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E-state: Realistic or Utopian?

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ABSTRACT

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is known to facilitate governance and citizen participation in States' decision making processes. However, e-governance researchers have argued that beyond the current use of ICT to facilitate existing means of governance there exists the possibility to fundamentally revolutionise public administration through ICT. There is the ideation and aspiration for ICT-based States (E-states) which exist without governments, and whose citizens can self-organise and self-govern without the need for institutions. This paper conceptually discusses the viability and prospects of this aspiration for E-states based on review of literature on politics, public administration and Information Technology in the context of governance and public administration. This study ultimately argues that the possibility of establishing an E-state will be based more on changing existing political ideologies and systems of governance to anarchism than on developing and implementing the technology that will bring about a self-organised and self-governed State. As it is, ICT cannot be a substitute for governments and certain governmental institutions but can only help them to have more effectively and efficiently.

Keywords: E-state, e-government, self-organising citizens, self-governing citizens, anarchism, political ideology, functions of government, essence of government

INTRODUCTION

Existing studies have looked at how Information and Communication Technology (ICT) enhances information sharing between citizens and governments, how it facilitates governments' accountability and transparency and how it improves governments' delivery of public services. The most recent focus is on smart cities which have been defined as the use of ICT to provide, manage, monitor and integrate the critical infrastructures and services of a city which may include road, bridges, healthcare, city administration, education, public safety, etc.(Bowerman, Braverman, Taylor, Todosow, & Von Wimmersperg, 2000; Washburn et al., 2009). There is adequate focus on how ICT impacts on governments' business affairs and on their performance as it concerns communicating and delivering services to all stakeholders in the State-whether citizens, businesses, employees or even other

governments. But all these have been on how ICT has been used to enhance existing systems of governance other than bring about a new system altogether.

It is under this light that a call has been made for scholarly research into innovative approaches by which ICT can be used to fundamentally change States and existing approaches to governance and followership. The driving vision is that ICT can bring about self-organising and self-governing States without institutions and bureaus. As this is yet an idea and a vision, it is pertinent that it is investigated and tested for practicality. The motivation for this study is: is it really possible for ICT to bring about a self-organised and self-governing State where the citizens can collaboratively make decisions about common assets or common matters without the need for government and bureaucratic institutions? For instance, is it possible to have a parliament which involves each and every citizen? Is it possible for the citizens to - at every step- decide the budget and expenditure of the State? Is it possible to have a State whose viability is the responsibility of the Citizens and not of elected officials? For the sake of brevity, this prospective State is referred to as an E-state.

To investigate the practicality of an E-state, it is necessary to ascertain: first, the political ideology which the said State would adopt; this is important as the idea will fundamentally affect existing social systems and forms of governance if implemented. Second, the Researcher shall ascertain the functions of governments; this is important as it will present a clearer picture as to the government functions which would become the responsibility of citizens if the E-state comes into existence, and would help envisage whether or not the citizens can handle such functions. And third, the Researcher shall ascertain the essence of and functions of governments; this is important in understanding the consequences - or lack thereof- of having a State without a government and institutions.

By answering to the research question and investigating the factors mentioned above, the feasibility or possibility of aspiring for an E-state shall become clearer and there shall be a well-defined idea of what citizens of an E-state can or cannot achieve.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is developed conceptually by review and analysis of research from the literature. A three-stage approach is adopted in the collation and analysis of relevant literature for this study. To develop the key concepts in this study and locate initial references, the first stage involved conducting a search on the Google search engine with two main search terms: "functions of government" and "core functions of government". These literature aims to firstly establish what governments' tasks are in order to understand what the consequences of not having a government would be. This search round did not result in much literature. Further search terms like "theory of the functions of government" and "theory of government" were then used. The latter brought up John Mack's article on 'Classical Theory of Government and the Social Contract'. Based on the analysis of this article, "Social contract" and "Natural Law" were picked up as starting points for further literature search and review. The second stage involved conducting a search on Google Scholar for the two core terms: "social contract" and "Natural Law", especially for the works of Thomas Hobbes,

John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau which are popular in the area. Google Scholar was used as it presents search results from different academic databases (Jacsó, 2005). Articles were selected based on their topics and their perceived relevance to this study. Building on findings from the second stage of literature search and review, the third stage of search for and review literature in political ideologies and public sphere was conducted. This was done because the E-state prospective is in line with anarchist political system and it requires public interaction and collaboration without interference from the government. Finally, literature on ICT and its effect on the normative Public Sphere were also reviewed. In total, 77 papers were reviewed and analysed for this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES

