Fighting Stories with Stories:

Driving Evidence-Based E-Participation with Storification and Embodied Narratives

Abstract

Post-truth politics have thrived in the shape of fake news, feeding divisive emotional narratives. While stories with strong emotional appeal can mobilize, their current post-truth form erodes the ideals of democracy. Some have called to counter post-truth populism with evidence-based e-participation. However, such initiatives appear less engaging to their audiences. We argue that that because human cognition is constitutively narrative and emotional, a more viable strategy is to embrace emotional narrative to mobilize civic participation in a form aligned with democratic ideals through evidence-based storification and gamification. As such, the attraction to emotional narratives becomes a positive force towards evidence-based engagement. We discuss e-participation applications that can highlight promising strategies for positively influencing civic engagement through *1. Storification*, the clothing of an artifact with an explicit emotional narrative, and *2. Embodied narrative*, the implicit narratives conveyed by the very existence of an artifact.

1. Introduction

Stories engage and unify people through shared emotional energy and framing of reality (Boyd, 2009; Grint, 2016; Redekop, 2016; Rivière & Currow, 2016). Indeed, emotion is a fundamental dimension of human decision-making and behavior (Lerner et al., 2015), and stories are a basic way through which humans evoke emotions, make sense of their reality, and communicate (Bruner, 1990; Redekop, 2016). Stories reduce the complexity of the world into a concrete form that is easy to grasp, remember, and

share. They articulate clear chains of cause and effect as well as normative evaluations. They engage and unify their audience in joint vicarious emotion as they: jointly sympathize with the protagonist's suffering which often stands in for the in-group's collective suffering; jointly despising the antagonist embodying an out-group framed as the source of suffering and disharmony in the world; and jointly celebrating the protagonist's victory over the antagonist (Bruner, 1990; Boyd, 2009; Punday, 2012; Tan, 2013).

Such narratives may be employed at times of need, such as during wars, to unite the populace (Lasswell, 1927) or during times of austerity (Rivière & Currow, 2016). Other times, such narratives may intentional or accidentally drive polarization in society, eradicating some democratic ideals such as inclusion and equality. This power of stories and emotion plays a major role in the current rise of post-truth politics. We see populist leaders rising to power on nationalist, us-versus-them narratives (Grint, 2016). Media pundits and social media communities feed and spread similar politically charged (conspiracy) stories (Johnson, 2018) to engage their audience with them. Such narratives usually motivate and engage target audiences by mirroring and amplifying their affects and semi-conscious explanations for the state of the world and (Hochschild, 2016) – with little regard for factual grounding (Suiter, 2016).

Standard post-WWII democracy theories see political engagement grounded in reasoned deliberation and inclusive decision-making among equals (see Bohman and Rehg, 1997). Hence, calls to counter post-truth politics often imply doubling down on these fundamentals: "If only we had *more* information and inclusive deliberation, citizens would not fall for emotionally moving but factually untrue stories." Such calls usually call for the eradication of false information/news as seen in Facebook removing accounts and groups known to spread false news in 2018 and Google announcing its News Initiative for fact checking. Likewise, laws are put in place to increase transparency of content origins. "Evidence-based" e-participation is then evoked as contemporary technical solutions to this perceived information and

access gap in democracy where citizens are encouraged to facet check and utilize rational thinking and evidence in their political engagement (Higgins 2016).

However, such calls for evidence-based e-participation overlook the constituent role of emotion and narrative in human cognition and action. They are grounded in an implicit 19th century, Enlightenment view of human nature – pitting supposedly-superior and distinct data and reason against supposedly-inferior and distinct narrative and emotion. This view is as laudable as a regulative ideal, as it is outmoded by psychological research (Lakoff, 2009). 'Reason' itself is always-already narrative and suffused with emotion. Without that emotion we would not be motivated to reason, evaluate, or act to begin with (Lerner et al., 2015). One immediate consequence of this fallacy is that e-participation initiatives often fail to engage all but a tiny minority of already highly politically engaged and educated individuals (Bista et al., 2014; Jensen, 2003). True, evidence-based, participatory governance may in principle generate better outcomes, higher legitimacy, and a greater sense of political agency and inclusion, but these theoretical advantages alone do not suffice to motivate the majority of citizens to participate online or offline and have been overshadowed by the more attractive post-truth practices. In other words, today's democratic participation initiatives suffer an engagement gap, not an information or an access gap (Coronado Escobar and Vasquez Urriago, 2014; Dargan and Evequoz, 2015; Hassan, 2017).

