

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Enlightenment of foreign citizens' online political participation on China—Based on the case study of America, Singapore, South Korea, and Japan

Haisheng Hu^{1,*}, Samuel Amponsah Odei²

¹ School of Public Policy, Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai, 50200, Thailand

² Department of Economics, University of Hradec Králové, Hradec Králové, 50002, Czech Republic

ABSTRACT

The rapid progress of information technology has made public online participation in policy formulation an inevitable product of modern government reshaping and reconstruction. However, compared with developed countries, citizens' online participation in policy formulation in China started relatively late. Thus, in order to explore an effective and efficient method for Chinese citizens' participation in policy formulation, this research made a brief review of the experiences from the typical developed country of United States of America at first, followed by some other developed countries such as Singapore, South Korea, and Japan in Asia with similar situations. Still, combined with the current situation of the China itself into consideration, this research further proposes targeted recommendations. It is expected that the findings in this research could provide some references for the Chinese government to form more effective and efficient theoretical frameworks targeted at the future development trends of the Chinese society and accordingly, to improve the construction of democracy in China.

KEYWORDS

public participation; policy formulation; experiences; enlightenment

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*CORRESPONDING AUTHOR

Haisheng Hu,
School of Public Policy, Chiang
Mai University, Chiang Mai, 50200,
Thailand
Haisheng_hu@cmu.ac.th

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1. Introduction

During the process of human civilization, social progress is deeply influenced by the unparalleled power and astonishing development speed of science and technology (Siregar, 2022). Under the wave of information technology and globalization, the current era has been deeply branded with information technology. As a product of information technology, the Internet has deeply influenced all aspects of human beings, for example, changing production and lifestyle, shaping thoughts of solving problems, and so on. To some extent, the Internet has even changed the entire human society (Guasti, 2016). In the information society, the openness, efficiency, and concentration of the Internet have made it a landmark existence (Ronaghi and Ronaghi, 2021; Sharon, 2021). On the Internet, people could not only obtain various

information through search engines but also spread information to strangers. Based on this relatively free information acquisition and dissemination, the Internet has become an important platform for communication in the information age. In today's era where digital media such as the Internet are used as the carrier of government information dissemination, information technology has provided strong technical support for the construction of a service-oriented government with its wide adaptability and strong permeability, making the public's participation in public life and affairs more fully accessible and information dissemination more convenient (Gvirtz Probolovski, 2020; Liang and Xiao, 2022). Still, at present, the public's demand for public service products is also becoming increasingly personalized. The public is no longer satisfied with just being passive recipients of public policies or public service products, but rather hopes to actively participate in the formulation of public decisions, especially policies closely related to their own interests (Quick and Bryson, 2022).

From this point of view, the rapid progress of information technology has made public participation in policy formulation through the Internet an inevitable product of the rational choice of government reshaping and reconstruction. Of course, the question of how citizens could participate effectively in the process of public policy has become a hot issue in society.

2. Review of literature

This research first makes a brief review of previous studies related to citizen online participation, so as to have a deep understanding of this field and accordingly further ensure the necessity and importance of citizens' online political participation.

With the rapid development of information technology, citizens have the opportunity to use the more advanced technical means to participate in public policy and public life. People could participate and express themselves in public policy and public lives more efficiently and effectively through the Internet (Chen, 2019). Such a kind of participation through the Internet is just the new form or approach to civic participation, namely, citizens' online participation.

Citizen participation is an action process in which citizens participate in or influence public policies or public affairs through certain channels of participation. The essence of civic participation is to exert influence on public policies and public affairs (Edwards et al., 2022). In essence, citizens' online participation is a new development of citizen participation that conforms to the trend of the times under digital conditions. Its ultimate purpose is to exert influence on public policy and public affairs so that its own interests can get the reasonable attention of the policy makers (Armenia and Irina, 2022). In time and space, online political participation greatly extends the physical space of reality and infinitely expands the platform for citizen participation. Still, citizens' online participation attracts more new groups into the political field and accelerates pluralism. From this point of view, online participation makes citizens exert greater influence on one link or several links in the operation process of government power.

At first, citizens' online participation in policy formulation is conducive to the consultation and cooperation of diverse public policy subjects. Citizens' online participation makes up for the inadequacy of traditional policy formulation methods, promotes the improvement of

the policy system and the establishment of multiple consultation mechanisms, and ultimately maximizes public interests (Margarit and Rammelt, 2020). The characteristics of virtualization, decentralization and deauthorization of the Internet supplement the multiple policy-making subjects (Schfer, 2023). Citizen online participation can reduce the time and space limitations of traditional citizen participation and form a benign interactive negotiated policy-making method. The multi-participation mechanism of multiple policy subjects realized through the network is the embodiment of network deliberative democracy. The Internet is becoming a virtual public domain and public space, and almost all public issues can be discussed on the Internet. Not only are citizens less involved in policy formulation, but there are also fewer consultative and democratic platforms and mechanisms for cooperation and exchange. The multi-subject network deliberative democracy is conducive to the rationalization and legalization of public policies on the policy output side and increases the possibility of direct communication and direct exchange between policy subjects. This is conducive to promoting the effective implementation of policies and safeguarding the interests of multiple policy subjects.