Erikson and Tedin (2011) defined political ideology as a set of beliefs about the proper order of society and how this order can be achieved. It is a shared framework of mental models inherent within groups of individuals with which they interpret their environment and decide on how it should be structured (Denzau & North, 1994). According to Jost, Federico, and Napier (2009, p. 312), this ideology manifests in two aspects: the symbolic political ideology and the operational political ideology. The symbolic political ideology "refers to general, abstract ideological labels, images, and categories, including acts of self-identification" with a form or system of governance. For instance, an individual or group of individuals may explicitly state that they prefer democracy to other forms of governance therefore their symbolic political ideology is democracy in this case. On the other hand, operational political ideology refers to "more specific, concrete, issue-based opinions" through which objective observers can state which form or system of governance is being supported by an individual or a group of individuals. For instance, the same group of individuals who had explicitly stated their preference for democracy may actually prescribe authoritarian approaches to solving societal issues when put through a test.

There are several dimensions of political ideologies amongst which the following are prominent:

1. Left-right dimension: This is the classification of ideological opinions as it concerns initiating social change (left) or maintaining status quo (right). There are two main aspects to this dimension which are the advocating versus the resistance of social change and the rejection versus the acceptance of inequality (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003).
2. Systemic dimension: This relates to broad and fundamental beliefs about the basis and general organisation of political behaviour in a society- they refer, in other words, to the idea of political systems (Livesey, 2006), of which there are over thirty types. Although democracy theoretically is the most dominant form of government in the world today, other common forms include monarchy, oligarchy, authoritarianism and totalitarianism (Freedom House, 2015). It can, however, be aptly put that any

particular government must be wholly or partially democratic or dictatorial. This study would focus more on the systemic dimension of political ideology.

FUNCTIONS OF GOVERNMENT

In his popular work called the Wealth of Nations, A. Smith (1937) observed that every government has three main functions: (1) protecting the State –with a military force- from invasion or oppression from other States. (2) Protecting, as much as possible, every citizen of the State from oppression and injustice by other citizens by acting as a neutral judge (3) Erecting and maintaining public institutions and engaging in public works that are for the benefit of the citizens. Weaver and Rockman (1993, p. 6) discussed ten specific capabilities that all governments need, which include the capability:

> *"to set and maintain priorities among the many conflicting demands made upon them so that they are not overwhelmed and bankrupted; to target resources where they are most effective; to innovate when old policies have failed to coordinate conflicting objectives into a coherent whole; to be able to impose losses on powerful groups; to represent diffuse, unorganised interests in addition to concentrated, well-organised ones; to ensure effective implementation of government policies once they have been decided upon; to ensure policy stability so that policies have time to work; to make and maintain international commitments in the realms of trade and national defence to ensure their long-term well-being; and, above all, to manage political cleavages to ensure that the society does not degenerate into civil war".*

Similarly, the United Nations' Statistics division developed a classification of the purpose of transactions carried out by governments (United Nations, 2015). This classification is general enough to be applied to governments of different countries and is called the Classification of the Functions of Government (COFOG) (OECD, 2011). The first level functions include: general public service; defence; public order and safety; economic affairs; environmental protection; housing and community amenities; health; recreation, culture and religion; education; and social protection. Each of these functions has second level functions as well and all of which are manned by government institutions (Weaver & Rockman, 1993) either by funding or by direct provision of the services involved (Cohen, 2001).

ESSENCE OF THE GOVERNMENT

Thousands of years ago, human ancestors have no governments and live in what is said to be the primitive state of human existence or the state of nature. In this state, individuals had natural rights, were self-preservative and were bound by the natural law (Finnis, 2011) "which determines what is right and wrong and which has power or is valid by nature, inherently, hence everywhere and always" (Strauss, 1983, p. 137). It demands -without coercion or subjugation- justice, equity, modesty, mercy and that every individual treats others as s/he would like to be treated (Curley, 1994) and ensures that everyone is granted his/her fundamental right to life, health, liberty and possessions (Locke & Macpherson, 1980). Finnis (2011) defined natural law as a set of moral standards and practical principles that humans need to follow in order to thrive and everyone must use in one way or the other. However, Curley (1994, p. 1) argued that obeying such laws "without the terror of some

