

Chapter 106

Social Media Applications Promote Constituent Involvement in Government Management

Gerald A. Merwin Jr.
Valdosta State University, USA

John R. Bennett Jr.
Valdosta State University, USA

J. Scott McDonald
University of Texas El Paso, USA

Keith A. Merwin
Merwin Associates, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the use of social media applications by local governments to communicate with constituents and promote involvement in policy and project management activities. Although public and private sector organizations make different uses of social media (Halverson, Hauknes, Miles, & Røste, 2005), there are many ways for government and nonprofit entities to make use of Web 2.0 applications. The focus in this chapter is on local government and a variety of examples will be provided. Some local government agencies primarily provide information to constituents through the social media apps, while others solicit the input from citizens to expand involvement. Finally, suggestions for future research and uses will be discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Local governments use social media applications in a variety of ways to involve citizens in policy and project management activities. Citizen involvement or engagement is advocated by a number of authors (Hollingsworth and Cooper, 2011; Hui & Hayllar, 2010; Linders, 2012; McNutt, 2012). This chapter explores some examples of the use of Web 2.0 to connect governments with their constituents and provides some suggestions for other applications.

Numerous local governments have elicited citizen reports of potholes or street lights that are out of order to facilitate repairs. This can be done in a variety of ways, but the obvious advantages of social media greatly increase the appeal to the citizens and also speed up the response time of the government

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agencies. Another evolving use of social media is communication between residents and either police or fire department officials. Crime, accident, or fire reporting can be easily accomplished through online methods. Additionally, use of Web 2.0 technologies is applied to disaster response and recovery efforts.

The communications can be done in either direction. In many cases social media will allow the local government agency to inform residents of the latest news or reports on crime, street repairs, or other developments. Also, announcements of meetings of special interest can be spread online and could result in many more constituents being involved.

This chapter explores a variety of ways that local government actors are using social media to improve relations with citizens, involve citizens in improving the community, and otherwise building linkages with neighborhood groups. Successful innovations are identified to serve as best-practices for other local governments that hope to make similar efforts as the technology becomes simpler to use.

DISRUPTIVE TECHNOLOGIES IMPACT ON PUBLIC SECTOR POLICY IMPLEMENTATION AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Disruptive technologies and their ramifications are on the minds of government managers at all levels. In the private sector the impacts of disruptive technology are notable for displacing an earlier technology and the creation of new markets (Oram, 2001; Denning, 2014). In the public sector, one is more likely to see technologies coexist as market forces are less prevalent and the profit motive has far less impact. Nevertheless, disruptive technologies clearly impact how governments do business as well as what business governments might act to undertake (Bent, Østergaard, & Villumsen, 2002).

It is not difficult to identify some prior disruptive technologies and their impacts on how government transacts its business. For example finger printing, the automobile, and two-way radios yielded much of today's modern law enforcement. More recently, the personal video camera and GIS are yielding significant changes in local law enforcement (Bellis, n.d.). These technology shifts impacted law enforcement while leaving much of the rest of government unimpacted. A more macro disruptive innovation has been and continues to impact all governments (with the possible exception of North Korea), at all levels, in innumerable ways -- the use of social media. Over the past decade or so, local governments have grappled with both the potentials and applications of this disruptive technology (Dixon & Keyes, 2013).

The Web is the root of numerous disruptions in the ways local governments operate, and no change has presented more potential than the use of social media to promote constituent involvement. Before proceeding it is essential to disaggregate citizen involvement into its two basic components: participation via political avenues; and participation by way of administrative government, the focus of this chapter. Briefly, political impacts of electronic media are well documented for at least two decades (Mayrowitz, 1995). The importance of contemporary social media in politics is evidenced in recent uprisings in the Arab world (Tufkei & Wilson, 2012).

Returning to the focus of this chapter, social media and administrative government warrant continued research. While scholars and practitioners have researched and experimented with various aspects of social media, the technology (hardware and software) continues to evolve and at times revolutionize, while understanding of the capabilities of social media similarly continue to evolve (Zeider, 2007; Lee & Kwak, 2012; Rudnick, Wootton, & Wyatt, 2009; Wright, 2009).

The motivation for private sector use of social media centers of course around profit, even when the rationale given is media or public relations (Pettigrew & Reber, 2010; Dunn, 2010; Evans, Twomey,

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