Seen this way, a central challenge of democracies in the face of post-truth populism is to square the good that evidence-based, deliberative democratic governance can bring, with the sense-making, engaging, and unifying qualities of emotional narratives – rather than pitching one against the other. In this paper, we propose storification and embodied-narratives as useful conceptual and practical approach to squaring evidence-based, deliberative political participation with the engaging power of emotional stories. *Storification* – clothing a process or artifact into a narrative -, and *embodied narrative*: the implicit

narratives conveyed by the very existence of an artifact. We illustrate their potential to address the engagement challenge of e-participation through a discussion of two storified e-participation tools, *Run That Town* and *Community PlanIt*. We investigate: "how do storification and embodied narratives influence e-participation in political contexts?". We hence contribute to the discourses on the significance of stories in political participation and to the study of e-participatory government.

2. Background

2.1. E-participation and Post-Truth Politics

Civic participation broadly describes ways in which individuals (can) influence their communities and its leadership through e.g. deliberation, campaigning, voting, or other actions (Islam, 2008; Sæbø et al., 2008). E-participation, the introduction of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to civic participation, has long been seen to lower barriers to civic participation, such as the lack of time, or geographic distance (Coenen, 2014; Komito, 2005; Lee and Kim, 2014; Linders, 2012). E-participation spans a wide range of initiatives, from civic education to citizen sourcing and citizen consultations. Its ultimate aim is almost always to move beyond the digitisation of basic government services and interactions, towards the co-creation of societal value between governments and citizens as partners, as seen in one of the most widely adopted categorizations of e-participation tools according to the level of engagement they intend to facilitate by Macintosh (2004). According to that categorization, e-participation tools can broadly facilitate three engagement levels:

1) *Informatory:* Where citizens are mainly passive "consumers" of government information so as to increase government transparency and citizens' awareness of political processes. This is often seen in open government and open data initiatives, where governments publish some of their documents and data collected by the public sector for online, free access by citizens. The premise is to inform citizen on the governance and status of their communities.

2) *Consultations:* Where citizens are "consultants" providing feedback on issues of interest, and help in planning their communities, thus facilitating perceptually higher levels of governmental legitimacy. This is often seen in initiatives that seek citizen feedback on past on planned government activities, such as the planning of cities, law-making or petitioning activities. The premise is that by consulting citizens on governance related practices, governmental activity and decision-making can become better aligned with citizen expectations.

3) *Coproduction:* Where citizens are "partners" with the government, jointly setting the political agenda, governing and improving the community working together on equal terms in an atmosphere of openness and trust. Examples of these practices are hard to come by as it is currently advocated by many scholars that no e-participation imitative has reached that level yet (Islam, 2008; Thiel and Lehner, 2015; Thiel et al., 2016).

Data suggests that citizens are in principle open to and interested in political participation and co-production (Abdelghaffar and Hassan, 2016; Gordon, 2013: Komito, 2005). As an informal, bottom-up example, millions of citizens across the globe regularly express and share political views on social media (Abdelghaffar and Samer, 2016; Linders, 2012). In fact, this social media groundswell has been a major conduit for the so-called post-truth politics, where politicians mobilise citizens with emotional appeals that have little or no grounding in fact, while facts in turn are dismissed as mere ungrounded assertions (Higgins, 2016; Suiter, 2016).