power causing them to be observed" is contrary to the natural inclination of humans to be partial, proud, vengeful, etc. As discussed in Curley (1994), Thomas Hobbes believed that under the natural law, human life was solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, short and mainly characterised by self-interest and that there was need for a power which checks and monitors these excesses to be established-hence the government. Locke and Macpherson (1980) argued that contrary to Thomas Hobbes' assertion that humans are unruly without the government, they are indeed fundamentally good and are bound by the natural law not to harm anyone's life, health, liberty or possession. However they do need the government to act as a neutral judge and to dispense the law. Locke and Macpherson's argument may well seem oxymoronic because if everyone upholds the Natural law, then there would be no need for a government to act as a judge and to dispense the law. Nonetheless, it is this willingness to give up the total freedom which characterised the primal state of human existence for a policed society that brought about the concept of social contract. Social contract is defined as an agreement made thousands of years ago by primitive human ancestors to surrender their natural liberties in exchange for social order (Rousseau, 1920).

ANALYSIS: HOW VIABLE IS THE PROSPECTIVE E-STATE?

Following the discussion of political ideology, functions and essence of government, this section will investigate how these factors may impact on the viability of the proposed E-state.

E-state: The Challenge of Existing Political Ideologies

As discussed earlier, the systemic dimension of political ideology is concerned with the broad and fundamental beliefs about the basis and general organisation of political behaviour in a society. This could entail the acceptance and practice of a political system out of a plethora of existing ones, although democracy is the most accepted or desirable in the world today. The prospective E-state mirrors a systemic political ideology which is termed anarchism. Anarchism is a political ideology that promotes self-organised and self-governed stateless societies (Wolff, 1970) which is not being practiced anywhere in the world. It represents the primitive state of nature - thousands of years ago and before the social contract- when human ancestors live without governments. The E-state as earlier discussed is all about the use of ICT in facilitating self-organising and self-governing States without institutions and bureaus, the result of which shall essentially lead to an ICT-supported anarchist society.

The major challenge herein is to decide whether the emergence of this E-state will adopt a top-down approach with ICT driving the transformation of society from governed to self-organised or bottom-up with society influencing how ICT is used in public administration. Lips (2012) observed that there are two predominant perceptions in the role of ICT in public administration and governance, the first perception is that of ICT driving changes in public administration and governance, whilst the second perception creates a nexus between the use of ICT in public administration and the transformational change in society. Lips saw these perspectives as being technological deterministic and argued that "scholars with a research interest in e-Government phenomena should be focusing on how the use of ICTs in the public sector and its external relationships are being shaped by the particular institutional settings, processes, actors, and arrangements" (Lips, 2012, p. 245).

Whether Technology has the capacity to fundamentally change the culture of a given society is still in debate. Some researchers and contributors argue that technology is dependent on culture and may only change the medium through which things are done (Lips, 2012), others argue that technology has essentially changed the way things are done (M. R. Smith & Marx, 1994), while others argue that culture affects technology just as technology affects culture (Rothwell & Wissema, 1986; Westrup, Al Jaghoub, El Sayaed, & Liu, 2003). Farahani (1996), however, argues that the viability of technology is not in the inherent nature of the technology itself, but on the proportion of the link with which it will have in the environment where it shall be used. There is yet to be an instance where the change from one political system to the other was directly linked to technology and in particular ICT. What is readily observable is the role ICT plays –especially via the internet- in enhancing the status quo as it concerns government-citizen relationship in democratic States (Flew, 2005; Gutmann & Thompson, 2003; Hands, 2005; Nchise, 2012; Warren, Sulaiman, & Jaafar, 2014). ICT has also been seen to enhance the status quo in undemocratic States, for instance in China where the number of internet users is over 560 million (Chen, 2013), democracy remains elusive and the internet has even become a tool for further government control over the citizens (Lei, 2011).

This goes to suggest that although an anarchic-friendly ICT may enhance 'public administration' in a society that has already accepted anarchism as an ideology and preferred social system, it may not be feasible to adopt a top-down approach to establish an anarchic State using ICT in a society practicing democracy or another form of governance.

E-state: The challenge of Functions

The prospective E-state also entails the transfer of government functions and responsibilities to the citizens. For the sake of brevity, this study shall take the three main functions of the government as observed by A. Smith (1937) as a starting point. This means that with the aid of ICT, the ordinary citizens are to coordinate and provide protection for the State from external invasion, protect every citizen from injustice by other citizens, and erect and maintain general public service whilst engaging in public works that are for the benefit of the citizens. Whilst it may be tempting to immediately discard this idea as utopian, it shall be more rewarding to investigate the extent to which ICT can facilitate the execution of hitherto government functions by self-organised citizens.