Secondly, citizens' online participation in policy formulation is conducive to the reform and improvement of the public policy system. The composition of the public policy system includes several factors, and it is composed of several policy subsystems that are both distinct and interconnected. It is a dynamic and open system. Policy subjects and policy objects continuously exchange material, energy, and information in the policy environment so as to achieve the purpose of solving social and public problems. Dimitrova et al. (2014) stated that the environment for public policy today is more fluid and unpredictable. The scope of human activities continues to expand, the pace of society is gradually accelerating, and the probability of social contradictions and conflicts is gradually increasing. The involvement and participation of the indirect subject of public policy in public policy can reduce and resolve contradictions and conflicts to a certain extent. Even in the face of some global problems, the participation and cooperation of indirect subjects have formed transnational non-governmental organizations and played a role, and the influence of indirect subjects' participation on policy has been deepened. As a new channel for promoting democratic participation in the public policy environment, the use of the Internet can improve and improve the entire public policy system.

Thirdly, citizens' online participation in policy formulation is conducive to ensuring the public interest orientation of public policy. Choi et al. (2019) believed that the essence of public policy is its publicness, and the ultimate goal it pursues is public interest. However, under the domination of the traditional concept of development, the uncontrolled use of public resources in the style of 'getting what they need' often leads to interdependence between various factors within the development system. In particular, the relationship between people and resources, ecology, and the environment is in a state of imbalance, resulting in a gap, or even a shortage or interruption, in the supply of public goods that meet the needs of sustainable development (Sarvarzadeh and Abidin, 2021). To this end, this requires the government to always ensure the public orientation of the policy in the process of formulating public policies, and to promote the long-term sustainable development of the policy with the goal of public interest. The public's participation in public policies is realized through this fast and convenient channel, which reflects the coordination between the strong and the weak, as well as the public domain

and the private domain. It is also the coordination between public interests and private and personal interests. Most of citizens' online participation is directly related to public affairs and citizens' vital interests. The public nature of these matters allows citizens to resonate and increase their enthusiasm for participating in discussions and expressing their opinions. The way citizens express their opinions is not only to protect their own interests, but also as a powerful supplement to the knowledge of government think tanks (Schmidhuber et al., 2017). The function of citizens' social supervision is not only conducive to the enhancement of social publicity, but also to the formation of a democratic social environment and an atmosphere of the rule of law. For China, which is in a period of social transformation, democracy and the rule of law are both ways of realizing public interests and a yardstick for measuring public interests. Democracy and the rule of law enable the orderly network participation of citizens in a wider range, wider field, and deeper level, which plays an important role in safeguarding and promoting public interests.

Since the occurrence of COVID-19, due to the rapid spread of the epidemic and its wide range of influence, online political participation has become an important channel for citizens to express their interests. To put it more specifically, this sudden epidemic blocked the traditional channels of political participation, and the Internet has become the main channel for citizens to express their opinions about taking part in social and economic affairs (Mikecz and Oross, 2020). For example, citizens supervise the implementation of epidemic prevention and control measures through the Internet, urge relevant government departments to do a good job in epidemic prevention and control in accordance with the law, improve the government's governance ability to fight against the epidemic, and promote the modernization of the national governance system and governance capacity (Prasetyanto et al., 2022).

After the brief literature review, it could be concluded that promoting citizens' online political participation is quite important for the government. However, compared with those developed countries, citizens' online participation in policy formulation in China started relatively late (Zhang et al., 2021).

Still, although studies related to citizens' online participation in policy formulation have flourished in recent years, it seems that the majority of studies have not formed a theoretical framework targeted at the future development trends of the Chinese society. Therefore, it is quite necessary to explore a framework for Chinese citizens' online participation in policy formulation based on the learnings from the experiences in developed countries and still combined with the considerations of the current situation of China itself.

3. Methodology

Targeted at the above research objective, that is, to explore a framework for the Chinese citizens' online participation in policy formulation based on the learnings from the experiences in those developed countries and still combined with the considerations of the current situation of China itself, this research aims to make the qualitative analysis, or, to put it more specifically, induction and deduction.

Firstly, this research aims to make a detailed review of some typical foreign experiences related

to citizens' online political participation by way of induction analysis. When it comes to online political participation, it is required to first make clear of the great significance of the political system, especially its impacts on information access and engagement with public policy. Democratic politics has become a goal pursued by global development and an inevitable trend in global political development (Budd et al., 2018). Although democratic politics is widely recognized as the core goal of political modernization, the construction of democratic politics is a gradual process closely related to the development of civil society (Pirannejad and Janssen, 2019). Democratic politics means extensive political participation by citizens. It can be said that democratic politics is the expansion of political participation, which can never be separated from civil society. Taking the specific political system and still developing extent of different countries into consideration, this research intends to select the experiences of America, Singapore, South Korea, and Japan for a deep exploration of their typical experiences in citizens' online political participation. As for those developed countries, from the perspective of political organizing and managing systems, these countries are all democratic to some extent and have relatively large government institutions, which is still one of the typical characteristics of China's current political system. Specifically, Singapore, South Korea, and Japan are all Asian countries, just like China. Those Asian countries have quite a lot of similarities in their political systems (Jin, 2019). In fact, the Chinese cultural circle covers the whole of Southeast Asia, and its long history has had a great influence on other countries in terms of politics, language, and customs (Dreyer, 2018). Thus, it is possible to learn from and utilize the experiences of those developed countries with similar characteristics of political democracy.

