Chapter 1
Social Media and E–Participation Research:
Trends, Accomplishments, Gaps, and Opportunities for Future Research

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ABSTRACT

Citizens increasingly demand an active role in public affairs and decision-making processes. From a critical standpoint, this chapter consolidates existing knowledge and, in turn, provides a better understanding on how social media tools promote the citizens' engagement and participation. The main aim is to assist researchers in the development of their future analyses, identifying trends of research and the methodology used. In so doing, a systematic literature review has been used to examine social media and e-participation research in journals listed in ISI in the field of public administration and information science and library science during the period 2000-2016. The findings reveal that although research on social media and e-participation has increased in the last year, it remains immature. Therefore, further research is needed in order to understand the true impacts of social media tools and their involvement in e-participation.

INTRODUCTION

The development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) has impacted every aspect of our society, including the way governments interact with citizens. So, the relationship between citizens and governments has changed, and e-government represented the new alternative to representative democracy and hierarchical governance (Hooghe et al., 2010; Nam et al., 2012). The implementation and development of e-Government have produced direct effects on the policy-making process, extending and promoting its participatory opportunities to average citizens (Jho & Song, 2015).

Therefore, citizens demand greater participation in public affairs and, new technological advances promotes their engagement by sharing more information and favour the interaction among politicians, public managers and citizenry (Ganapati & Reddick, 2014). Besides, the new technological platforms and the ease of use of the apps allow the citizens to be involved in shaping services integrated systems, given that they could offer feedback, comments, ideas and experiences about the public services, which increase the efficiency and effectiveness in public sector (Hu et al., 2014; Meijer & Thaens, 2013).

Moreover, the development of Web 2.0 tools has been a crucial influence in the transformation of an Internet from a passive one-way communication, into an interactive two-way communication system (Wirtz et al., 2016; Mergel, 2016). In this sense, social media is considered to be a part of the Web 2.0 revolution which is characterized by user-generated contents, online interactions, and content sharing in a social environment. It is belonged by a set of online tools such as Facebook, Twitter, Blogs, Wikis, and YouTube (Merchant, 2012) introducing substantial and pervasive changes to communication and information sharing between organizations and citizens (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

Furthermore, social media supports interactive participation among public managers, policy-makers and citizens in real time, which represents an important strategy for improving trust in government (Picazo-Vela et al., 2012; Stamati et al., 2015). So, governments have adopted platforms, applications, channels and tools to promote an informed citizens and favour their engagement in make decision process, trying to achieve an increase public confidence in government (Kim & Lee, 2012), monitoring the behavior of public managers and politicians (Hui & Hayllar, 2010), and promoting the democratic process by offering debate and discussion on important issues of public concern. In other words, social media provides the channel to integrate information and opinions from citizens into the policy making, increasing transparency and collaboration with the public to reach decisions or solutions for government problems (Mergel, 2013).

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