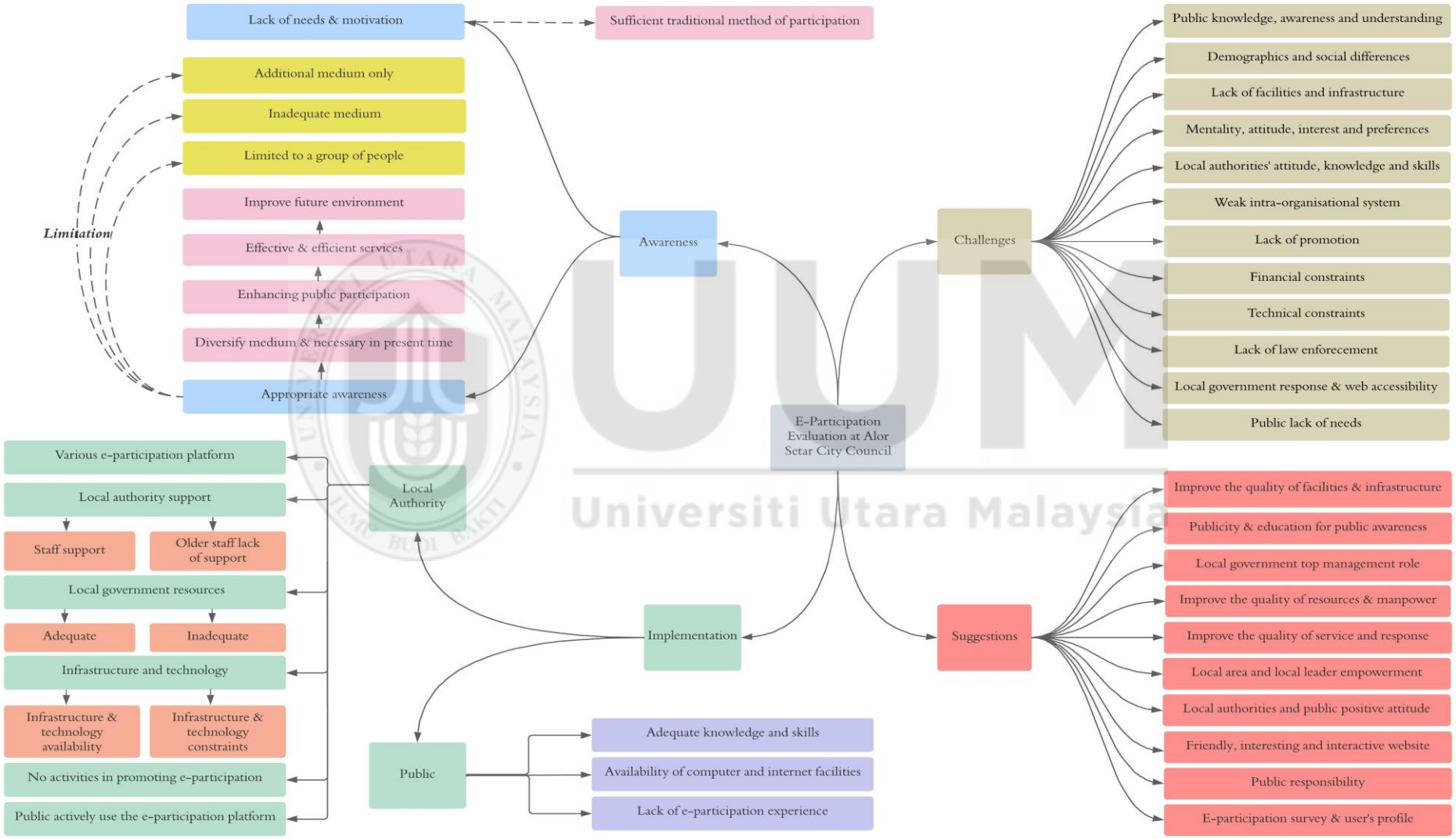

Figure 5.1 Diagram Summarisation of Findings

5.2.6 The Evaluation of E-Participation Implementation

To conclude that Alor Setar City Council, specifically, our government generally, lags in e-participation compared to other countries, it might be harsh. We witnessed that the government had put the best effort in supporting and enhancing e-participation through various programmes and policies. However, the evaluation of the e-participation programme at Alor Setar City Council could be considered fair since there are opportunities for improvement. For instance, the e-participation level could be considered between e-enabling and e-engaging levels since the Alor Setar City Council had access to the relevant information through the website or other social media such as Facebook. The information provided related to the council profile and background, main functions and services, recent activities, job opportunities and e-services. However, the information related to e-participation is limited to the tools provided without any supplementary information to educate the public on e-participation. There is no e-participation information displayed on the website's main page, which is easy to access and understand by the public. Consequently, it limits those who would not usually have access to the internet to benefit from the wealth of information available.

In the meantime, in engaging the public, the Alor Setar City Council kept pace with technology innovation by providing the public with various mediums such as email, website complaints and feedback, and other online complaint mediums including i-Sedar i-Tegur, Facebook, WhatsApp and Telegram applications. Despite being accessible to the public, these platforms limited for one-way communication only. However, other interactive two-way communication mediums such as e-forum, e-

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meeting for discussion, and chat live are still absent on the website of Alor Setar City Council.

Concisely, e-participation at Alor Setar City Council remains a top-down approach. It practically reaches the e-engaging level due to the lack of support of interactive online mediums. However, with an improved e-participation medium, this study believes that Alor Setar City Council could reach the highest e-engaging level. On the other side, the success of e-participation also depends on the public's participation. But currently, public participation through e-participation at Alor Setar City Council is significantly lacking. Thus, the local government should play its role in addressing the issues faced by the public to understand and create an effective solution.

Overall, e-participation is a complex and interesting topic. To reach meaningful and effective participation is still challenging. There is no single factor that contributes to the success of e-participation implementation. All the elements, components, and actors in e-participation have their significant role in supporting the programme's success. E-participation consider successful if the public utilises it. However, the essence of meaningful participation is not merely dependent on the innovative platform because technology alone cannot be expected to increase public participation. The ICT in e-participation is only a mediator between the government and the public. Successful implementation of e-participation requires a clear-cut process with a good design of legislation, policies and strategy. However, vigorous enforcement also is one of the critical values that should not be neglected.