The protection of state from external invasion: According to United Nations (2015), this entails the administration of military defence affairs and services and the operation of all defence forces. Unless the State decides to do away with the military, it is not conceivable how the Military can exist without an institution. Clearly not having a solution to probable consequences of anarchism on national defence, Wolff (1970), a pro-anarchist stated that as it concerns national defence, a self-organised State would allow the citizens to freely choose whether or not to defend the State and carry its purpose beyond the national borders. No Citizen is bound to defend the State against his or her will. Wolff further queries the essence of a State remaining in existence if its populace does not wish to defend it. However, Friedman (1989) discussed possible approaches to national defence in a self-organised State.

Friedman suggested the creation of defence organisations which are funded voluntarily and which could combine to defend areas of national or continental size. Guerrilla warfare is an example of this and has been used to good effect in stopping even larger and State-backed forces. However, most of the successes recorded by Guerrilla forces were when they acted in collaboration with conventional and State-backed forces as were the case during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Vietnam war, the American revolution, and the Patriotic war/French invasion of Russia (Milstein, 1974; Tse-tung, 1937; Yousaf, 1992). Another approach to national defence in an archaic State could be the self-organisation of every institution in the State apart from the institution that deals with defence which should still be run by the State (Friedman, 1989). The State in this instance shall - by coercion - raise funds for defence from the public. Tannehill and Tannehill (1984) posited that another approach could be self-organised States acquiring defence services from external agencies or mercenaries.

However, as national defence is a public good (Friedman, 1989), its feasibility in a self-organised State shall be largely dependent on the contributions of the public either by funding or by participation herein ensue the challenge of free-riding where members of the public who benefit from the public good have little or no incentive to contribute their own quota to it (Klandermans, 2008). Recent occurrences in the Middle East have also highlighted possible challenges posed by uncontrolled Guerrilla approach to national security with one being the possibility of militias overrunning their host self-governed States following a conflict, for instance is the continued unrest in Libya and the rise of ISIS from a self-organised entity to one which seeks the status of a State. The questions now are, how can ICT help in avoiding free-riding as it concerns recruitment and funding of any military apparatus that the E-state may need? How can ICT help ensure that Libya and ISIS-type problems do not occur with the militia overrunning the E-state? How can ICT resolve such problem if it occurs?

Online donations and funding have consistently shown the power of collaboration in terms of raising funds for a particular cause. There are so many instances of this, one is of James Robertson for whom over $350,000 was raised on gofundme.com within 9 months by 13, 280 people although only $25,000 was targeted (Go Fund Me, 2015). According to Vargas (2008), over $500 million of about $600 million raised by Obama for the 2008 US election was raised on the internet. This presents a strong case for an E-state in terms of crowdsourcing especially as it concerns fund-raising or what Hart (2002) termed ePhilanthropy. So in theory, in an E-state, ICT can help raise funds to equip the military and for other causes. However, in terms of actual offline participation in military activities or other activities, ICT has been seen as encouraging slacktivism (Christensen, 2011) which are political activities that serve the purpose of increasing the feel-good factor of the participants with little or no effects on real-life political outcome. According to UNAIDS (2010), with slacktivism, people support a cause by performing simple measures which require minimal efforts although they are not truly engaged in the said cause. It also leaves them satisfied with the feeling that they have contributed to the cause. This phenomenon has proliferated in the digital world as netizens would easily like pictures and posts, share them, change their display and profile pictures in support of a cause, update their social media status to reflect

the cause, make donations, etc. but would not participate offline where it matters the most (Vitak et al., 2011). On the flipside, ICT has also been successful in mobilising and coordinating participation in offline activities like mass protests, for instance the Arab spring (Stepanova, 2011) and the ouster of Philippine's President Joseph Estrada (Shirky, 2011). Therefore, it could be argued that an E-state may overcome the challenges of free-riding by using ICT to call for donations and participation in military activities and otherwise. Whether the E-state citizens tend towards low-cost digital participation (slacktivism) or active offline participation may be dependent on how each individual cause appeals to them.

Although institutionalised military may not always guarantee all that is expected in terms of defence and are also known to stage coups and overthrow legitimate governments in their host States, it provides an ever-ready resistance to invasion and a structure that is readily activated during conflict and easily deactivated afterwards. How an E-state –without an empowered institution -can easily deactivate its military apparatus after conflict is presently not clear. Furthermore, in a period where there are advancements in modern warfare and strategies as supported by technology, strong institutions are needed to orchestrate military development in States.

