Social Media as a New Public Administration Instrument

[1]Dr. Anita Samal, [2]Ms. Prayukta Katela

[1]Department of Political Science, Kalinga University, Naya Raipur (C.G)

[2]B.A. Fifth Semester, Kalinga University, Naya Raipur (C.G)

Abstract:

This article explores the evolving role of social media as a powerful instrument in public administration. With the proliferation of social media platforms, governments worldwide are increasingly leveraging these digital tools to enhance communication, engagement, and service delivery with citizens. Through a comprehensive analysis, this article examines how social media serves as a catalyst for transparency, accountability, and citizen participation in governance processes. It delves into the diverse functions of social media, including public outreach, policy development, crisis communication, data analysis, and enforcement. While highlighting the numerous benefits of utilizing social media in public administration, the article also addresses the associated challenges, such as privacy concerns, misinformation, and digital inequality. By offering insights into the opportunities and limitations of social media, this article provides a foundation for policymakers and practitioners to harness its potential effectively while navigating its complexities in the realm of public governance.

Keywords: Keywords: Social Media, Public Administration, Governance, Communication, Engagement, Citizen participation, Misinformation

Introduction

Public administration is going through rapid transformation due to external pressure of adapting to the new normal in a response to COVID-19 pandemic. This transformation is supported by the usage and adoption of social media tools and techniques which have in a way supported this transformation. Alternatively, the adoption of social media has brought its own challenges and problems during the process. It is important to understand the trends and issues of the social media

adoption by the public administration. And also, the challenges posed by the COVID-19 to the public administration and response to this phenomenon supported by the social media. The acceptance of social media is the new normal, generally, and specifically by the public administrators. Identified trends include but not limited to the new information dissemination patterns, engagement techniques, public sentiment analysis, emergence of "celebrity servants", localization of social media and emergency response integration.

Available data on internet use by citizens indicate that participation in social networking represented one of the most common online activities. Social media have been perceived as new tools that can enhance participation and inclusion of citizens and other important stakeholders in public decision-making for several years. According to available literature, the use of social media may also drive innovation in public service delivery and government operations

Social media in government are becoming one of the major trends in e-government research and practice worldwide and social media use has the potential to change practices, processes, and cultures. Governments are adopting social media to provide complementary information dissemination, communication, and participation channels whereby citizens can access government and government officials and make informed decisions. Social media (including social networks) are one of the strongest marketing tools used by private companies and private entities users represent a large potential for their image building, marketing of services and / or products, improved customer service, and user involvement in the development of new products and services. Social media offer new opportunities to reduce political exclusion and that governments can leverage this potential to design public policies and services.

The impact of information technologies is a decisive challenge of contemporary governance. These technologies increase transparency, support interorganizational and intraorganizational collaboration, and enable innovative forms of participation. Presumably, public administration represents an important entity in governance processes. However, the position and importance of an active public is irreplaceable as well. Participation and engagement of citizens are fundamental attributes of healthy and vital democratic societies. Regarding the contemporary crisis of democracy finding the new forms of citizen participation is a permanent process. The phenomenon

of e-participation becomes an imperative in democratic societies, because e-participation increases participation through the information technologies, gives citizens the ability to take a role in the decision-making processes and represents the newest way how to foster the process of democratization.

Information technologies, e-participation and engagement have mostly been discussed in their connections to social media in the last few years. The use of Web 2.0 applications transforms activities of public administration, especially through its potential to enhance government operations, policy-making, and administration. Social media and their impacts on society continue to grow, and there is no evidence that this popularity is slowing or stopping. Social media are free and do not need to build and maintain the technological background. The power of social media to connect people and information in real time is increasing the capacity of people to exercise power and mobilize into action, because a large number of groups can be reached very easily, but on the other hand, they have the potential to split the persons living in one joint household

Social media should be perceived as a tool which helps public administration to serve citizens more effectively, give them a voice, and at the same time helps public organizations to reduce administrative costs. Moreover, public administration and citizens could use social media in ways that foster participation, deliberation, and collaboration. Public administration should listen more systematically to the voices and needs of the digital public in order to improve mutual communication through innovative social media tools, such as social media statistics and insights, online surveys or customer satisfaction questionnaires of target group. In this sense, social media bring sophisticated mechanisms, which can enrich communication and interactions between public administration and citizens. Social media are not only a platform for two-way communication between public administration and citizens. Social media have the potential to create an environment where citizens feel more involved in the management of organization, measurement of its performance and at the same time feel more responsible for a concrete territory.

In this sense, social media have the potential to raise public awareness of the execution of public administration functions. This can help citizens and governments, as partners, to be more informed and make socially responsible decisions.

The importance of social media in public administration could simultaneously be identified in the daily execution of public administration functions. The use of social media is expected to contribute to the fulfilment of goals and imperatives, such as cost saving, improvement of public services, citizen satisfaction, transparency, accountability, citizen participation or cooperation.

In this sense, social media usage seems to be very attractive and promising. The specific character of public administration must be considered such as specific contradictions needs to be reconsidered: (1) the open character of social media versus the closeness of public organizations, (2) the self-organizing capacities of social media versus the focus of public administration on strict control, and (3) the horizontal character of social media versus the hierarchic structure in public administration. Obviously, some important challenges and differences must be solved. Otherwise, the ideal of public administration, cooperating with the digital and informed public through the modern technologies, would not be reached.

