

Chapter 2

Digital Era Governance and Social Media: The Case of Information Department Brunei

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ABSTRACT

Digital technology is at the forefront of transforming how governments operate around the world. Using Brunei's Information Department (InfoDept) as a case study, this chapter looks at how the agency has evolved from its inception in the 1950s to 2019 in its embrace of both old and new media to pursue its mission and objectives as a government-run media agency. The results demonstrate how new media, such as social media, can complement old media if done right. The case study on InfoDept contributes to the growing field of research related to the increased advancement, development, application, and impact of new technologies in bolstering the digital governance process. This chapter also provides strong evidence on how governments can improve its general governance process and unlock the digital dividend in the 21st century by incorporating new media into its public policy architectonic. Salient lessons for policymakers and practitioners on digital governance have also been presented in this chapter.

INTRODUCTION

Governments around the world have taken steps to embrace and incorporate technology into their operative functions (Bertot, Jaeger, Munson, and Glaisyer, 2012). New Media such as social media and the internet are capitalized to boost the digital governance process (Milakovich, 2012). In embracing digital governance, governments can unlock digital dividends in the form of increased public service delivery, citizen engagement, and organizational efficacy (UNDP, 2016). Governments also apply new technology in response to the increased public participation of the public through New Media. These technological

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changes are the natural consequence of creative destruction (Schumpeter, 1942) that necessarily test organizations to adapt to become better. Brunei's Information Department (henceforth called InfoDept) is no exception when it comes to tapping into the digital governance. While digital governance may not necessarily deliver automatically digital dividends (Peña-López, 2016) this work demonstrates that Brunei's InfoDept has attained success, with it being ranked by We Are Social Report (2018) as having the most active government Instagram account in the world.

There are three justifications as to why this study is done: The first reason is to contribute to the growing literature on digital governance through the deployment, application, and impact of social media as a governance tool (Mallard, 2003) to boost the government's ability to build "better, more efficient public services" (Blair, 2005) and to promote engagement and trust with citizens (Almunawar et al., 2012). This study adds to the growing literature of governments moving towards the digital governance trends, which entails the empowering of the public sector to treat citizens as collaborators and active participants in the governance process. Secondly, the case study selected is unique in such that the InfoDept operates in a small country with a low digital divide where there is a low gap between the "haves" and "have-nots" concerning ICT and internet access (Ashraf, Hanisch, and Swatman, 2009). There is a high degree of internet penetration and social media usage. We Are Social Report (2018) ranks Brunei as the 4th highest when it comes to social media penetration in the world, with 95% of its population of 410,000 having access (We Are Social, 2018). This chapter ultimately unpacks the digital governance architectonic using InfoDept as a case study in order to advance the growing global literature that intersects digital governance, social media, and public policy. The success of InfoDept and the high usage of social media in the nation provide strong evidence for policy-makers and practitioners of how governance can be reshaped to the realities in the digital century, as with salient lessons that can be learned.

LITERATURE REVIEW

E-governance is "...the use by government agencies of information technologies that can transform relationships with citizens, businesses, and other arms of government" (Steins, 2002: 18). E-governance also entails the exploitation of digital storage and internet communications to transform citizen-government engagement and interactions (Dunleavy, Margetts, Bastow and Tickler, 2006; Ronaghan, 2002). Done right, the incorporation of digital technology can assist governments to reduce operational costs, enhance public service delivery, and deepen citizen-to-government engagement. Meanwhile, E-government (or E-gov), refers to the use of IT, ICT, and other web-based telecommunication technologies to augment inter-organizational relations (Ronaghan, 2002) and enhance the "efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery in the public sector" (Fang, 2002). Jeong and Hai (2007) described e-government as the interactions at the digital level between people and government (C2G), government and other government agencies (G2G), government and citizens (G2E), and government and enterprise (G2B). Through social media, the government can interact with all levels of government and businesses. The difference between the two concepts is how E-governance focuses on the application of ICT for governance purposes, whereby E-government aims at improving the means of ICT-based public service delivery. Both of the concepts essential works to enhance the "public views of, and interactions with, the government via electronic channels" (Gauld, Goldfinch, and Horsburgh, 2010: p177) in reducing digital gap (Noh and Yoo, 2008) in Brunei.

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