One strategy to counter post-truth politics has been to engage people in deliberative democracy through the ICTs they spontaneously use, such as social media. However, as with previous intentional, formal e-participation efforts, these initiatives have struggled to attract and retain participants (Thiel et al., 2016). Analysis suggests that the *design* of such formal e-participation initiatives is often a key engagement

hurdle (Abdelghaffar and Hassan, 2016; Abdelghaffar and Samer, 2016; Hassan, 2017; Thiel et al., 2016). While e-participation platforms are designed to be functional and usable, they are often not designed to be engaging, require effort to use, lead to information overloads, and have long waiting time, while being light in emotional appeal, individual agency, or flow. In contrast, the quintessential form of post-truth participation – reliant on viewing and sharing heavily spun or outright false political stories on social media – is intentionally designed to maximally engage (and enrage) participants (Sydell, 2016). In response, political practitioners have been actively looking for design strategies to make e-participation more engaging (Coronado Escobar and Urriago, 2014; Hassan and Nader, 2016; Thiel and Lehner, 2015).

2.2. Design for Engagement: Gamification, and Storification

First and foremost, amongst these attempts to affectively re-design e-participation initiatives is gamification, the use of game design in non-game contexts (Deterding et al., 2011; Huotari and Hamari, 2017). While the use of games to foster political participation has a history of over 40 years (Mayer, 2009), gamification in particular has gained traction in civic education and engagement in recent years (Hassan, 2017; Thiel and Lehner, 2015; Thiel et al., 2016). Gamification entails a wide gamut of design elements, reaching from basic progress feedback and reward structures (virtual points and badges for e.g. posting comments in a forum or sharing items on social media) to social facilitation (virtual teams and team competitions) or personal expression (e.g. allowing users to represent themselves online with a visually customizable avatar). It is in many ways an imprecise tool that needs careful design consideration ([Removed for review]).

It has been argued that a tool that is easy to use and that is engaging (as gamified e-participation tools are thought to be) will attract a larger user base than a regular e-participation tool, leading to a greater

societal impact (Hassan, 2017; Thiel et al., 2016). While this proposition ignores the fact that most societies suffer from a level of digital divide due to differences in access to technology, and technological literacy that limits the reach of many participation initiatives (Gordon, 2013; Komito, 2005; Sæbø et al., 2008; Polat, 2005), a gamified e-participation tool could garner a relatively large base of users beyond the traditional case. Civic games (Mayer 2009; Stokes and Williams, 2018) and gamified e-participation tools have a window to the young; age is the main difference in the demographics of people politically active online and offline (Best and Krueger, 2005; Sæbø et al., 2008). The young tend to utilize online tools of participation (if any). E-participation tools have thus already assisted in the inclusion of a group that may have otherwise been more marginalized, and gamification, with its appeal to that group, may further strengthen their inclusion. If gamification, or particularly storification, is to further widen the reach and impact of e-participation tools, then there should be conscious initiatives that facilitate the introduction of for example the elderly or demographics who have not classically been active online (or offline) to these participation tools. Otherwise the "superior" engaging abilities of storified e-participation tools, helpful in spreading civic education and counter post-truth politics, remain limited.

N*arrative gamification*, namely storification, is a design strand of gamification particularly pertinent to civic participation. *Storification* describes the organisation and clothing of a person's interactions with a given entity over time into a story (Deterding, 2016). It increases engagement and the sense of being a part of the activity at hand (Lane and Prestopnik, 2017) through imbuing content with motivation and interest-increasing game elements, instead of just decorating existing processes with things such as points and playful achievements (Landers, 2018). A practical non-political example would be a storified mobile city tour through Amsterdam, where students are assigned various roles in the city in the year 1550 (Akkerman et al., 2009). Their smartphone guides them from location to location, as they listen to stories of fictional characters of the medieval world, take pictures, solve puzzles, or act out certain scripts with

other players. Here, the walk through a city and historical information are clothed in a fictional plot with characters that both engage and give history meaning and coherence. Such storification can be supported by theming, i.e., audio-visually dressing up interfaces in a style fitting the world of the narrative.

