

Chapter 35

Adoption of Social Media as Communication Channels in Government Agencies

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ABSTRACT

Social media has become an integral part of many people's lives around the world. The main use of this communication channel is to connect with social circles. It is also widely used for commercial and business purposes. Governments are also keen to use social media as an alternative to the traditional communication channels. Nonetheless, when the level of use of social media in the government is compared to other fields, a clear gap becomes apparent. This chapter investigates the adoption of social media as a communication channel between citizens, public agencies and government departments; and considers a wide range of factors that affect the issue from the perspective of public agencies. This chapter presents an extensive literature review and proposes a framework that organises the critical factors that affect public agencies' efforts while implementing social media. We also provide a list of hypotheses to validate and evaluate the significance of these factors.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and the development of the World Wide Web (WWW) in the form of Web 2.0 have received significant attention from researchers, business communities and governments to explore, understand, visualize and enhance new possibilities

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to promote their products and services. The new possibilities have mainly been considered as a communication channel and are known as 'social media tools', including Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Google+, YouTube, MySpace, Weblogs, microblogs, wikis and many more. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) noted that the social media tools have been defined as a collection of Internet-based applications established on the foundation of Web 2.0 to allow development, exchange and sharing of user-generated content (UGC).

The use of social media has changed the way we interact on the web, connect to people and present ourselves to the world by disseminating information in a far more convenient way. In recent years, the use of social media has seen massive growth and has become a noticeable communication channel on the Internet for various activities. The facts and figures below highlight the importance of various social media tools in terms of global use (Jones, 2013):

- Use of social media by businesses to promote business 93%
- Presence on Google+ by various brands 70%
- Attracted and gained customers through social media (Facebook) as a channel 70%
- Attracted and gained leads using Twitter as a communication channel 34%
- Facebook influenced Americans' purchase decisions on the Internet 47%
- Number of active users on social media:
 - Facebook 1.15 billion,
 - Google 359 million,
 - Twitter 215 million
 - Instagram 159 million users.

These facts and figures reveal that organisations of all scales can utilize social media tools as two-way communication channels to interconnect with consumers/citizens and boost their corporate identity, growth and relationship.

In the context of the government domain, the use and integration of social media began with the Open Government Initiative in 2008 during the US presidential campaign. The Open Government Initiative is also known as Government 2.0, which emphasizes the following three major principles (Barack, 2011; Deschamps et al., 2012; Mergel, 2013):

- Transparency
- Participation
- Collaboration

Over the past couple of years, the proponents of Government 2.0 in both developed and developing countries have realized the importance of providing and disclosing government services and information via social media tools to enhance efficiency, transparency and government's relationship with the public. Even though the acceptance of social media to communicate with the government has the potential to provide better services to citizens, it still faces acceptance and adoption problems. Previous research has found that the successful implementation of e-government services has relied not only on government backing, but also on citizens' satisfaction and willingness to adopt e-government services (Alomari, Woods and Sandhu, 2012). The satisfaction of end-users (consumers/citizens) towards the adoption, usage and success of social media platforms plays an important role. Therefore, it is crucial to identify critical factors that influence government's acceptance towards the adoption of social media

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