Furthermore, on this basis, still combined with China's own development characteristics, this research attempts to propose some suggestions for Chinese citizens' online political participation by way of deduction analysis.

4. Findings

After reviewing the experiences of foreign citizens' online political participation, this short essay gets the following main findings.

4.1. American citizens' online participation in public policy formulation

At first, it is required to have a general understanding of the practices of American citizens' online participation in public policy formulation. The construction of e-government in America originated in the early 1990s (Baxter, 2017).

From the beginning of the construction, special attention had been paid to the construction of network infrastructure and the application of information technology. Among many countries promoting e-government, America is the earliest country to build e-government. In 1994, the Information Technology Service Group (ITSG) proposed to establish a public-oriented e-government and issued a relative report, 'Prospects for Government Information Technology Services to adapt to the development of the new technology (Chan, 2021). Then, in 1998, the federal government was required to achieve paperless office work within five years, and passed the Government Paper Elimination Act, making information technology the internal basis of e-government management. In September 2000, the federal government officially launched a government portal. In 2001, then President Bush proposed to construct an electronic government on the basic premise of 'full of

vitality but limited'. In 2001, the American government set up a special task force for e-government management (Shybalkina, 2022). Since then, the construction of the government administration system in America has been gradually improved, marking the beginning of the e-government era in the United States. The openness, equality, and convenience of the Internet make American netizens more and more inclined to obtain relevant national policy information through the Internet and still participate in some democratic discussions. The Internet has gradually been penetrating all aspects of American political life. At the same time, in the new media era, the relationship between American politics, politicians, and the Internet is becoming more and more close.

In practice, the Internet has been involved in the presidential election of America since the 1990s. In 1996, the Republican candidate Buchanan used his personal website to campaign and became the first candidate to successfully use the Internet campaign (Baxter, 2017). Since then, the media strategy of the presidential campaign has made the establishment of candidate websites a necessity. In 2000, Republican candidate John McCain used the Internet to raise campaign funds for the first time, setting the precedent for Internet donations. In 2004, the Democratic candidate Dean used blogs to publish political opinions for the first time. In 2008, Democratic candidate Obama made use of various network media, new technologies, and new applications of the Internet during the election process, making Obama, a young man who lacked political experience, he become the first black president of America (Chan, 2021). Many celebrities and politicians combine the Internet with political life and emphasize the importance of the Internet in political elections. For example, in 2006, Google President Schmidt once put forward the view that if the candidate can give full play to the potential of the Internet in the presidential election, it will make him stand out in the political election (Gao, 2014). Similarly, an American media once commented that, in 2008, the key factor determining the outcome of the presidential election was not who knew politics better, but who knew how to use the Internet better (Gao, 2014).

Furthermore, based on the above review of American citizens' online participation in public policy formulation, it was found that the success of American citizens' online participation greatly benefits from the construction of network legislation and its financial assistance. To put it specifically, America, is known as the birthplace of the Internet is the first country to manage the Internet. Although some Americans once believed that the order and rules of cyberspace should be gradually established by the invisible hand of the market, a series of problems, such as network viruses and hacker had proved that the government must be involved in the formulation of Internet rules and crack down on illegal acts through appropriate management. Legislation is the most important means for America to manage the Internet (Chan, 2021). In addition to national regulations, each state had still promulgated regulations according to their specific characteristics of Internet applications in the local area (Baxter, 2017). The American government's focus on the construction of network legislation can be traced back to the United States Computer System Protection Act of 1977, which provided legal protection for computer security in 1987. Furthermore, relevant legal documents based on cyberspace security made more prominent progress in 2002. In the field of e-government, the American government has still formulated relevant legal documents. For example, in 2002, the American government formulated the e-government strategy law. After the establishment of the fixed special management organization, the United States began to focus on strengthening the unified management of e-government, which promoted the

construction of e-government to a great extent. In 2003, the 'National Cyberspace Strategy for Cyberspace' issued by the United States placed the security of cyberspace information at the strategic level. In the field of network privacy, the United States has also formulated relevant legal documents (Olabamiji, 2014). For example, in 1995, the American government made a more thorough supplement to the regulations on personal privacy and formed a more comprehensive protection of legal documents on network privacy. Furthermore, in 1999, the improvement of the Internet Privacy Protection Policy further guaranteed personal privacy and national information infrastructure. In addition to legal countermeasures, the American federal government had also set up more financial assistance in public places as a countermeasure to eliminate the digital divide and promote the application of the Internet in the whole of society. For example, the community technology service center is in a concentrated area where low-income people live in groups. The local government often provided free information technology knowledge and related services to low-income people (Baxter, 2017). In the communities of most citizens, the government had also gradually established more service centers and guaranteed the diversified services of these centers. In rural areas, the local government invested in broadband access equipment in the form of low-interest financing to meet the needs of broadband Internet access in rural areas. Still, the government provided training and assistance for the disabled in the whole society (Baxter, 2017).