Storification can facilitate deep and lasting engagement, using narrative dynamics like suspense to stoke curiosity (Dickey, 2006; Punday, 2012; Sakamoto and Nakajima, 2014). Significantly for civic participation, storification can also facilitate empathy and emotional resonance of the addressed political and societal matters (Carpenter and Green, 2012). While there is no guarantee that storification generates lasting appeal for every audience (Koivisto and Hamari, 2014), there are now several e-participation initiatives using storification (Bartlett-Brag, 2013; Cimino, 2016). According to current evidence, storification appears to motivate better than typical, basic points-based gamification does (Prestopnik and Tang, 2015) and in turn better than traditional e-participation initiatives (Thiel and Lehner, 2015; Thiel et al., 2016). It should, however, also be noted that too much storification may alienate users highly interested in the subject matter, and too much subject matter, in turn, may deter very playful participants (Prestopnik et al., 2017). Thus, balance is needed.

2.3. Design for Engagement: Embodied Narratives

Aside from wrapping e-participation into explicit narratives, the very existence of the storification in and off themselves communicate implicit or *embodied narratives* – e.g. narratives about the roles envisioned for citizens and government or the importance and ideal form of civic participation. At a minimum, every e-participation initiative by its very existence communicates (a) that political participation is important, (b) that current participation is somehow lacking, and (c) that ICT are capable of solving this problem (Deterding, 2012: 118). As such, embodied narratives are akin to the rhetorics of design (Buchanan, 2001) and like them, inescapable. Often, these embodied narratives are experienced and deduced from

the interaction with an artefact, as part of experiencing the artefact and making sense of it, even if the narratives are not explicitly highlighted by the designers of the artefact (e.g., Kelly, 2018; Mukherjee, 2018). That said, embodied narratives can and often are used intentionally as part of what Losh (2009) calls "virtualpolitik" or "digital realpolitik": a government's use of modern ICT to drive practical, proximate interests. For instance, Losh describes how government-sponsored serious games, e-participation tools, or open source initiatives are often tokenist coys deployed to signal openness, innovativeness, democraticness and the like rather than to actually open up and transform politics.

Citizens, in turn, often fear that politicians and officials active on e-participation platforms are present there symbolically or for the sake of publicity with no other intention (Sæbø et al., 2008; Thiel and Lehner, 2015). Officials and politicians are hence in a continuous need to argue that the aim of the initiatives they introduce is to spread civic education and encourage political activity (Abdelghaffar and Samer, 2015), to ensure participation and engagement with the positives of the embodied narratives (youthfulness, openness, etc.) rather than the negatives.

More general critiques of tokenist participation reaches back at least to the 1960s (Arnstein, 1969; Monno and Khakee, 2012), raising the question of whether *intentionally* deploying embodied narratives might fuel the very inauthenticity and resultant citizen cynicism that is part and parcel of the post-truth politics one intends to combat. But again, just like human cognition and decision-making is inescapably emotional, any designed artifact or process put into public has an inescapable social signaling dimension. If anything, once aware of this direct and indirect potential any design has, our ethical imperative is to craft it deliberately (Deterding, 2012). To forfeit its conscious crafting at best gives the other side an upper hand and at worst opens one up to unconscious, unintended effects. In other words, the question is not *whether* to stoke citizen emotion with narratives in e-participation, but for which purposes and

contexts to ensure that they are authentically aligned with the intentions of designers and the agency granted to participants.

3. Storification and Embodied Narratives in E-Participation

To discuss and probe storification and embodied narrative in e-participation, we here present two illustrative examples of storified e-participation tools that have been reported on by prior literature. In particular, we selected one application for the e-participation levels of information provision and consultations. The e-participation level of co-production has been problematic in the literature as no tools were found to be explicitly considered as such and coproductive e-participation remains mostly elusive (Islam, 2008; Thiel and Lehner, 2015; Thiel et al., 2016). The selected example tools are currently frequently examined in the gamified e-participation literature, hence a plethora of research reporting on their various strengths and shortcoming is accessible. Additionally, they are held in good admiration in the gamified e-participation field which makes their study important.

We looked at the illustrative examples of storified e-participation through various lenses; The first lens is of which e-participation levels and behavior they intend to facilitate according to Macintosh's (2004) participation levels. The second lens is of the features that have been employed in building up these applications. Gamification and storification design elements are reviewed and summarized in works by Hamari et al. (2014) and Koivisto and Hamari (2018). Table 1 presents a comparative summation of the examined tools through these identified lenses.