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Moreover, besides another essential aspect such as the government capacity in terms of technical, financial, administrative and political, the institutionalise factor is also essential, which means government willingness to adopt the e-participation is the top among others. The willingness and determination of the government will shape the decision, direction and action that want to be achieved. If explicit and ideally shared principles guide the design process, institutionalisation can be encouraged. As a result, there should be a clear vision of what local governments and other governmental institutions wish to do using the internet. Either they want to utilise the internet to improve public services, provide knowledge on the policy concerns, establish direct engagement channels for the citizens, or encourage citizens to engage in political deliberation? Arnstein portrayed in her theory that participation is a hierarchical transformational process in the government. However, there is no absolute hierarchy to involve the public. Whether participation occurs at the highest or lowest level of government through the traditional or online form depends on the government.

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5.3 Recommendations

Based on the finding, there are shortcomings of e-participation implementation at Alor Setar City Council. Therefore, there are several recommendations to enhance the evaluation of e-participation implementation:

5.3.1 Strategy and implementation of e-participation programme

The findings show that e-participation crucially needs better implementation to reach its potential in enhancing public participation. In their study, Wirtz, Daiser and Binkowska (2016) discovered that e-participation initiatives frequently fall short of expectations due to the lack of knowledge and understanding on effective participation

strategies and implementation. Therefore, to establish an impactful and sustainable e-participation programme, this study recommends strengthening the strategy and implementation aspects of e-participation.

In strengthening the groups' capacity to engage in online participatory activities, the local governments should design effective promotion strategies of e-participation, focusing on the potential impact and benefits of e-participation usage on a given community. The promotion should not be restricted only to the internet or online media such as local council websites and social media. Still, it should be intensified through diverse mass media, either printed or electronic, namely pamphlets, newsletters, newspapers, billboards, banners and posters, and radio and television. Different promotion strategies are necessary to cater to different segments of society in which the infrastructure and the accessibility to the ICT are limited, especially in rural areas. A vigorous and continuous promotion is essential to educate and increase the public's awareness, knowledge, and interest in e-participation.

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Additionally, the governments should promote civic engagement and participation in school curricula, including developing skills specific to e-participation in the scope of initiatives to increase the population's digital literacy and competencies. In the meantime, it is essential to diversify the educational and awareness programme, which could open the opportunity and attract the involvement of the public beyond racial, age, culture and political differences. Furthermore, through an appropriate programme, the skills in utilising the computer and internet also could be developed, and perhaps the digital gap among the citizens could gradually reduce.

These programmes could be implemented within the states and districts level. However, the lowest level also could not be disregarded. By targeting the small community, through cooperation between the chief officer and the local community leader, the learning process could be much easier, and the public understanding could be easily observed. In the meantime, the involvement of professionals among the citizen also essential. For example, academicians and technological savvy could contribute their skills and expertise as co-creator and co-developer in the specific e-participation programme. Therefore, the local government should organise the programme within an appropriate time and venue to allow these people to be involved. Likewise, the collaborative participation with key players such as professional groups, non-governmental organisations, and the private sector is also crucial. The program could be effective and impactful with various skills, resources, and expertise exploited.

In addition, financial sustainability is part of organisational sustainability. Therefore, a solid financial commitment is required to support the promotion strategies and implement these programmes. The existing federal allocation, on the other, had might be restricted. As a result, the local government requires successful financing strategies to generate sufficient funds to support all the costs, including the administration, training and development, and seamless monitoring and evaluation process.

5.3.2 Monitoring and Evaluation System

It is crucial to develop a reliable monitoring and evaluation system for the local authority to assess the success of e-participation initiatives and improve it. Therefore, the monitoring and evaluation system evaluating the e-participation programme should have been more systematic, updated, and constantly maintained through a

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practical approach. An effective monitoring and evaluation process could obtain a comprehensive report reflecting actual circumstances. In the meantime, with the popularity of technology, the local government should start integrating computerised electronic systems for reporting, report sharing and storage. In such a way, the local authority could ensure the data and report on the e-participation programme have been systematically organised and revised. Still, the longevity of the report has also been preserved, and the probability of losing the physical information could be avoided. Nevertheless, it could be retrieved quickly and conveniently when needed, either by the authorities or the public.

The current study also believes that the local government could not rely on the citizen satisfaction survey as the only resource for the programme evaluation. Although the feedback could easily obtain, it is not enough to have a deep understanding. Therefore, a field study method is required to comprehensively observe and evaluate an e-participation programme by focusing on behaviour in context and views expressed either in individual discussions or group meetings to understand the appropriateness of an e-participation programme comprehensively. Moreover, an effective performance indicator system should also be developed to guide all local governments. Through his indicator, all the local authorities could easily measure and determine whether that programme had achieved the objective or successfully contributed to the participant's desired outcome. The use of the logic model, for example, is a valuable reference that allows the authority to identify the success of the programme since the needs, strengths, and weaknesses in every single aspect and inventory of resources in the programme could be easily monitored either during the planning, implementation or evaluation of the programme.

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5.3.3 Organisational Restructuring and Enhancement

The local government needs restructuring and enhancement to implement a long-term e-participation successfully. Accordingly, it is necessary to establish one unit that focuses on planning, implementing, and observing each e-participation programme. Furthermore, as this unit is responsible for e-participation, this unit serves as a guide and partner with other departments. Therefore, to ensure the evaluation of this unit, a skilled and knowledgeable workforce is essential. In addition, this current study also recommends that each department, either a particular unit for e-participation or another unit in the local government, improve their responsiveness towards the public to have a successful e-participation implementation. Each local government member acts as the mediator between the government and the public. Therefore, as they are much closer to the public, it is essential to be skilful and knowledgeable to be highly responsive in serving the people.

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Subsequently, it is also essential for the local government to ensure all other staff use computers and other related technology. Due to the ongoing technology development, most organizations have transformed their process, task content, and skills requirement. Thus, currently, most workers must use the computer, internet, or some other form of technology at work. It will continue to grow, as will the scope and sophistication of technology. In the future, the rapid pace of technological change and the transition to a knowledge-based economy will also increase the demand for highly skilled and well-educated workers. As a result, the local government should invest in a training programme to equip all the staff with relevant diversity skills in technology and skills as mediators and communicators in serving the public. In the meantime, for older workers, especially those who may not have been exposed to changes in

technology, there is an essential need to engage them in training and retraining activities to remain competitive in the workforce.

On the other hand, effective recruitment and selection are crucially important for the local government to select the newcomers or young workforce with excellent skills and qualities. Mostly, the young workforce is technological savvy. Therefore, fresh and creative ideas could succeed with their skill, knowledge, interest, and energy. Profoundly, for long-term sustainability, building a resilient organisation should be a priority for all the organisation's leaders. Resilience organisation created and supported by a resilience team. Perhaps, the restructuring and enhancement of the local government contribute to building a more remarkable and resilient workforce in supporting the success of the e-participation programme and the organisation's evaluation.