4.2. Singapore citizens' online participation in public policy formulation

At first, it is required to have a general understanding of the practices of Singapore citizens' online participation in public policy formulation. Singapore is in a relatively leading position among the developing countries in the world. Its domestic politics is relatively stable, and its economic development is relatively good (Skoric et al., 2009). In recent years, Singapore has always taken the interests of the people and public morality as the main policy of national development and has always taken strict control over the information and media sectors. Especially in the context of the continuous progress of Internet technology, the Singapore government also has a more rigorous attitude towards the management of the relevant network sectors (Skoric et al., 2009), for example, the regulations relative to the Internet, so as to minimize the abnormal effects of the Internet. The construction of electronic government in Singapore has two remarkable characteristics: the early start and the rapid development. At present, Singapore's e-government development level is at the forefront among Asian countries and has reached the global advanced level in technical support, intelligent management, and other aspects (Chan, 2021). The development of Singapore's e-government could be divided into five stages. The first is from 1981 to 1985, that is, the stage of administrative affairs networking, aiming to improve the efficiency of government administrations through network information technology. The second is from 1986 to 1991, which is, the stage of national information technology, aiming to build and promote the so-called 'one-stop' government e-government model. The third is from 1992 to 1999, that is, the stage of planning 'Smart Island', aiming to make Singapore one of the cores of global information technology. The fourth is from 2002 to 2005, that is, the stage of planning for the 21st century of information and communication, aiming to build Singapore into a world-famous information capital at the beginning of the 21st century.

The last is from 2006 to 2015, that is, the blueprint stage of the 10-year development towards

'Smart Country', discussing the development trend of science and technology in the next decade. E-government adopts the 'citizen, enterprise, government' cooperation mode, so that citizens and enterprises can access a total of 1600 convenient and fast online government services 24 hours a day (Chan, 2021).

The main platform for Singapore citizens' online participation is the policy forum on the website of the People's Action Party, with the purpose of providing citizens more opportunities to express their opinions on national policies. The Singapore government believes that this could help each policy to be established based on the widely accepted opinions of people both inside and outside the party, and still help to formulate policies consistent with the national conditions and recognized by the public (Skoric et al., 2009). Since the establishment of this forum, the public has been able to discuss and debate directly with the leaders of the party, making the forum a bridge between the decision-making level and the common people, and thus enabling two-way consultation and communication (Althaus et al., 2022). Furthermore, citizens could learn and get policy information from People's Action Party on science, education, and other aspects through the forum. Most importantly, citizens get the opportunity to freely express their opinions on hot topics and public policies in the forum, which is quite conducive for the People's Action Party to understand the public opinion and incorporate the relevant content into the policies in the future. With regard to the regulatory or supervision of the Internet, in order to provide the most respect to the citizens, the Singapore government had taken a greatly cautious attitude in directly using public power to intervene in the control of contents on the Internet, and had adopted flexible policies, such as contents grading system, operator self-discipline system, and so on (Skoric et al., 2009). For example, at present, the Singapore government is implementing a category license plan on Internet regulation. Those operators on the Internet would be divided into registered categories and unregistered categories based on their nature and contents.

Furthermore, based on the above review of Singapore citizens' online participation in public policy formulation, it was found that the success of Singapore citizens' online participation greatly benefits from the construction of network legislation and the digital literacy trainings. To be specific, the Singapore government believes that the online public sphere is a major area in political life, and the online media has an important impact on the public opinion orientation of the whole society (Abdulraufsalau et al., 2018). Therefore, at the beginning of the construction of e-government, the Singapore government began to formulate a strict management system and still set up a special regulatory group to oversee the supervision, so as to ensure the healthy development of the entire Internet industry. Singapore's Internet management is strengthened through legislation, law enforcement, website content management, and their citizens' self-restraint. First, the Singapore government takes national security and public interests as its primary content, attaches great importance to promoting government management innovation with the Internet, and strengthens and improves legislation related to the Internet to provide a strong guarantee for the development of the Internet. Secondly, the establishment of the website and the content of network services are also strictly controlled by the Singapore government. In addition, the Singapore government strengthens public education, especially in skills of using the Internet, so as to improve its citizens' awareness of voluntary filtering useful information among various kinds of information on the Internet (Koh et al.,

2022).

4.3. Korean citizens' online participation in public policy formulation

At first, it is required to have a general understanding of the practices of Korean citizens' online participation in public policy formulation. According to the statistics released by the OECD, the penetration rate of wireless broadband in South Korea was 106.5% by 2014 (including multiple mobile devices owned by one person), and the average network speed reached 22.2 Mbps (Kim et al., 2019). Since then, South Korea has become one of the countries with the fastest Internet speed in the world, and the first country among the members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to achieve 100% wireless broadband penetration. Actually, in South Korea, the influence of the Internet on political activities has become more and more profound. More and more Koreans have begun to obtain information and make political comments through online media. As early as in the 'Information Survey in the Second Half 2004' conducted by the Korea Internet Revitalization Institute, the results showed that the total number of South Korean Internet users reached 31.58 million, accounting for 70.2% of the total population, with an average of 2 e-mail addresses per person (Kim and Chen, 2016), meaning that the Internet has become a basic communication method for South Koreans.