Table 1: Example of storification and embodied narratives in e-participation tools

Storified Tool	RunThatTown	Community PlanIt

Producers	The Australian Bureau of Statistics	Engagement lab at Emerson College
Target audience	Citizens (youth)	Citizens (busy adults)
Participation level	Informatory	Consultation
Use scenario	The tool employs a game-like interface of a city. Players select which city in Australia they want to run. They are then directed to various city challenges based on real data from the city they chose.	Users are first directed to a video on an issue of interest. They are afterwards asked to discuss it and provide opinions. Points earned during such discussions can be spent on supporting decisions.
Explicit narratives / storification	- "You are the mayor of a town in Australia"	- "The Community Plans It"
Implicit/ embodied narratives	- Civic education - Engage young audiences - Youthful governance - Innovativeness - Openness	- Legitimizing political policies - "We are paying extra effort to listen and to involve you." - Innovativeness - Openness
Storification aspects	Narratives, extensive aesthetics, competition, social features, and progress evaluation	Narratives, game economy (points), cooperation, missions, and progress presentation

3.1. Run That Town

RunThatTown was developed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) with the aim to improve civic education in Australia (Bartlett-Brag, 2013; Cimino, 2016). It utilizes advanced audio and video aesthetics with narratives and social features to encourage players to imagine themselves as the mayors of real towns in Australia. Akin to the popular simulation game series *SimCity*, players are tasked to plan a virtual rendition of an actual Australian city based on actual census data. The players are faced with various challenges and planning decisions that they have to make taking into consideration the demographics of their town and their expected needs and preferences. The game evaluates progress in

terms of how popular the virtual mayors are to the people of their town based on the real demographics of the town in question. Players in the same network are ranked by popularity on a joint leaderboard.

The open data and open access movements in the public sphere aim to provide information such as census data, free to everyone regardless demographics, geographics, or other individualistic variables that can be a means of differentiation between individuals (Gurstein 2011). It is believed that the opening up of governmental data for free use, through minimal technologies, would facilitate new business opportunities, improve perceptions of governmental transparency, increase citizen participation and distribute the cost of governmental data manipulation and interpretation to a larger community beyond governmental organizations (Ding et al., 2012).

While some e-participation scholars argue that the mere provision of information and open data does not count as active e-participation (Sæbø et al., 2008), ensuring informed citizenry is still a prerequisite for e-participation (Macintosh, 2004). RunThatTown bypasses this debate by making the participants active consumers of information through storification. Such active participation is often argued to be an outcome of electronic narratives through for example games (Punday, 2012). Coating the census data with a scenario-based story of "you are a mayor" makes participants interact with the information connected with their personally-relevant mayorship story since that they are invested in. Participants use the story to filter and make sense of the data based on their interests and previous information. Through the storification designers (and government officials) may introduce information contrasting what the player is inclined to pursue, through "counter towns" with different demographics, competing against the player for a spot on the leaderboard. This influences the player to learn more about different perspectives to policies.

Additionally, the scenario-based story provides the player with the autonomy of decision-making. The census data facilitates simulation - players can explore other policies through different story decisions in order to see the impact of the policies they may be supportive or unsupportive of in real life. Gamification through such designs fosters civic education which is an outcome rarely achieved in classical townhall meetings (Gordon and Baldon-Philippi, 2014; Thiel et al., 2016). This simulative storification additionally allows governmental officials to operate in a safe environment where they are able to test ideas and learn about the community without the fear of real-world implications (Mayer, 2009; Thiel et al., 2016). On the other hand, it allows players to experience different points of view to policy-making, gaining a deeper understanding of individuals they may have previously thought of as "good/bad" guys and a deeper understanding of the complexity of many political and societal situations (Kelly, 2018)