The protection of every citizen from injustice by other citizens: This entails the use of the Police Force, Law courts, Prisons, Public order and safety, etc. (United Nations, 2015). Cohen (2001) points out that any governmental function that regulates or removes freedom or free movements should not be left for private individuals. The task of protecting every citizen from being oppressed by other citizens constitutes the social contract and is said to be the very reason why the government came into existence in the first place (Curley, 1994; Locke & Macpherson, 1980). Thus this task and function most likely will be deprecated in a self-organised State like the prospective E-state.

The question then is, how would ICT help a self-organised State to ensure safety and equality for all without coercion from an institution? The answer is not far-fetched because it is more of a people-oriented problem than a technological one. There would be the need for every citizen to obey the 'natural-law' (Finnis, 2011), which anarchists perceive as moral constraints by which every individual is bound and for which the individual remains the sole judge (Wolff, 1970). Every individual is expected to be constrained by the natural law and to willingly undergo agreed punishments when the law is flouted (Finnis, 2011). The possibility of this is still in doubt as Curley (1994) has described humans as being inherently be partial, proud, vengeful, etc.

Erecting and maintaining general public service whilst engaging in public works that are for the benefit of the citizens: This includes the creative function of government which is the corporate action of the citizens of the State and is dependent on the law of Common Consent through which the ruling class in elected and laws are made (Lucas, 1938). It also includes discretionary and ministerial functions like the making and execution of policies, erecting of structures, provision of infrastructures, etc. This is perhaps, the class of functions where self-organised citizens can play a significant role aided by ICT. The possibility of this is considerably evident in the smart-city concept which is the use of ICT to

meet the demands of the citizens (Deakin & Al Waer, 2011). It concerns the provision, management, monitoring and integration of critical infrastructures and services of a city which may include road, bridges, healthcare, city administration, education, public safety, etc.(Bowerman et al., 2000; Washburn et al., 2009) through artificial intelligence and data analytics and for the purpose of facilitating a strong economic, social, and cultural development (Hollands, 2008). There is also the possibility of ICT facilitating the establishment of a public-run parliament where laws are made without the use of representatives- but this is prone to the disadvantages associated with direct democracy which may include lack of protection over minority groups, balkanisation, and emotional and ill-informed reaction to immediate events which may result in regrets that may have been otherwise avoided (Bowler & Donovan, 2000).

Furthermore, there is actually more to governance than the three functions discussed in this section. As Weaver and Rockman (1993) observed, amongst many other functions and responsibilities, governments would have to set priorities and manage conflicting demands, and also need to make informed decisions as it concerns the most effective targets. This doesn't seem to be tasks well suited for self-organised and self-governed societies. Therefore, how ICT can facilitate self-organisation to the point that there is no need for an institutionalised executive and judiciary arm of government remains to be seen.

E-state: The Challenge of Government's Importance

As earlier discussed, humans gradually gave away their right to self-organisation in exchange for social order in what is called the social contract. This social contract brought about changes in political structures from the fundamental *bands* structure, to *tribes*, to *chiefdoms* and to the current and predominant *states* (Service, 1962). It must be stated however that there are still pockets of earlier political structures that are still in existence - for instance, there are still nomadic societies which run a band-type political structure although they are subordinated to the States in control of their territories.

With the advent of ICT, researchers are considering the possibility of re-evaluating this contract with a view of fundamentally changing public administration from government-based to citizen-based. Since, theoretically, the social contract was established to solve a problem caused by a primitive state of self-organisation (Curley, 1994; Locke & Macpherson, 1980; Rousseau, 1920), it is pertinent to ask the question: would returning to a state of self-organisation not be a return to the theoretical ancient state of anarchism?

The internet facilitates freedom of 'speech', public interaction and a degree of self-organisation in the digital world without interference by the State (Novak, 2005; Shirky, 2011). Even when States interfere in online public discourse and activities through censorship and surveillance (Dahlberg, 2001), the public respond–both socially and technically-with a drive for online autonomy and eventually anonymity (Ohm, 2009). Internet users are able to considerably evade government's censorship and surveillance by Internet Protocol (IP) and Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) related anonymity. Since IP addresses can be used to locate the origin and destination of network packets, anonymising services like Tor

were developed to facilitate the evasion of IP tracking (Ohm, 2009). Such services allow multi-level encryption of network packets which are also sent through predetermined routes therefore allowing undictated access to blocked domains. On the other hand, CMC related anonymity allows for three levels of obscurity for online interlocutors (Morio & Buchholz, 2009); these include: (1) visual anonymity which is the default anonymity provided by CMC except in video-calls as it allows interlocutory without physical appearance (2) dissociation of real and online identities which refers to the creation of online persona such as name, avatar, gender, age, race, personality and values which may be different from the real (3) lack of identifiability which is present in online communities where no information is provided about senders of messages and these messages and communication styles of the interlocutors are conflated such that no individual interlocutor can be singled out. All these further show the capability of the internet to facilitate self-organisation without the influence of governments and provides a model with which the proposed E-state can be examined.