Therefore, Internet users, namely, netizens had become the main component of Korean voters. In the whole election process, netizens make friends through network channels, forming various groups and organizations. They often participate in the discussion of political topics on the Internet, speak in the form of groups and organizations, and have huge political influence. For example, netizens could hold party meetings, rallies, demonstrations, and other activities through the Internet, participate in political competition, and even affect the results of the presidential election. In the history of the presidential election in South Korea, Roh Moo-hyun has pioneered the online political election (Kim et al., 2019). Roh Moo-hyun skillfully combined the Internet with politics and positioned the government as a 'participatory government' during his term of office, which is a government that allows citizens to participate widely in political life. Among them, the Internet is an emerging means to promote citizens' political participation (Chang and Park, 2021). In 2002, South Korean citizens generally paid attention to the report that two female middle school students were killed by the American military stationed in South Korea. Numerous South Koreans asked the American President Bush to apologize directly and publicly for the incident and asked the American military to withdraw from South Korea. This is the time of the general elections in South Korea (Jang and Gim, 2022). Thus, the Democratic candidate Roh Moo-hyun took the establishment of equal relations between South Korea and America as his election platform, which made him win a great number of supporters on the Internet. These supporters spontaneously discussed and established 'Roh Moo-hyun Lovers Union' on the Internet. The power of those netizens was quite powerful. Inspired by patriotic enthusiasm, netizens who supported Roh Moo-hyun posted online to canvass for him, and finally made him elected the president of South Korea by a narrow margin of votes. Therefore, it is not exaggerated to say that the success of Roh Moo-hyun's presidential cause was accomplished by the Internet to some certain extent. Furthermore, based on the above review of Korean citizens' online participation in public policy formulation, it is found that the success of Korean citizens' online participation

greatly benefits from its construction and governance of its online political participation. To be specific, the Korean government has unique characteristics in the construction and governance of network political participation. In the 1990s, South Korea began to formulate relevant laws, regulations, and policies to vigorously develop network communication technology, thus effectively eliminating the digital divide in the development of the Internet, making it one of the top countries in broadband Internet applications in the world (Kim et al., 2019). About the aspect of legislative governance, the Korean government formulated the 'electronic administrative process regulations' in 1979. In 1986, the Korean government formulated the 'Law on Popularization and Promotion of the Use of Networks'. In 1995, the Korean government promulgated and implemented the Government Information Disclosure Law. Later, in 2001, the Korean government enacted the Law on the Digital Divide, and then adopted the Law on the Realization of E-government and the Promotion of Electronic Administration. In 2007, the Korean government implemented the Law on Promoting the Use of Information and Communication Networks and Information Protection Association, which made strict provisions on personal information, Internet users, industry and infrastructure. In 2008, the Korean government released the National Basic Plan for Informatization. In 2009, the Korean government implemented the Basic Law of National Informatization and set up a network security prevention center. In addition, the Korean government has also issued a series of regulations, such as the Basic Protection Law of Information and Communication, the Regulations on Network Security Management, to build and improve the network security prevention system (Kim et al., 2019). Besides that, the Korean government had also established an Internet censorship institution, which is also the first institution with similar functions in the world. This institution has rich censorship functions. Moreover, the giant business portal websites in South Korea are registered through the real-name system. At the same time, in the process of bridging the digital divide, South Korea invested a lot of money in the construction of national information infrastructure. At present, advanced network infrastructure and high-level government information services in South Korea had provided a strong guarantee for promoting citizens' online political participation (Baxter et al., 2013). For example, the 'Information Month' has been set up for citizens to provide the training related to skills in using information technology. The training covers rural and urban areas, as well as the elderly and the disabled. And still, the training activities further develop the information network community, for example, providing computers and related equipment services for students from low-income families, establishing free Internet centers for the disabled, recycling computers and related equipment throughout the society for low-income families, disabled centers and non-profit organizations, providing farmers with the information technology required for agriculture, and so on (Mushtaq and Baig, 2015). In short, the fundamental reason for the rapid development of the Korean e-government is that the government vigorously strengthens the Internet legislation, ensures the order of Internet operation, and eliminates the digital divides between different regions and classes.

4.4. Japan citizens' online participation in public policy formulation

At first, it is required to have a general understanding of the practices of Japanese citizens' online participation in public policy formulation. After reviewing the development of e-government in Japan, it is possible to divide the development of e-government in Japan

into four stages: the first assumption stage, the second legislation stage, the third policy preparation and adjustment stage, and the last conception stage (Ono et al., 2018). In the first assumption stage (1993–2000), the Japanese government cautiously promoted the development of e-government in the way of ‘pilot before popularization’, which laid a solid foundation for the construction of e-government in Japan. To be specific, in 1993, the Japanese government began to draft the ‘Basic Plan for Promoting Administrative Informatization’. In 1994, the Murayama Cabinet issued this Basic Plan, aiming at the allocation rate of computers in the government of 2 people/unit (1.2 people per unit in the central government agency), the computer networking rate of 65%, the number of main network systems doubled to 660, and significantly increasing the investment in government information equipment from 1995 to 1998 (Fukuda et al., 2021). Furthermore, in 1997, the Japanese government formulated the Guidelines for Adapting to the Electronation and Modifying the Procedures of Report. According to these guidelines, among the 8822 office projects of various departments in the Japanese government, a total of 3423 procedures are allowed for electronic office work, accounting for 38.8%. In the same year, the Hashimoto Cabinet formulated a five-year plan aiming at promoting the administrative informatization and proposed the goal of building a comprehensive retrieval network in 1999.