Embodied, *RunThatTown* is presumably the most attractive to its target audience of youth, interested in games, displaying to them an image of youthful governance through the design of an uncommon, innovative game. It is hardly expected that youth would have engaged with the census data, if the engagement was facilitated through old-fashioned e-participation techniques that are not engaging in the first place, by what might be perceived as a stagnated government unable to innovate or match the preferences of new generations. The players are not explicitly told that the goal of the game is to educate them, but that is implicitly materialized once the players engage with the game and possibly discovers through the storification how interesting and useful data can be. Had this been explicitly communicated to the players beforehand, the target audience of youth - possibly uninterested in census data - would likely have avoided the game. Employing storification here helped counter the unengaging "boring" narrative that could be associated with census data, had the government chosen a different design for the e-participation tool. The government's use of actual census data furthermore signals that it is open and

ready to not only share the data it is possibly lawfully required to share, but also to disclose it in a manner that ensures it will be consumed by citizens rather than ending up as unread statistics on static websites.

3.2.2. Community PlanIt

Community PlanIt is an online consultation tool for planning and strategic, communal decision-making by the engagement lab at Emerson college (Gupta et al., 2012; Gordon, 2013). It aims to foster collaboration between citizens and government on matters of concerns to the community (Reinart and Poplin, 2014). The degree of storificiation in this tool is perhaps relatively limited compared to RunThatTown. The goal of getting stakeholders involved in community planning is coated with a non-fiction story that the community itself can and will plan its own future with the government rather than the planning being imposed through a top-down approach. The process of community planning is traditionally closed, but through this storification, the government implicitly communicates that it is open.

The game employs missions run for a fixed time period. Each mission is introduced through a video, and players are given the opportunity to provide their opinions and decision preferences in relation to the video through Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs), open ended questions, and multimedia. Similar to the scenario based RunThatTown, some questions in Community PlanIt invite players to answer through the eyes of another person, in order to simulate their positions before preferences are cast. Other questions encourage the participants to take the role of policy-makers and officers in order to understand whether their preferences are actually implementable. The embodied goal here is the legitimation of political policies through simulations so players are aware of various dimensions of decision-making and hence may become more accepting of new policies that are to be passed.

The second announced goal from the introduction of Community PlanIt is to test and research whether the new form of gamified e-participation is actually more effective in soliciting citizen feedback than traditional town hall meetings are. Here, the government signals that it does not only wants citizen participation, but that it is willing to go through extra research, design, and testing costs in order to acquire that participation. The government presents itself as an innovative organization that is exploring new avenues along with modern hypes in participation design. The embodied narratives help in the attainment of increased participation and break negative narratives that may have been associated with previous community planning tools, which may not necessarily have been met with success. Community PlanIt might be perceived as a new innovative, expensive design and hence be reflected upon with different connotations than other e-participation tools.

The expression of support for or objection of governmental ideas and decision after deliberations is essential for democratic decision-making. It however creates ground for the domination of groups most strongly represented online. Marginalized groups might continue to be marginalized as their opinions are slowly pushed down and replaced by a majority's voice that garners more support. Participants may, under peer-pressure, conform to the opinion of the majority and possibly ignore facts or their own personal preferences. Participants of Community PlanIt however report positive experiences from the use of the tool. Deliberations through Community PlanIt are reported to be richer than those which have taken place in town hall meetings organized for the same purposes (Gordon, 2013; Gupta et al., 2012; Reinart and Poplin, 2014). This is encouraging for further research into how storification can foster productive, inclusive engagement on e-participation platforms.

4. Discussion

In the battle against post-truth politics, we argue along with Higgins (2016) that essential tools to combat it are civic education and evidence-based engagement. To the contrary however, we think that emotional narratives, a core mechanism of post-truth politicians, should not be shunned but embraced. Emotion and narrative are constitutive parts of human decision-making and behavior (Lerner et al., 2015). Initiatives that shun their conscious deployment – like many information- and process-heavy e-participation systems – are likely to be met with poor reception and engagement at best, and unintended adverse effects at worst. Hence, the challenge is to employ emotional narratives to foster desired behavior such as public deliberation, critical thinking, information-seeking, and civic participation, in a way that is grounded in facts and aligned with the normative ideals of deliberative democracy, while keeping the process highly motivating for the participants.