Since the prospective E-state would most likely involve virtual interaction and deliberation between citizens, it is pertinent to consider the possible challenges that may be encountered. Perhaps, a good starting point will be the concept of a normative public sphere which - according to Habermas (1989), Pusey (1987) and Hauser (1998)- is characterised by independence from the State and without restriction as it concerns assembly and expression of opinion, freedom of access to the sphere, freedom to put forward individual views and opinions, and freedom to contest the views and opinions of other citizens in the discourse of issues of general interest. According to Dahlberg (2000) cited in (Dahlberg, 2001), there are factors that are necessary for the sustenance of these normative principles of the public sphere and these include: ideal-role taking, exchange and critique of criticisable moral-practical claims, reflexivity, sincerity and discursive inclusion and equality. So the question is: without control/governance, will these normative characteristics of the public sphere hold true in the E-state?

Ideal-role taking: In a public sphere, ideal role-taking demands that interlocutors with conflicting opinions should understand the diverse perspectives by putting themselves in the position of the other (Dahlberg, 2001). This allows participants to listen to each other despite the differences and to respectfully dialogue. It is almost a rare consensus that practitioners and researchers have observed a high level of conflictive behaviour on computer mediated communication. This is more so where there is limited social control. This conflictive behaviour is usually referred to as flaming and is characterised by use of aggressive, offensive or derogatory languages/messages and personal attacks (Albrecht, 2006; Alonzo & Aiken, 2004; Davis, 1999; Dutton, 1996; Lee, 2005). Ideal role-taking is a rare occurrence on CMC-oriented public sphere and when it does occur, it is hardly sustained (Dahlberg, 2001).

Exchange and critique of criticisable moral-practical claims: A normative public sphere should be devoid of dogmas and it should however contain reasoned and criticisable opinions and involve reciprocal critiquing of these opinions (Dahlberg, 2001; Habermas, 1989). Barber (1999) argues that online interlocutors tend to conform to dogmas instead of problematizing them and that they also convict people of conflicting opinions instead of

making efforts to convince them. Thus to Barber, there is a dearth of criticisable moral-practical claims and a lack of exchange and critique of same claims. Furthermore, Ferree, Gamson, Gerhards, and Rucht (2002, p. 292) observed that CMC-especially on the internet-has given too much voice to citizens who "misunderstand, oversimplify or distort issues to serve their own personal agendas". It allows for the informed, not-so-informed and ill-informed to contribute in the discourse and this may affect the rational-critical nature of the opinions presented.

Reflexivity: This is the core of rational critical discourse which Wilhelm (2000) described as being the same concept as deliberation and refers to the consideration and acceptance of opposing views and opinions in the light of better judgement (Dahlberg, 2001). Researchers have argued that there is no reflexivity on internet discourse. According to Barber (1999), on the internet, people 'talk' without 'listening' and individual views are more reinforced than exchanged in online discourse (Davis, 1999) . Similarly, Wilhelm (2000) observed that participants in an online discourse tend to self-express and indulge in monologues. He argued that such behaviour negatively impacted on aspects like attention/listening, responsiveness and dialogue which are necessary for a dialogue/deliberation to take place. It has also been observed and that readers would often skim through posts that contain more than a few line of texts (Dahlberg, 2001) as against engaging with the texts. Dahlberg's observation is in agreement with non-academic practitioners in online engagement who have shown through web analysis that there is a high rate of audience disengagement with articles while suggesting that it appears that the more the audience read, the more they tune out (Haile, 2014; Manjoo, 2013; Mintz, 2014)