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Not least of all, the lowest of the local structure should also be restructured and enhanced. The local leader, such as the chief officer and the residence association, such as the resident representative committee, should be empowered so that their role can be maximally utilised. For example, through one special committee, the chief officer and residence association could work together to serve and assist minor and rural communities within their area where the opportunities to participate were limited due to the lack of knowledge and awareness. At this point, the community could be educated through various programmes related to e-participation and technology. Similarly, as important mediators, these local leaders need appropriate training to develop their knowledge, understanding, and skills.

5.3.4 Improvement on Intra-Organisational System and Online Medium

Since the intra-organisational system within the council was weak, dated, and ineffective, the quality of the internet speed within the organisation also poor. Thus, strengthening the intra-organisational system and facility contributed to an effective and efficient daily operation within the local government and supported an effective service to the people. As the provider, improving the intra-organisational system is a significant need for an effective e-participation implementation. In the meantime, the availability of current online mediums such as e-mail, e-complaints, and instant messaging provided a limited two-way communication channel mostly aimed to gather public feedback and alternatives. Therefore, an enhanced two-way communication channel between the public and local government, such as chat rooms, virtual e-meeting, e-forum and virtual communities, is essential to reach a wider audience and meaningful involvement.

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This initiative could be accomplished through a partnership by combining expertise and knowledge. The local government could also encourage a bottom-up approach in which the citizens could initiate an e-participation platform. Therefore, the resources could be mobilised effectively through a collaborative effort between the government, private sector, and citizens. Beltrán (2015) identified this method as being used by the local government of Cali through an initiative called Active Residents. Since it was effective and demanded by citizens, the Colombian government funded a recent project called Apps.co, which promotes and supports citizens to build their apps based on their needs and concerns. These programmes demonstrated that a more creative and innovative environment could emerge even with limited resources in creating something meaningful and useful for citizens. Vaerst, Steffens and Lokaiczyk (2015)

also underline two platforms initiated by the private sector: FixMyStreet and SeeClickFix. FixMyStreet, which debuted in 2007, is the first nationwide online platform that allows the public to report issues to the municipalities throughout the UK. Meanwhile, SeeClickFix, which operates in the US, was followed in 2008.

However, the e-participation platform might be a technical challenge for rural areas. Following that, the local administration may consider combining online and offline engagement. For example, the rural communities may be involved in the local government with the support of a local leader if a physical meeting using technology could be put up. This option may provide a chance to increase participation from various community levels.

5.3.5 Public Empowerment and Stakeholders Collaboration

The local government should also welcome the public as a partner by empowering them to involve actively. Therefore, the local government should support and encourage a bottom-up approach where the public could also come forward to share ideas, initiate any appropriate e-participation programme or collaborate with the local authority. This bottom-up approach complements the top-down approach rather than challenging or criticising their managerial competencies. Accordingly, as the public had the opportunity to bring in different resources, competencies and capabilities such as skills, knowledge, commitment and creativity, local government, on the other hand, could play their role in preserving the democratic value by being inclusive, accountable, transparent and responsive.

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In the meantime, it is essential to collaborate with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations (CBO). Both organisations had shared a common goal to promote and improve people's well-being. Unlike CBO, the NGO is well recognised for its tremendous work either at the local, regional, national or global level for the benefit of society. While the CBO, which is typically rooted at the local level, strives for the needs and development only of their local community. These organisations equally play an important role in facilitating the changes and empowering the people to improve their quality of life. Likewise, the NGO and CBO also strengthen the foundations of society at the local and neighbourhood level and promote active citizenship in communities. They can serve as important development partners for the government, facilitating and mobilising local engagement in the development plan. Therefore, the local government needs to start collaborating with these organisations in e-participation programmes and initiatives to open the great opportunity and positive impact for a successful e-participation implementation.

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However, compared to the NGO, the CBO is financially vulnerable, and their capacity in terms of skills, governance, and expertise is also limited. Therefore, it is also crucial for the NGO to support building and strengthen the CBO capacity. The role of CBO is as essential as the NGO. Since they have a good understanding of their community dynamics, they are frequently the best suited to identify the needs of their communities. Essentially, the CBO complements the work of NGOs rather than replaces it. Thus, support between both organisations is necessary to achieve extraordinary accomplishments for the people at large. Furthermore, the local government should collaborate with other stakeholders such as the private sector, businesses, and experts. As a result, the local government could exploit abundant

resources such as knowledge, skills, expertise, experience, tools, and technology. This collaboration creates an advantage for local government to learn and improve to maximise the chances of success of e-participation implementation.

5.4 Contribution of the Study

This section focuses on the contributions of this study. The section is divided into two subsections addressing the academic and practical contributions.

5.4.1 Academic Contribution

This study aims to provide theoretical and empirical contributions to the emerging discipline of technology and public participation. This study generally contributes to the growing study on e-participation and specifically to the e-participation studies in the Malaysian context which is currently a lack to the best of the knowledge. This study comprehensively examines the evaluation of e-participation implementation at Alor Setar City Council. Compared to the previous study, which less emphasised the public perspectives, this study applied an in-depth interview with the public and the local government authorities. Thus, this study adds value to public perspectives in e-participation implementation within the local setting.

In addition, the application of the logic model adapted from the University of Wisconsin Extension by Taylor-Powell and Henert shows it is appropriate to evaluate the of e-participation implementation. This model has served as a fundamental theory and guidance in measuring the evaluation of various studies and programmes across fields such as environmental, research and education, healthcare, sustainable planning, and community-based programme. From the findings of this study, several

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enhancements in this model are suggested to be applied in the e-participation programme evaluation, as stated in Figure 5.1.

In Figure 5.1, this study recommends including the strategic and action plan and monitoring and evaluation aspect to ensure the program's evaluation. The strategic plan is a roadmap to the programme's success where the long–term vision was shaped. A good strategic plan helps the organisation thoroughly examine the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in achieving the vision. Therefore, the strategic plan helps prioritise the goal, allocate the resources, and mobilise the staff, council members, stakeholders, and citizens towards the shared goal. As part of the strategic plan, an action plan is crucial in translating the strategic plan into a workable plan. An action plan helps delegate the team's responsibilities, tasks, and resources to make the strategy impactful. With a clear direction, an action plan allows effective coordination and communication among the team to complete the task and responsibilities in an effective and timely manner. Accordingly, the organisation will track the progress and make necessary adjustments to the programme.