We here argued for two particular strategies to pursue this end: the storification and design of embodied narratives of e-participation. Storification can foster learning as well as engagement through stoking curiosity, suspense, and emotional resonance (Äyrämö, 2016; Deterding, 2016; Dickey, 2006; Sakamoto and Nakajima, 2014). Scenario-based narratives and roles in tools like *RunThatTown* not only inform players about their community (Bartlett-Brag, 2013; Cimino, 2016), they also enable and encourage players to practically test the impact of different policies (Kelly, 2018; Reinart and Poplin, 2014). Instead of 'preaching' the importance of fact-checks, *RunThatTown* engages players by testing their assumptions against data, thus cultivating critical, evidence-based engagement.

Modern technologies and design have been introduced to e-participation platforms to eliminate participation barriers, spread civic education, improve governmental decision making and facilitates the inclusion of marginalized groups, making governments explicitly and embodied-ly appear more legitimate, democratic and inclusive (Lee and Kim, 2014: Polat, 2005; Sæbø et al., 2008). The potential

to eliminate certain participation barriers justifies the continuous improvement of e-participation tools and the refinement of their designs until better solutions are developed (Gordon, 2013; Polat, 2005). For example; users of *Community PlanIt* (Gordon, 2013; Gupta et al., 2012; Reinart and Poplin, 2014), overall were extremely satisfied with the storified e-participation tool compared to offline town hall meeting that they have been a part of - specifically for reasons relating to mobility, ease of use, and fun. The tool was appropriate for its target audience of working citizens, pressured for time, concerned about the future of their community, and possibly looking for a fun application to engage with during coffee breaks or while in traffic. A government's mere use of playful storification as a tool to reach out to their "busy" of disinterested audience signals a desirable image of innovativeness and youthfulness, in embodied narratives that may alter how a government is perceived, and thus increase intentions to be politically active. Embodied fears of tokinist participation have been relatively countered on Community Planit by demonstrating that an actual action has been influenced by the input collected from citizens through an online published list of initiatives that came from the tool,

Storified e-participation initiatives additionally embodied-ly communicate a story of effort. While these tools are still considered relatively cheaper and more convenient alternatives to town hall meetings, they require investments greater than what a regular e-participation initiative would require. Creating good storification for them costs time and money. The fact that a government is willing to shoulder these comparatively increased costs signals that the government does want more participants or is at least seriously intending to give off that image, thus contributing to increased engagement with these tools. Since it is argued, however, that all objects are rhetorical; explicitly or embodied-ly communicating a message (Buchanan, 2001), these embodied narratives of youthfulness, innovativeness, and effort can be embraced and used in alignment with the values of democracy.

5. Conclusion, limitations and future directions

Continuous refinement of e-participation technologies and methods can lead to an evolutionary leap in the citizen-government relationship. Citizens can become active recipients of information from leaders, and more aware of their ability and rights to fact-check, produce solutions, and shoulder a societal responsibility. Storification and game-based e-participation tools, as seen in the discussed tools of RunThatTown and Community PlanIt, place citizens in a fantasy where they are mayors and partners, active co-producers, or consumers, emphasizing their role in the democratic process. Such tools can directly and indirectly reinforce citizenship identities and participation towards a possible revolutionary leap, in the design for and facilitation of civic participation. Hence, it is essential to examine more options for game-based participation and the positive and negative consequences of their implementations. Likewise, we need to further see which embodied narratives affect the stories that are created through such storified and gamified participation to discern their impact and mindful utilization. More research is thus needed on the topic in general, focused on the use of storification, not just gamification. This relates to the key limitation of this study: due to the limited number of empirical works on using narratives for storifying e-participation processes, we have drawn on the general literature of gamification research. Future empirical research is encouraged to see if narratives and storification have a particular impact different from other gamification techniques. In post-truth societies, the power of the interesting story appears to often be triumphant over facts. We must therefore know exactly how to interactively deploy stories together *with* the facts, not in opposition to them.

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