

Chapter 23

Social Media Corporate Policies for Government Organizations: Lessons Learnt from the United Arab Emirates

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ABSTRACT

As government organizations increasingly recognize the fast growth and expanding influence of social media tools such as social networking sites, blogs, and wikis, they start involving in these tools to increase the value delivered to their citizens. Many government organizations have realized the importance of having corporate policies to guide them while involving in these social media tools. The main purpose of this chapter is to present the key lessons learnt from the process of formulating a government-wide social media policy in the United Arab Emirates. This covers how government officials perceive the adoption of social media by government entities, the main barriers face successful adoption of social media, and the key issues need to be covered by social media policies. The authors analyze the collected answers in light of some of the literature available on the topic. They conclude the chapter with a brief summary and recommendations for future research directions.

INTRODUCTION

“Society is in the early phases of what appears to be a media revolution on the scale of that launched by Gutenberg in 1448” The Economist, 20 April, 2006.

In December, 2010, Time magazine unveiled its Person of the Year 2010: Mark Zuckerberg, founder of Facebook – the world’s most popular social media site. Mark has surpassed a long list of candidates in the initial list, and Time justified this recognition of Facebook and the power of social media by saying:

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For connecting more than half a billion people and mapping the social relations among them, for creating a new system of exchanging information and for changing how we live our lives, Mark Elliot Zuckerberg is TIME's 2010 Person of the Year (Stengel, 2010)

This selection is another example of the way social media is expanding its influence in our daily life and contribute to make serious changes in our world. In the last few years, social media and social networking sites in particular have expanded remarkably to the limit that social media is now considered the top activity on the internet (Qualman, 2009). At the time of writing, the number of active users on Facebook site only has exceeded 500 million users 70 percent of them outside the United States and they use 70 languages to connect and communicate on the website (Facebook, 2010), this means that if Facebook were a country, it would be the 3rd largest country in terms of population immediately after China and India!

This growing population on Facebook and other social media sites represent an opportunity that couldn't be missed by the business firms. Today, 79% of the Fortune 100 use at least of one of the main social platforms (i.e Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, and blogs) to communicate with their customers, 82% of them use Twitter and tweet at 727 times per week while 50% of the Fortune 100 have a YouTube account and upload 10 videos on average a month. (iStrategy2010, 2010)

On the government side, a clear recognition of the influence of social media tools on governance was made by the World Economic Forum (WEF) in its annual Global Agenda Meeting 2009 which was the first one after the explosion of the global financial and economic crisis. Not surprisingly, the theme of the meeting was "Shaping the Post-Crisis World" (World Economic Forum, 2009). The "Future of Governments" was one of the key issues discussed by the leaders, and they have identified "four new forces enable transformation of government", one of these

four forces was the Web 2.0 which described by (World Economic Forum, 2009) as "Technology Revolution". The summit report briefly described how Web 2.0 would change the governments by saying: "The static, publish-and-browse Internet is being eclipsed by a new participatory web that provides a powerful platform for the reinvention of governmental structures, public services and democratic processes." (World Economic Forum, 2009. p. 161)

From the e-Governance perspective, the emerge and fast growth of social media represent unprecedented opportunity for the government organizations to expand their abilities to reach and interact with their citizens and promote essential principles of good governance such as openness, inclusiveness and citizen participation. However, these opportunities don't come free of risks and challenges especially in areas like privacy and security. Practices around the world have shown the governments' need to develop and implement effective policies to utilize social media and hence, maximize the value delivered to their citizens. As Eggers (2005) argues: "today's technologies can play a crucial role in fixing the problems of modern government, changing how we get to work, how we pay our taxes, how we register our business, and how our kids learn".

The recent economic and financial crisis has offered another reason for government leaders to think of new methods for fixing the malfunctions of the current model of governance and practices in making the government policies and decisions and in providing the public services. The trend as shown by many evidences is moving towards more collaborative and engaging citizens in the decision making, social media is a key enabler of this. The majority of Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries has formally included e-Government as part of their national response to the crisis, and some of these countries (i.e. United States, United Kingdom, Germany and Slovak Republic) decided to give priority to "electronic social forums" and

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