Chapter 1
Communication and Collaboration in a Web 2.0 World

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ABSTRACT

A recent paradigm shift, enabled by Web 2.0 technologies, represents a potential change from a static web presence for the delivery of government information and services to using collaborative web technologies to engage citizens and employees, enabling collaboration, fostering co-production, and encouraging transparency in government. Social media is creating new communication pathways among all stakeholders. The author examines two theoretical approaches to provide a perspective for understanding the adoption of social media and the changing relationships between government and citizens using Web 2.0 technologies. Research studies examining the adoption and use of social media by citizens and public and private sector organizations are presented. Examples of government initiatives adopting and using social media are explored. Challenges and barriers of using social media to achieve open government initiatives of participation and collaboration are examined. Recommendations for using social media to achieve government organizations' missions and to build relationships with citizens are offered. Future research directions are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Public sector organizations are beginning to recognize the importance of emerging Web 2.0 technologies (Smith, 2010; NASCIO, 2010; Human Capital Institute, 2010a). These collaborative technologies have the potential to change the relationships among all stakeholders with government (O'Reilly, 2010). Web 2.0 technologies change the

perspective from a "build it and they will come" to engaging in a dialogue with stakeholders and building upon stakeholders' expertise to solve problems. The paradigm shift is characterized by moving away from a monologue towards dialogue and this incorporates listening and providing feedback. A driver for implementing Web 2.0 technologies in the U.S. federal government is outlined in the presidential Memorandum on

Transparency and Open Government issued on January 21, 2009. The goal of the presidential directive is to create a level of openness in government by establishing a system of transparency, participation, and collaboration (Obama, 2009). To achieve this broad initiative federal government agencies are employing social media and other Web 2.0 technologies to integrate technology, social interaction, and content creation. This accelerating change requires a deeper understanding of these emerging platforms, the human interaction with these technologies as well as the impact on reshaping communication pathways and building relationships.

The focus of this chapter is on building and managing relationships with government stakeholders using Web 2.0 technologies. To accomplish this, first a brief background on social media and key definitions of terms are provided. Then two theoretical approaches, Diffusion of Innovations Theory, and Social Network Theory, are presented to advance one's understanding of how relationships are formed and maintained in an online environment and the adoption of new technologies. Then a brief review of relevant research on using social media in government is presented to demonstrate how citizens are using Web 2.0 technologies to search for government information and to access government services. In addition, we examine how companies and government agencies are leveraging Web 2.0 technologies to build and maintain relationships in an online environment. This is followed by examples of initiatives of social media use in U.S. federal, state and local government agencies. Next challenges and obstacles for implementing social media in government are examined and solutions and recommendations are offered. This chapter concludes with a discussion of future research directions.

BACKGROUND

Web 2.0 is an umbrella term used to refer to a new era of Web-enabled applications and tools such as blogs, micro blogs, podcasts, Really Simple Syndication (RSS), social networking sites, video sharing, web chat, and wikis used to encourage participation, collaboration and transparency. Web 2.0 does not refer to a new software version, but rather to a new (i.e. second) phase of the evolving and extending the Internet. It is more than a mere set of technologies. Web 2.0 uses web-based technologies, has a social dimension built around communities and social networks, is based on user-generated and control of content, emphasizes providing and remixing of data from multiple sources, uses increased simplicity in design, and features participatory, decentralized models and processes (Wigand, 2007). Hence, social media are one form of web technologies that enable interactive conversations and the exchange of user generated content.

When using social media for building relationships with stakeholders, it is important to understand the interactions enabled by these technologies. First, social media increase the number of channels for organizations to reach stakeholders and for stakeholders to interact with them. Reciprocity or feedback in the communication loop enabled by these channels is essential if these tools are to be used effectively. Moreover, social media enables organizations and individuals to communicate with either a small targeted audience or to broadcast a message to thousands instantly. Individuals can talk directly with one another via social media and share information and opinions. Today, an individual's social network has expanded from a few acquaintances to possibly hundreds and understanding the strength of these relationships may impact the effectiveness of the communication. By increasing the number

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