In the second legislation stage (2000–2003), the Japanese government promotes the further development of e-government through the formulation of relevant regulations and policies, which provide effective guarantees for the development of e-government in Japan. To be specific, in November 2000, the Mori Xilang Cabinet issued the National Strategy for Information Technology, which clearly proposed to promote the construction of e-government (Fukuda et al., 2021). In 2001, the Japanese government clearly identified the construction of e-government as one of the five key areas of Japan’s information construction in the e-Japan Strategy. Among this strategy, the goal of building e-government in Japan is to further accelerate the digitization, paperless and networking of government documents, to focus on promoting business reform, and to promote information sharing and use. In 2001, the budget for building an e-government in Japan was as high as 19 trillion yen, and the local government also made a budget of 300 billion yen to build a public information network. Still, in 2002, the Japanese government passed three bills on speeding up the construction of e-government, namely, the Act on the Networking of Administrative Procedures, the Act on the Networking of Administrative Procedures and the Act on Personal Certification Services, all of which stipulated that various administrative procedures could be basically handled online through the Internet in 2003. In the third adjustment stage (2003–2005), the Japanese government further accelerated the implementation and application of e-government through the introduction of a series of adjustments and constructions. To be specific, in 2003, the Japanese government successfully held the ‘Joint Conference of Information Integrated Responsible Officers of all provinces and prefectures’ and formulated a special ‘Plan for the Construction of E-Government’ (Fukuda et al., 2021). This plan clearly defines the focus of Japan’s e-government construction from 2003 to 2005 and puts forward the strategic goal of realizing the public-centered administrative service and realizing optimization, efficiency, and rationalization of internal business. To promote the administrative informatization of national and local public organizations, the Japanese government still established the ‘Electronic Administration Promotion National and Local Public Organizations Agreement’ in 2003, which is composed of informatization responsible officials from all provinces, 10 prefectures and counties, and 12 municipalities. Those officials

regularly exchange views on matters such as business optimization of national and local public organizations, which effectively promoted the implementation of administrative informatization. In 2004, the Ministry of General Affairs further proposed the 'U-Japan Policy' in recommendations that 'improving the convenience of e-government services is one of the priority issues to be solved in the next step'. Furthermore, to promote the effective use of the Internet, the IT Strategy Headquarters formulated the 'Plan for Promoting the Use of the Internet' in 2005. This plan decided to create an e-government to promote the tax system, implement incentives such as reducing fees, simplifying electronic signature and so on. In the last conception stage (2006 till now), the Japanese government proposed the strategic idea of becoming a pioneer in the information age and leading the development of the world's information industry. In 2006, the Ministry put forward the overall goal of e-government construction in the New IT Reform Strategy, that is, to build the most convenient and efficient e-government in the world by flexibly applying information and communication technology in the administrative field, improving the convenience of national lives, simplifying administrative links, improving administrative efficiency and transparency of administrative actions. In the same year, the Japanese government also formulated a five-year E-government Promotion Plan (2006–2010). According to this plan, the Japanese government focuses on promoting the construction of e-government from two aspects, that is, to strengthen the promotion system and still to attach importance to results. In 2007, the IT strategy headquarters put forward the new goal of 'building world-class e-government' in their 'e-Japan Key Plan for 2007'. To ensure the effective implementation of the above policies and measures, the IT Strategy Department strengthen administrative supervisions on the basis of accepting the complaints and opinions of citizens on government affairs, and still timely publish the handling results since 2008. In fact, in Japan, the Internet has been widely used in political communication, political elections and other political activities (Aoki, 2021). As early as 2008, some political parties in Japan publicized their ideas through the Internet and established a good image of parties. In addition, the Internet also has the function of government information dissemination, for example, using the Internet to investigate the support rate of political leaders and the implementation effect of public policies. All in all, the Internet has provided a good channel for the handling of government administrative affairs and has gradually become an important part of political life.

Furthermore, based on the above review of Japanese citizens' online participation in public policy formulation, it was found that the success of Japanese citizens' online participation greatly benefits from the following aspects. At first, it was the strong supports from the government (Ono et al., 2018). In Japan, e-government had been fully applied in both the central government and the local government, and still, such e-government had been unified and standardized in 1997 due to the Amendment to the Basic Plan for Promoting Administrative Informatization (Tolbert and McNeal, 2003). In terms of the organizational structure, in order to promote the application of e-government, special organizations with all high-end talents have been set up to take charge of management. Secondly, it is the great efforts made by the Japanese government in promoting the legal construction of e-government. For example, the Japanese government formulated a series of regulations to eliminate the imbalance in the construction and development of Internet infrastructure and required the unified implementation of all parts of the country with institutionalized standards, so as to comprehensively deepen the application of e-government and still to promote the innovation of government services. Lastly, it is to always

keep people-oriented in daily affairs. In the E-Japan Key Plan 2004, the basic principle of ‘people first, government support’ was put forward, which straightened out the role of the government, and also unified the determination and action of the central and local governments to jointly build e-government. The Japanese government has effectively promoted the construction of infrastructure projects through the joint governance of the central and local governments, providing important institutional guarantees for supporting citizens’ participation in political affairs through the Internet.