Another aspect crucial in evaluating the programme is monitoring and evaluation. The monitoring aspects are a continuous assessment starting from the beginning and during the programme's implementation by focusing on the input and output of the programme. At this point, the progress and efficiency and the weaknesses and shortcomings of the programme could be determined. Meanwhile, the evaluation aspect is essentially related to the programme's outcome, which determines the changes and benefits that contribute to the programme's beneficiaries. The evaluation process does not necessarily occur at the end of the programme, but it could be

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observed between the beginning and end of the programme. In other words, the changes that occur could be observed in between two specific activities. Overall, an effective monitoring and evaluation aspect is essentially needed for the evaluation of a programme. The best decision can be made during and after implementing a programme.

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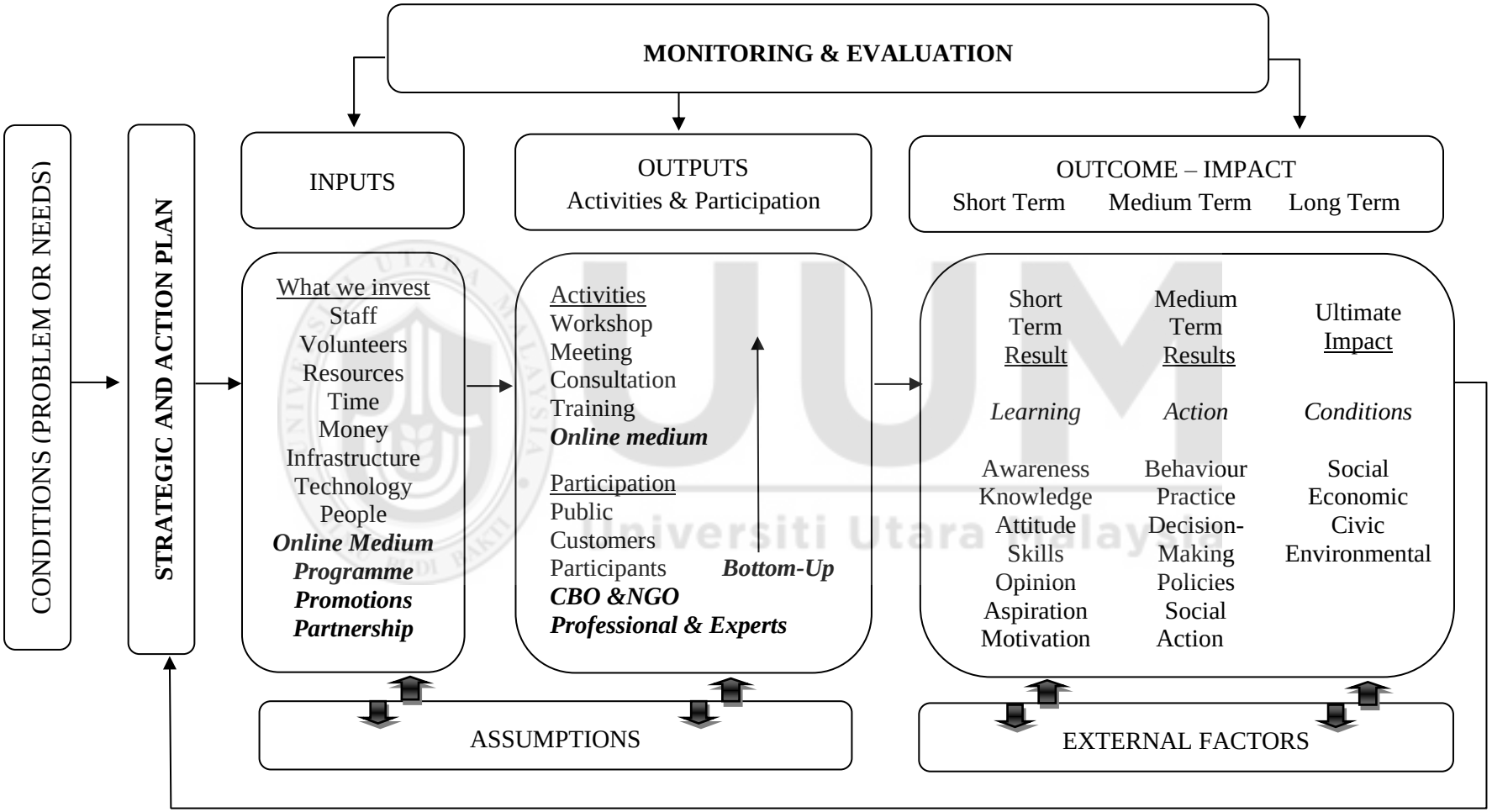

Figure 5.2 E-Participation Evaluation using Logic Model
Source: Modified from Taylor-Powell & Henert, 2008.

5.4.2 Practical Contribution

Derived from the result this, study recognise that the government generally, and the local government specifically need to strengthen several important elements. As highlighted in the modifications of the logic model, this study added the input and output that the Alor Setar City Council should acknowledge in enhancing e-participation implementation. The findings discovered the resources that support the implementation of e-participation need to be improved. Through various suggestions, the Alor Setar City Council and the public also address this limitation. Overall, both informants recognised the essential to enhance public knowledge and awareness, the quality of technology and infrastructure, the quality and skills of manpower, and the role of top management.

Accordingly, this study specifically recommends the Alor Setar City Council emphasise several aspects in the input and output through several initiatives, including implementing an effective vigorous promotional activity, diversifying the educational and awareness programmes, developing an interactive online medium, and enhancing the collaborative partnership between key stakeholders. As thoroughly discussed in the recommendations, all these elements could enhance the evaluation of the e-participation implementation at the Alor Setar City Council area. This study recommends that the initiative should not be restrained to the top-down approach only. However, the local government should encourage the bottom-up approach to gather various alternatives and innovations to create an effective transition. In the meantime, public also need to be responsible by preparing themselves with knowledge and awareness to actively involve. Conceivably, meaningful participation could be reached for a long-term outcome and impact through an improved input and output.

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Essentially, the use of the logic model contributes a strong framework in examining past and present strengths, needs, assets, and potential, which play an important role in the programme's evaluation. Therefore, with some modification on this model recommended in this study, the Alor Setar City Council may have better perspectives on implementing a programme's planning, process, and goals. This study's finding also contributes to improving the understanding of the current scenario in e-participation implementation at Alor Setar City Council.