Sincerity: The normative public sphere demands that interlocutors must thrive towards sincerely declaring every relevant information, making known their true intentions, interests, needs and desires all of which are necessary for rational discourse and critique to be possible (Dahlberg, 2001). Sincerity online has been discussed in two basic categories: sincerity/deception as it concerns identity, and sincerity/deception as it concerns information provision (Ben-Ze'ev, 2004; Dahlberg, 2001). CMC provides a number of signifiers which determines a person's online identity. These signifiers include: the email address which may indicate gender, ethnicity, nationality, location, etc., nicknames which may indicate gender, and the style and content of posts which may indicate class, level of education, interests, lifestyles, etc. Most researchers agree that communication in the cyberspace is inherently self-presentative and therefore apt to deception which is the inverse of sincerity in the context of this study (Ben-Ze'ev, 2004; Caspi & Gorsky, 2006; Dahlberg, 2001; Janssen & Kies, 2005). Real offline identities can be explicitly or implicitly altered by the interlocutors just as information can be falsified as pranks, to self-promote, to slander, to provoke, for propaganda etc. (Dahlberg, 2001; Fighel, 2007; Hachigian, 2001; Jowett & o'Donnell, 2014; Kalathil & Boas, 2001; Shea, 2012).

Discursive inclusion and equality: A normative public sphere is conceptualised as devoid of status/class and as being open to every citizen (Habermas, 1989); however, it has been observed that status and reputation can be built online thereby resulting to class and inequality (Donath, 1999; Wright & Street, 2007). According to Donath, status is typically

enhanced online when a participant is the moderator when his postings draw more comments /admiration from other members of the discursive group, when he is the one helping new participants find their voice in the discursive group and when he consistently displays technical expertise, posts frequently and consistently responds to other poster's messages. When status sets in, domination of discourse may ensue in any or all of the following ways: "abusive postings, monopolisation of attention and the control of the agenda and style of discourse." (Dahlberg, 2001).

With the E-state being ipso facto a digital sphere, the factors discussed above are essential for the citizens to interact meaningfully on issues of public interest. However, their practicality without social control remains doubtful. It presents an oxymoronic situation where the E-state needs to be without social control, but needs social control to remain viable.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This conceptual study set out to answer the question: "Is it really possible for ICT to bring about a self-organised and self-governing State where the citizens can collaboratively make decisions about common assets or common matters without the need for government and bureaucratic institutions?"

E-state: The Weaknesses

Review of literature shows no proof that ICT has ever had a direct impact in fundamentally changing a political system or form of governance. It has however, enhanced the status quo especially in democratic States and facilitated existing processes in public administration. ICT, particularly the internet, provides an avenue through which citizens of a State can voice their opinions, it also provides an avenue through which the State can exercise more control on the citizens. With the prospective E-state being based on the anarchist political ideology, theoretically, proponents would either achieve this vision by transforming the target States' existing political systems to anarchism before implementing pro-anarchist ICT, or by implementing ICT which has the capability to transform existing political systems into anarchism whether the public accepts it or not. With the former, the support of political elites would be essential as according to Vergara (2013) the behaviour and degree of commitment of elites in a social structure determine its stability or the need for a change. The elites "have a greater opportunity and ability to shape the structure and functionality of key political institutions and will influence the kind of regime a country may have, as opposed to that of the general public" the stability of and maintenance of a social with the maintenance (Benavides, 2011, p. 1). However, the possibility of inventing such a society-changing technology and/or getting political elites to willingly give up their political importance in exchange of self-governing States is improbable (Marques, 2010; Noveck, 2004; Prattipati, 2003); therefore either option remains questionable.

Assuming that the problem of political ideology is solved, proponents of an E-state should also think about how ICT can facilitate citizens' new responsibilities in protecting the State from external invasion, in protecting every citizen from injustice by other citizens and in

Erecting and maintaining general public service whilst engaging in public works that are for the benefit of the citizens. Whilst the public can self-organise to form a military apparatus, the literature shows that they are more effective in collaboration with conventional military forces. There is also the prospective issue of free-riding as military apparatus in the proposed E-state will need funding and participation from the public. It will also be necessary to consider the challenges that may be encountered in containing and deactivating all military apparatus after a conflict without the institutions empowered to do so. Proponents and antagonists of anarchic States continue to argue about the nature of national defence in a self-governing State (Friedman, 1989; Hoffman, 1972; Hummel, 1990, 2003; Malkin & Wildavsky, 1991; Tannehill & Tannehill, 1984); and until feasible strategies are agreed upon, the possible contribution of ICT to it may not fully be known.