5. Discussion

After learning from the experience of citizens’ participation in e-government in the above four countries, it could be found that, whether in Western countries or Asian countries, their main measures on citizens’ online participation in politics are based on the actual situation of their own countries, trying to weaken the factors that are not conducive to citizens’ online participation in politics and give full play to the factors that are conducive to citizens’ online participation in politics.

Specifically, the following four key points could be summarized as the main enlightenment to Chinese citizens’ online political participations from such experiences.

In the first place, it is to strengthen the construction of e-government and provide a platform for citizens to participate in the Internet. Taking America as an example, American citizens play a key role in formulating public policies.

Decisions on important issues such as the presidential election will be communicated through the political and civil Internet platforms (Graham, et al., 2013). America, and other western developed countries have established platforms on the Internet from the perspective of innovation and opened interactive columns to directly communicate with thousands of netizens. Through the Internet, government officials could deal with public problems by replying to e-mails. Still, as for the problems encountered by many netizens in the process of formulating public policies, the effective classification could not only greatly improve the efficiency of information processing, but also increase the enthusiasm of citizens to participate through narrowing the distance between citizens and the government (Segesten and Bossetta, 2017). With the rapid development of information technology in those western developed countries, the construction of e-government plays an increasingly important role in the government administration. To increase the effectiveness of people’s online political participation, it is quite necessary to develop a corresponding level of e-government to aid citizens. It must be admitted that the quality of online political participation and the construction of service-oriented government would all be greatly affected by such online participation (Wa’Ed et al., 2023), which is due to the necessity of providing information for citizens to understand and further to take part in public policies.

In the second place, it is to give full play to the role of public opinion survey institutions and other relevant organizations in the light of the national conditions. For example, America, South Korea, Japan, and Singapore all have special online hearings to allow their citizens to participate in the discussion about important issues on the one hand, so that citizens could fully understand

their interests in the process of public policy formulation, and to use online public opinion surveys to understand public opinion on the other hand, so as to promote the final public policy to be supported and recognized by the public. The whole process of such hearings could be opened to the whole society through online video. Of course, the opinion proposers have certain legal and moral constraints. Based on the application of such practices, it could be found that such hearings also facilitate the supervision of other social interest groups. In addition, according to the experience of Japan, the development of Internet technology has significantly optimized the main paths for individuals to participate in public policy formulation. To be specific, before introducing major policies, the online hearings allow and call on people to take the initiative to participate in the discussion, which helps the policy makers to try to be compatible with different interests (Dimitrova et al., 2014). Therefore, when making policies, those policy makers could also make democratic, scientific, open and fair decisions by analyzing the interests of all parties and taking into account the interests of all parties through the Internet (Kim, 2006). In the process of policy implementation, such hearings would still strengthen supervision through the Internet to reduce the possible mistakes in policy implementation and reduce the probability of incorrect policies. At the same time, according to the feedback of citizens, the public policies could be revised for the first time to improve the effectiveness of citizens' participation in policy making and the feasibility of the policy.

Third, it is to firmly implement the Internet real-name system. In the virtual environment of Internet, the identity of netizens is unknown. In such an anonymous state, netizens tend to ignore their responsibilities as social people, so they do not consider the feelings of others when making personal remarks, and even carry out personal attacks on others. The online real-name system could be understood the complete registration to pass the identity verification, to put it more specifically, netizens should use real identity certificates to apply for online accounts and pass identity authentications to make statements or conduct other activities in the cyberspace (Krommyda et al., 2019). Thus, the Internet real-name system is not to ask netizens to use their real names for all activities on the Internet, but to register with online civil ID cards. At the same time, the government strictly protects the security of netizens' personal information, so other users could only see their IDs, but could not see their real personal information. The implementation of the Internet real-name system could make netizens be aware of their social responsibilities and social regulations to be observed when communicating in the virtual society (Egid et al., 2023), thus maintaining the purity of the Internet environments. South Korea is also among the first countries to implement the Internet real-name system. The Korean government began to promote the Internet real-name system in 2002 and implemented the real name system of the message board at the end of 2003. After 2005, the Korean government successively issued and revised the Basic Law for the Promotion of Information Technology and the Basic Protection Law of Information and Communication, all of which promoted the legislative process of the Internet real-name system in South Korea. Then, the Korean government had officially implemented the Internet real-name system since 2005. Furthermore, in 2007, the Korean government promulgated the Law on Promoting the Use of Information and Communication Networks and Information Protection Linkages, which stipulates in the form of policies that all major websites must verify the real names of Internet users, register, and verify the identity information of the message takers, and require that Internet users' personal ID card numbers and other information be verified before posting and leaving messages online.

When an individual conducts illegal acts on the Internet, the relevant government departments have the right to access the personal information of the Internet user within the legal norms, and accordingly crack down on the criminal acts committed by the Internet.