Theoretically, e-participation supports the notion that technology helps to improve the quality of public participation to foster local democracy. However, as acknowledge by other previous study, this study also found there is no indication that e-participation or any innovative online medium will replace the conventional public participation method. This study further demonstrates that being informed with technology does not lead to higher interest and active participation rates. Subsequently, e-participation among the public at Alor Setar City Council is still lacking. However, technology should not be blamed for the lack of participation.

On the contrary, technology and online tools benefit the people and government, especially today. But, to have a meaningful and effective e-participation, the Alor Setar City Council should initially take the necessary action to understand the social context and tackle the restriction faced by the people, especially the uneducated, uninterested and marginalised members among the people. Likewise, the Alor Setar City Council also need to enhance their capacity through the quality of human resource and facilities and infrastructure. Regular training should be provided to the local authorities to

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improve their skills and knowledge in the ICT and other latest innovation to support an effective e-participation implementation.

Predominantly, this study contributes to providing the Alor Setar City Council with the appropriate feedback and comprehensive recommendation in enhancing the e-participation implementation. Perhaps this study could give a small force to the policy maker and local government authorities to continuously be attentive towards the good quality of public participation as one aspect that could improve people's quality of life. Consequently, the need for an effective e-participation essentially aligns with the current demand of modern life, where technology plays an important aspect. Therefore, with the right process and organised efforts, the local authority needs to enhance the quality of e-participation implementation as an integral part of society for a better life.

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Practically, this study add value to public perspectives in local setting. It is important to comprehend that public perspectives much more effective in influencing the policy making at the local level than state or national levels. This is because, compare with the state and national levels, local government are less complex, less hierarchical and much closer to the society. However, as commonly known, limited studies has been done to specifically evaluate the public perspective on e-participation in the local government. Therefore, this study provide another critical findings on public perspective regarding e-participation in the local setting. Public perspective significantly contribute to an effective and strong local government. In the meantime, it is important to understand about local setting due to its great potential to effect changes. Local setting had a huge impact in the quality of life and well-being of the

society. Therefore, with the comprehensive understanding on the local setting, public will be aware and well-informed to adapt and be part of that system. Likewise, a comprehensive understanding could create an active citizen who can directly contribute a valuable input in the local government in shaping the community and its well-being.

Last but not least, this study also add knowledge in the public management field. As it is known, reform in public management are not new. Public management underwent an extensive reform in an effort to make an improvements in administration and enhance both its capacity and performance. One significant improvement in public sector management is investing in and optimising information technology. The application of ICT and contemporary innovation in public management have fundamentally changed the nature of government and its function in society. Additionally, over the past two decades, public participation in decision-making and service delivery through the use of information and communication technologies has gained prominence. Governments all around the world have implemented e-participation strategies to promote citizen involvement and the transparency of governmental decisions.

Considering public management responsible for implementing and administering the e-participation processes, therefore public management play a crucial role to the growth of e-participation development. However, creating an opportunities for online engagement is a challenge for many public administrations as e-participation is a complex and interesting field. Therefore, plenty of research in various discipline had studying e-participation systematically and comprehensively. Among these previous

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study, this study distinctly add knowledge to the public management field. Perhaps, with the evaluation of current e-participation practices, it could contribute as another valuable references in improving e-participation implementation in the public management field.

5.5 Future Research

While our findings provide a better understanding of the prior practices required for an effective e-participation implementation, several gaps could not be explored in this study, which raises several opportunities for future research. Therefore, this study encourages further research in providing additional information concerning the following areas. First, the focus of a single case study does not provide sufficient grounds for e-participation evaluation. Therefore, an additional comparative study is needed. Several cases within the same scope could be evaluated in addressing the constraints and limitations that prevent the public from participating in the local arena. Besides, this study should also be replicated in other organisational settings such as federal, state or higher local government agencies such as Kuala Lumpur City Hall. The City Council of Penang Island, for example, is basically on the same level as the Alor Setar City Council. However, these cities in major urban centres might be more affluent, highly educated, and digitally connected, contributing to different results.

Second, as the proposed framework presented a comprehensive understanding of the complexity of the processes and interactions in e-participation evaluation, future research is encouraged to improve the framework based on other cases and contexts. However, another e-participation evaluation framework that is appropriate could also be considered. In the meantime, considering the qualitative nature of this study, the

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sample of public informants was limited. Therefore, a quantitative study through surveys or questionnaires is suggested to be carried out to address this limitation. A larger sample size could facilitate greater generalisability and represent the true Malaysian population.

Third, another possible research venue is to consider other key players in the government, such as the lowest local government leader and the highest central government leader. The lowest local government leader, such as penghulu or the chief officer, would have a concrete understanding of the real problem as they are the closest leader and particularly serve the people within a small community. Therefore, their perspective is significantly necessary. On the other hand, as top government leaders represent the government generally, thus, it is essential to examine their aspirations and perception. The question that should be addressed is, how far has the government valued e-participation? How far has the input from the public been taken seriously by the government? To what extent could public participation impact and contribute to influencing government decision-making? This underlying assumption is derived as the public remains dubious about the government. During the interview, a small talk with one of the public showed the lack of confidence that public participation through e-participation would succeed since public opinion is often at a discount by the government. Moreover, it is believed that minority races, especially India, have always been discriminated against in various aspects.

Fourth, trust is another dimension that could be useful to fill the research gap. Generally, trust in the government is specifically related to trust and confidence toward the state actors in governing the people's best interest. Trust changes over time,

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reflecting the government's actual performance to people's expectations and experience. The decline of trust among people contributes to multiple factors such as lack of social development, low economic growth and political uncertainties in the government. Although the decline of trust might not harm democracies, the government needs to function well. As trust may be one determinant for people to participate in the government, thus lack of trust could be a huge challenge. Consequently, the next research should consider addressing: to what extent the people trust or distrust the government; to what extent trust influences the public to participate in the government; and to what extent e-participation and the transparency of technology would influence the level of trust in government.

Additionally, fifth, perspectives from different races should also be investigated. Essentially, inclusive participation provides a better quality of decision making and governance. However, in democracies, discrimination toward minorities based on race and ethnicity has been a long subject. Surprisingly, as highlighted above, people still feel excluded based on race. Therefore, whether there is a lack of trust among races towards the government; whether certain races believe in being excluded by the government; to what extent and why they believed it is true; and how e-participation or public participation is valued from the perspectives of other races, maybe another emerging question need to be explored. In the meantime, focus group interviews with different communities, especially the youth, should also be considered. Such extension of research is valuable since the youths are the leaders of tomorrow, the future of the nation, and the partners of today. As an agent of change, youth engagement and empowerment through e-participation is a smart investment for developing long-term sustainability and building resilient communities and nations. Therefore, their vision

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and thought are also crucial to explore in gaining deep knowledge and understanding of this matter.