Furthermore, E-state proponents would have to decide on how to ensure law and order without the security and legal apparatus and institutions in existence today. Anarchists suggest that every citizen in the E-state must be bound by Natural Law which entails – without-coercion- justice, equity, modesty, mercy and that every individual treats others as s/he would like to be treated. However, the practicality of such law without a level of coercion is doubtful especially as humans remain inherently partial, proud, vengeful, etc. Perhaps, where the E-state may be most functional is in the area of erecting and maintaining general public service. For instance, citizens can decide what needs to be done, how much should be spent on it, which firm or individual gets the contract, what becomes law and what doesn't, etc. However, this poses the risk of uninformed decisions being made because everyone gets to participate in the State's decision making process including citizens who misunderstand, oversimplify or distort issues to serve their own personal aims (Ferree et al., 2002, p. 292). There is also the risk of 'mob rule' with little or no protection for the interests of minority groups.

Some proponents of the E-state may argue that since band-type political structures like nomadic societies still exist, a self-organised E-state could still be possible. However, it is pertinent to understand that apart from the fact that earlier political structures allowed greater degree of self-governance than is obtainable now; they also had less human population, smaller geographical areas, and fewer functions and services to provide to the population. In essence, they were not complex societies. Perhaps it is the complexity of today's society that makes it necessary for certain institutions to exist.

The Researcher argues that establishing a totally self-organised and self-governing E-state may not only be unattainable in today's world but also unwise. Certain institutions are a necessity in society; and even if the E-state becomes reality as an entirely digital society; there is still the need for social control and hence governance.

E-state: The Strengths

A lot has been written about citizens' participation (Arnstein, 1969; IAP2, 2007; LeGates & Stout, 2011; Phillips, 2013; Rowe & Frewer, 2005). A number of citizen participation models have also been developed with some focusing on information flow between governments and

citizens, for example Rowe and Frewer (2005) and United Nations (2014), whilst some focused on governments' policies for engaging their citizens in States' decision making process, for example Arnstein (1969) and IAP2 (2007). A widely cited model is the ladder of citizenship participation as developed by Arnstein (1969) which has eight rungs split into three hierarchical categories: non-participation, tokenism and citizen power. It is within the citizen power category that participation is theorised to be at its highest level as it involves citizen control and entails that citizens should not merely negotiate with power holders but must fully govern and manage programs or institutions. It is this citizen-control that best reflects the proposed E-state. However, this citizen control has remained theoretical because the extent or degree of citizens' participation is determined by governments (United Nations, 2014) who retain the final say no matter how involved the citizens are (Arnstein, 1969). Therefore, it can be argued that ICT can only facilitate citizens' participation to the extent that a government has decided to engage its citizens.

The potential of ICT in citizens' participation (e-participation) is vast and only limited by imagination and, of course, the purpose and degree of citizens' engagement allowed by governments. In essence, ICT can be used for any level of citizen participation including citizen control as long the existing social, political and administrative system allows it. However, common e-participation efforts include: (1) providing policy ideas and feedback for governments, e.g. 'We the People' which is an online petitioning system run by the United States, (2) participating in States' legislative processes, e.g. TOM (Täna Otsustan Mina or 'Today I Decide' in English) - an online deliberative sphere provided by the Estonian Government which gives citizens an institutionalised role in law-making process, (3) contributing to the design of services via open-innovation and co-design, e.g. smart cities.

With the capacity of ICT to aid crowdsourcing both in terms of finance and participation in offline activities as earlier discussed, the Researcher can envisage an E-community and not an E-state, an E-community that can self-organise to achieve set goals within a State. These goals may not involve the State, or may be in collaboration or in contention with the State.

Recommendations

Following the findings, the Researcher makes the following recommendations:

1. Perhaps, instead of working towards of a Stateless society driven by ICT, focus should be on ways by which the gap between governments and citizens can be further closed using ICT and on how to lobby public authorities to allow for greater involvement of citizens in States' decision making process. Maybe this gap can be bridged to the point where there is a closely knit and efficient network between citizens and government institutions (Scott, 2009) to the point where the public can play direct roles in governance in certain areas and issues without the need for a fundamental change in the existing political system.

2. The Researcher further recommends a more modest focus on the prospects of using ICT to facilitate non-bureaucratic and self-functioning private/non-governmental institutions (E-institutions). For example, researchers could consider the prospects of

using ICT to facilitate self-functional, self-governing and non-bureaucratic Universities, banks, business firms, etc. Perchance, if such institutions can successfully function without bureaus, it may have a knock-on effect on the present political ideology to the very point that governments become more willing to increase citizens' involvement in States' decision making process.

3. There could also be more focus on the use of ICT to facilitate collaboration towards maintaining a community and achieving community-wide goals (E-community) without fundamentally changing governance as we know it today.

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