In the fourth place, it is to establish and improve relevant laws and systems. All the countries above-mentioned in have been promoting the development of information technology. However, in fact, the specific rules or regulations about the development of information technology had not been specified in detail. For example, the code of conduct for participation describes stable and diversified participation channels and ensures the implementation of the participation system, but its lacks clear legal provisions, making it easy to make the form of online participation non-standard, stimulate chaotic citizen participation behavior, and deviate from the original intention of citizen participation. Citizens could successfully participate in stable and healthy development only under the correct guidance, and thus, the national governments are required to formulate a complete set of rules and regulations (Tajbakhsh, 2018). Through summarizing it could be found that most countries have set up professional independent supervision departments to reduce the probability of splitting responsibilities between different departments. In addition, while carrying out the process of management, the relevant agencies of the government have also established the idea of service-oriented government and further clarified the responsibility of Internet management (Efraín et al., 2023). In terms of implementation, it can be found that most countries have made efforts in both legislation and law enforcement. To be specific, at first, these countries attach great importance to strengthening Internet legislation, and have established a series of complete legal systems including laws, regulations, outlines and rules, so as to effectively curb illegal and criminal acts in online political participation. It should be noted that at this stage, with the wide application of information technology, the formulation of laws and regulations should also be updated gradually, otherwise it will be difficult to adapt to the development needs of the Internet, and even result in the gaps in relative laws, which is easy to make the government fall into a passive situation during their sanction of some Internet violations and even criminal acts, thus providing opportunities for network criminals. Secondly, these countries attach great importance to strengthening the Internet law enforcement and to fulfilling legal accountability for online participation. For example, the governments of Singapore and Japan attach great importance to strengthening the education of the Internet legal system. By enhancing citizens' awareness of the concept of online participation, citizens' online participation behavior or actions could be exercised within the scope of the law. In addition, the American government had better implement the legal accountability of online political participation, maintain Internet security and effectively protect the legitimate rights of the public through improving the ability of the law enforcement group to use laws and regulations to combat illegal crimes.

6. Conclusion

In order to explore a feasible framework for Chinese citizens' participation in policy formulation, this short essay has reviewed the experiences of other foreign countries. Combined with the enlightenment from other countries, and still given the real situation in China into consideration, some thoughts had been put forward for further increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of Chinese citizens' online participation in public policies, which might become

references for the Chinese government.

First, the Chinese government is required to use various economic and administrative means to further accelerate and improve the construction of the Internet infrastructure. Still, faced with the obvious digital gap between rural and urban regions in China, the Chinese government is required to try the best to balance the information resources among different regions.

Second, the Chinese government is required to further perfect its e-government platform and still strengthen its e-government functions, for example, by changing the traditional management idea and strengthening the service functions of e-government, increasing the overall efficiency of e-government, so as to encourage citizens' enthusiasm to participate in politics online as much as possible.

Third, the Chinese government is required to build a comprehensive management mechanism for online public opinion, for example, by collecting the opinions that are put forward by the public through the Internet through special areas such as government websites, carefully screening the online public opinion and figuring out the useful information, improving a rapid response mechanism for online public opinion.

Fourthly, the Chinese government is required to effectively guide the online public opinion and realize the standardized working process, so as to establish a good public image of the government and accordingly improve the correct judgment ability of the public on the Internet information on the one hand and help to strengthen the mainstream ideological on the other hand (Wang and Shi, 2018).

Lastly, the Chinese government is required to further improve citizens' political literacy and guide citizens' moral compliance, so as to make citizens not only always maintain the consciousness of rational participation, but also maintain a positive and optimistic attitude at all times. Citizens should make their own judgments on the basis of rational analysis and take their own opportunities for online policy participation seriously.

This research makes a discussion on the experiences of foreign citizens' online political participation, and accordingly proposes corresponding enlightenment on Chinese citizens' online political participation. Due to the fact that citizens' online participation in the policy formulation in China started relatively late compared with those developed countries, the learnings from those experiences of foreign citizens' online political participation really makes contributions to the improvement of China's democratic politics construction. On the one hand, drawing on the advanced theoretical experience of other countries provides new development ideas for China's online political participation. The advanced theoretical experience of foreign countries in online political participation provides a favorable reference and arouses new thoughts for China's online political participation. On the other hand, drawing on advanced theoretical experience from foreign countries accelerates the reform of democratic political construction in China. Foreign countries have their own advanced theoretical experience, which provides valuable references for China to abandon traditional political participation models and better reform democratic political construction to meet the needs of the new era.

In summary, drawing on advanced foreign theoretical experience gives China infinite power

in online political participation, allowing its democratic political system to enter a new form of the information age while eliminating tradition, adapting to social development trends, breaking free from traditional deformities, and making democratic political construction more scientific. This has effectively promoted the development of socialist democratic politics in China, and even contributes to the further development of China at the forefront of the world in the future.

Author contributions

Conceptualisation, HH and SAO; Methodology, HH; Validation, SA; Formal analysis, HH; Investigation, HH; Resources, SAO; Writing the original manuscript, HH; Writing, Reviewing and Editing, SAO; All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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