Sixth, the in-depth comparative analysis could also be expanded. This study highlighted Denmark and Finland's exemplary practices. Future research could include the best e-participation practices from various regions and countries. For instance, Korea is constantly standing as the world's top e-participation index and is emerging with an outstanding ICT and digital infrastructure.

5.6 Concluding Remarks

This last chapter discusses and summarises the need and findings of the study. Several policy recommendations, the contribution of the study, and future research have also been presented. Conceivably this study could be a valuable empirical source in the direction of e-participation in the local government.

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E-participation initiative could facilitate and broaden inclusive and meaningful participation in the local government. However, the success of e-participation demands cooperation and collaborative effort from various parties, including the government, public and private sectors. In the context of the study area, the e-participation initiative enables to support the Alor Setar City Council to achieve its mission that is to “Drive the excellence of establishing Alor Setar City Council based on quality, innovative, responsive and committed organisation towards sustainable development to achieve a liveable township by 2035”. Although there are weaknesses and deficiencies in the e-participation implementation at the Alor Setar City Council,

it still needs to be sustained and enhanced continuously to provide positive results to the public, the private sector and the Alor Setar City Council itself.

Accordingly, several aspects need to be emphasised to ensure an effective e-participation implementation, including the logic model, new approaches, effective evaluation and monitoring programmes. Additionally, it is also important to ensure the continuity of e-participation implementation as one of the important factors in achieving sustainable development goals. It is hoped that the best efforts of various parties in the e-participation implementation will guarantee a quality and prosperous life for present and future generations.

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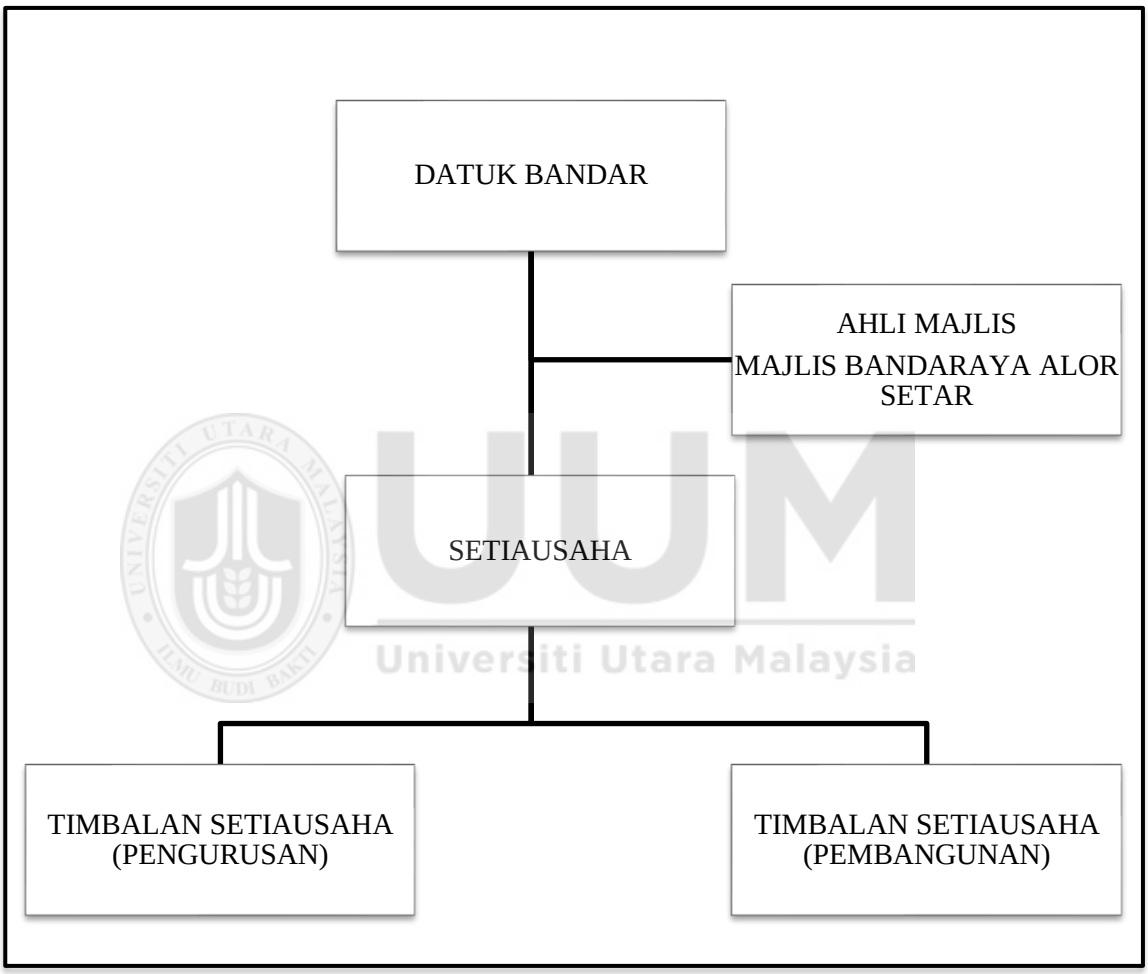
APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Organisational Chart of Alor Setar City Council



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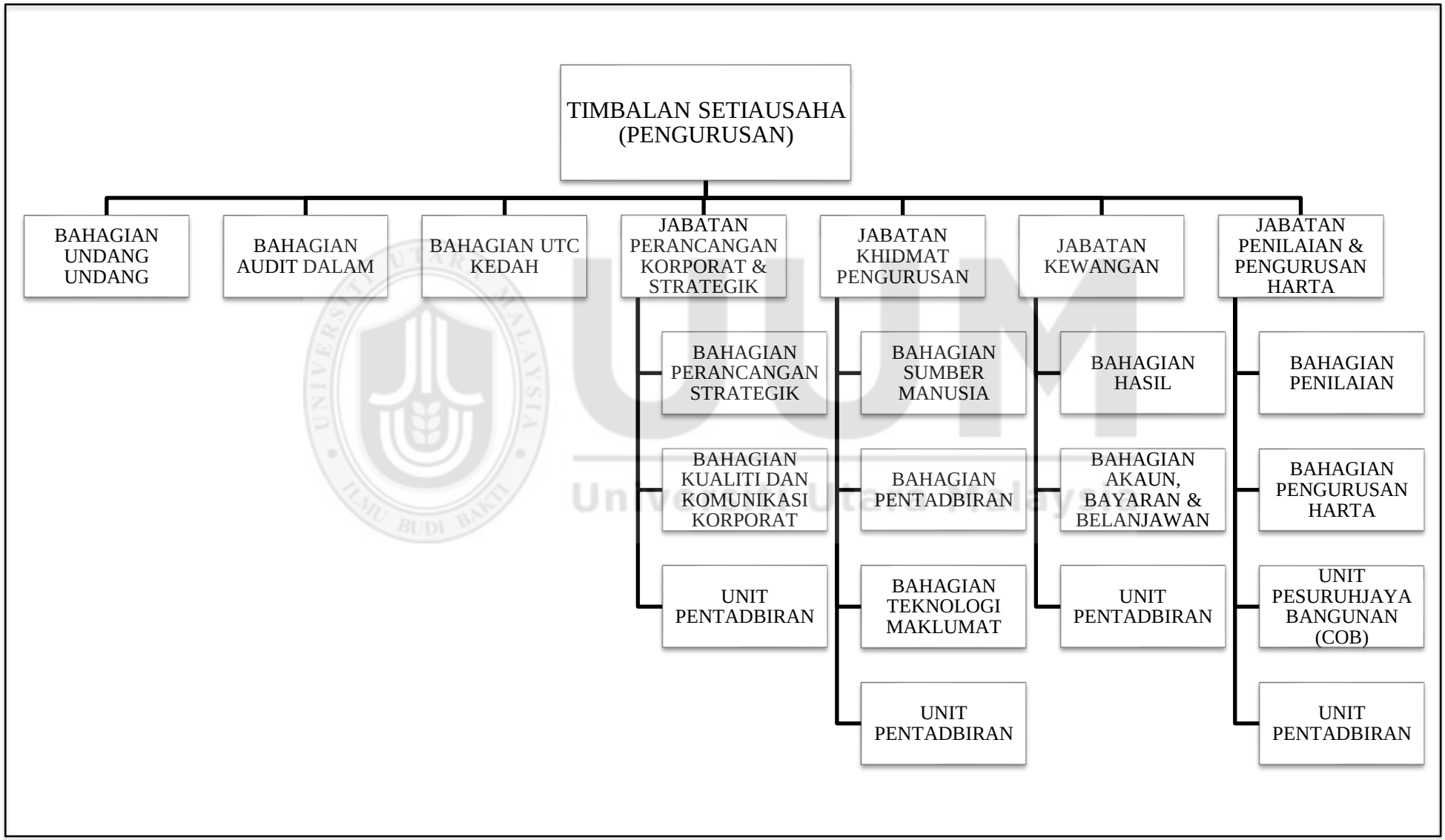
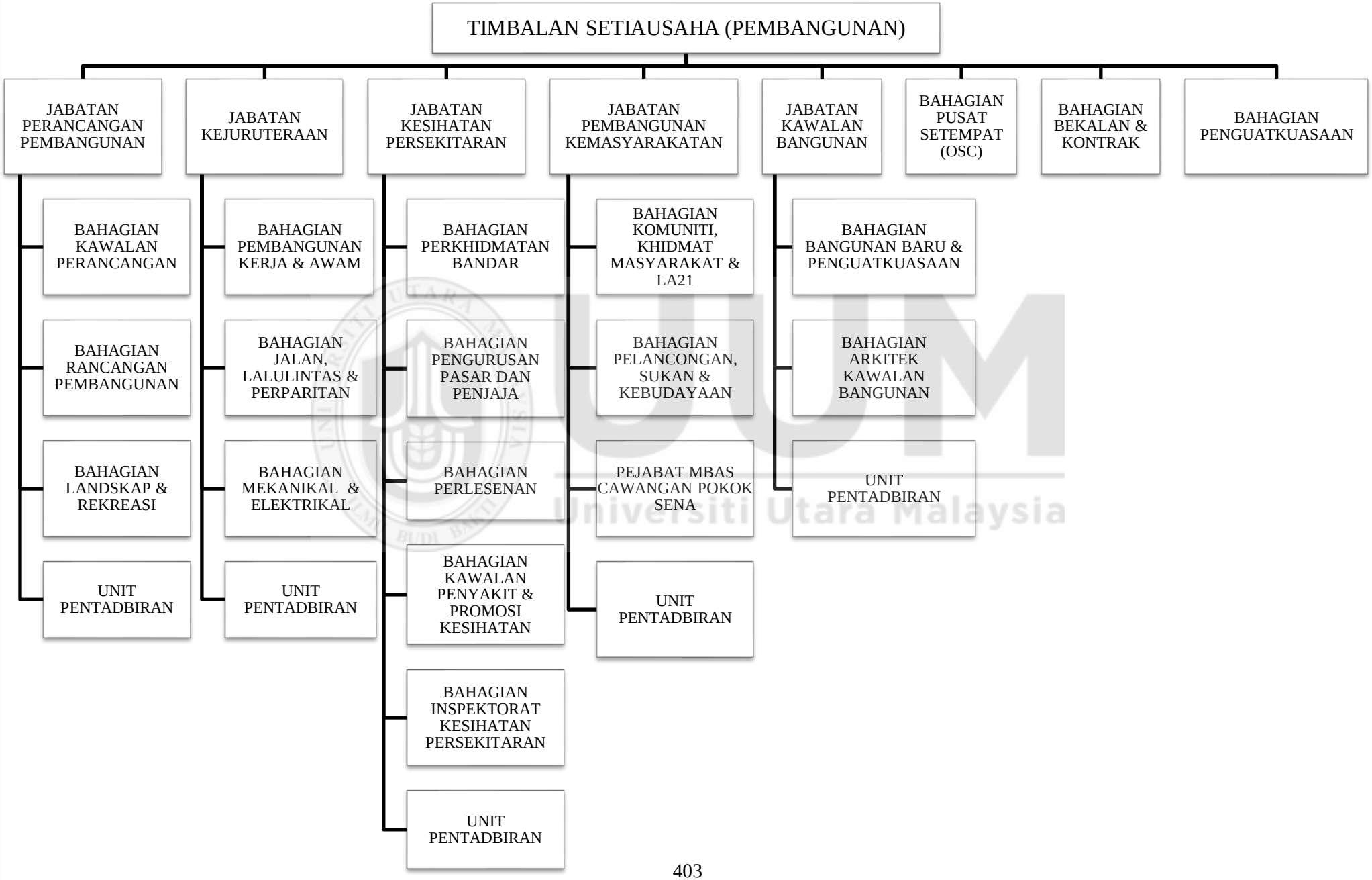

TIMBALAN SETIAUSAHA (PENGURUSAN)
BAHAGIAN UNDANG UNDANG
BAHAGIAN AUDIT DALAM
BAHAGIAN UTC KEDAH
JABATAN PERANCANGAN KORPORAT & STRATEGIK
JABATAN KHIDMAT PENGURUSAN
JABATAN KEWANGAN
JABATAN PENILAIAN & PENGURUSAN HARTA
BAHAGIAN PERANCANGAN STRATEGIK
BAHAGIAN KUALITI DAN KOMUNIKASI KORPORAT
UNIT PENTADBIRAN
BAHAGIAN SUMBER MANUSIA
BAHAGIAN PENTADBIRAN
BAHAGIAN TEKNOLOGI MAKLUMAT
UNIT PENTADBIRAN
BAHAGIAN HASIL
BAHAGIAN AKAUN, BAYARAN & BELANJAWAN
UNIT PENTADBIRAN
BAHAGIAN PENILAIAN
BAHAGIAN PENGURUSAN HARTA
UNIT PESURUHJAYA BANGUNAN (COB)
UNIT PENTADBIRAN



Universiti Utara Malaysia

APPENDIX B

Acknowledgement Letter for Data Collection

GHAZALI SHAFIE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT
UUM Kolej Undang-Undang, Kerajaan dan Pengajian Antarabangsa
Universiti Utara Malaysia
06010 UUM SINTOK
KEDAH DARUL AMAN
MALAYSIA

UUM
Universiti Utara Malaysia

Tel: 604-928 7751/7752
Faks (Fax): 604-928 7799
Laman Web (Web): www.gsgsg.uum.edu.my

"MUAFAKAT KEDAH"

Reference No. : UUM/COLGIS/GSGSG/93834
Date : Januari 4, 2016

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Sir/Madam

DATA COLLECTION FOR PH.D THESIS

This is to certify that **Nur Rusydina Binti Khadzali** (Matric Number : 93834) is a Full Time Doctoral student at Universiti Utara Malaysia, Sintok, Kedah.

She needs to collect data for her research in order to fulfill the requirements of his programme.

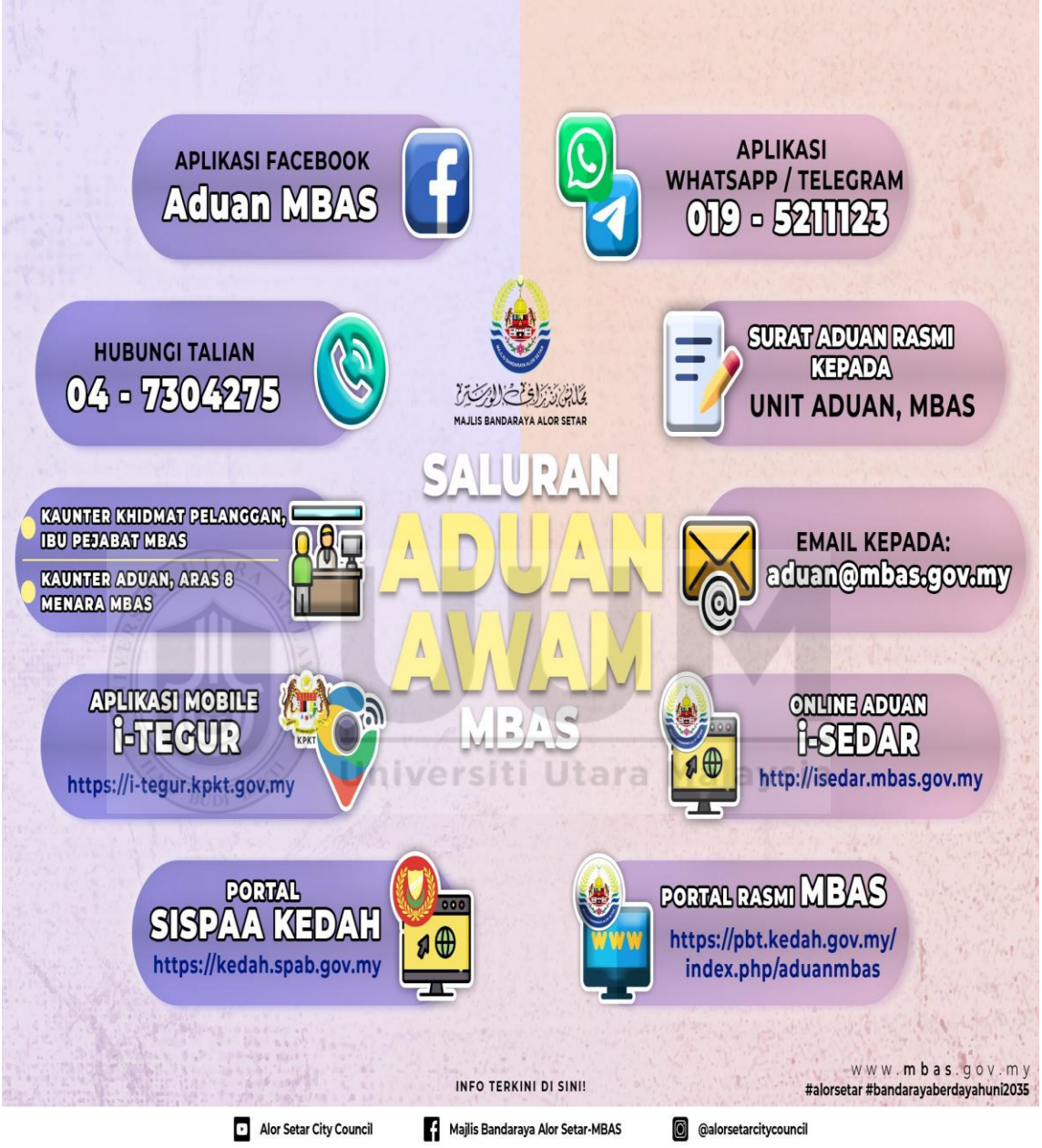
We duly hope that your organization will be able to assist her in getting the necessary information for his research.

Thank you.

"KNOWLEDGE, VIRTUE, SERVICE"

Yours faithfully,

(HAJI ABU BAKAR BIN MAT SAFAR)
Principal Assistant Registrar
On behalf of Dean
Ghazali Shafie Graduate School of Government
Tel : 04-9287752 Fax: 04-9287799
Email : abakar@uum.edu.my

Universiti Utara Malaysia

APPENDIX C
Public Complaint Channel of Alor Setar City Council