The importance of social media is growing in the local context. In this sense, especially local self-government units should improve local circumstances and improve the quality of life. Local government should use a combination of technology, human resources and interactive governance to promote local development. Social media help to create informational campaigns, create images of places where citizens live, exchange a realistic view of contemporary city life, and renew the sense of community and belonging. An engaged community can lead to a better functioning, more effective and smarter city, which considers the needs of the local community. Suggestions have been made that social media may have a better impact if relevant entities ensure that content posted is specially focused around topics of interest and significant to local citizens, rather than being of broader organizational interest. In this sense, social media should be managed by persons who are suited to prepare local awareness.

Only use social media if you can identify a tangible mission-related reason for using it. Ask yourself the plain questions: Would a proposed use of a particular platform concretely contribute to implementing my agency's mission? What are my goals and how will I achieve them?

Unlike a business or non-profit, every government agency has the duty of accountability in a democracy. The agency is expected to contribute to an informed citizenry by reporting on its

performance and stewardship. Before social media, the most common manifestation has been e-reporting, using websites to provide easy access to, for example, annual reports. Social media can further this democratic duty of government by sharing more unfiltered information on the agency's record.

Social media works only if the agency is committed to its maintenance and operation. In the mid-90s, with the rise of the Web, the strong advice was that an outdated homepage was worse than none at all. Ditto for social media. For example, the District of Columbia's Department of Transportation has a Twitter account to communicate traffic problems and receive feedback from residents. Earlier this year, Ethan used it several times, including identifying a pothole and problems in the timing of traffic lights. He experienced various difficulties, including no response and no action after receiving a response. So, some important cautionary signposts: Don't skimp on staffing or shift assignments. Have clear workflow delegation. Don't promise what you can't keep. Don't raise expectations to unreasonable levels. Don't let anything slip through the cracks.

Beware of the temptation of population explosion. Don't overdo the number of, for example, discrete Twitter pages. Going back to Ethan's experience, good call by DC's DOT not to have separate channels for reporting, say, potholes vs. broken traffic lights. What a citizen would consider reasonably related issues should all be in handled in an integrated way. Pages should be centralized, clean and crisp.

Integrate with the agency's existing external communications activities. It is de rigueur in 21st century public administration for each agency to have a website with interactive functions, an email list serves for discrete topics for citizens to sign up for, venues for submission of comments and complaints, and so on. If an agency is considering developing a Twitter page for citizens to report service complaints, it, presumably, already has in place one or more venues for this. Therefore, it's important that using social media for service requests is maintained by the same office that operates these other methods of receiving such feedback or ensure that the office handling social media, delegates concern to the proper personnel.

Just like other aspects of public administration that engage the public, remember the KISS principle (keep it simple, stupid). One doesn't want to confuse or overwhelm citizens. Simple

instructions and explanations are vital. Relating back to commandment #5, a prominent listing of "There are three ways a citizen can submit a service complaint" helps the occasional user. It's easy to forget that a user of social media may only be accessing it once in a long while and isn't as familiar with the system as the agency staff at the other end of the wire (or wireless). A model of this simple one-entry-point approach is the '_11' portal, such as 211 and 311 centres. This model helps the citizen get quickly to wherever he or she wants.

While social media tends to be seen as two-way communications, it can also be used for one-way communication, but generally only for high profile office holders, such as a mayor. This would follow the now-common template of legislators using Twitter to post short messages on what they're involved in at a particular moment. For public administration, this would be a good fit for senior officials in the executive branch. But the distinction of one-way vs. two-way needs to be made clear to the citizen users. When some agencies disseminate information via email ('your book is ready to be picked up') it is now common to include a clear notification that the address is not staffed. Ibid for social media.

One of the strengths of social media is public outreach. This tends to be proactive communication initiated by a government agency to reach a discrete audience about an upcoming event that will affect them. So, for example, if the public works department of a local government knows that an intersection will be blocked due to a project, being able to notify citizens who live in the immediate area of the upcoming disturbance to their daily routines is both helpful to the citizens and facilitates cooperation. However, such an effort must be continuous from start to finish. It's not enough to send a head's-up FYI one week out. Instead, countdown emails ('two more days') are helpful both as reminders and to reach citizens who may not have paid attention to earlier notifications. Similarly, updates ('if the weather holds up, we'll finish a day early') is a service that the public appreciates. Finally, a wrap-up ('Thanks for your cooperation. Please come to the ribbon cutting and free cake tomorrow at __') is a nice capstone to an outreach project.

Based on working experience on social media for a non-profit association, there's a need to create 'clear use' guidelines for staff. For example, who is authorized to post a tweet? Does anyone have to approve a message before it is released? What topics generally need to be cleared

for potential legal implications? Campaigns, interactive sessions and suitable content. Social media help to create an environment where citizens feel more involved and responsible for their city and its transformation into a smart city. Summing it up, social media represent important aspect of cities' effort to become modern, inclusive and smart.

Conclusion: Social-media has emerged as a powerful tool for public administration, revolutionizing the way governments interact with citizens. By leveraging platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, governments can enhance transparency, improve communication, and foster citizen participation. Social media allows governments to disseminate information directly to citizens, bypassing traditional media channels. This can increase trust and accountability. Social media provides a platform for real-time communication between governments and citizens, enabling more responsive and effective service delivery. Social media can facilitate citizen engagement in policy-making and decision-making processes, leading to more inclusive and democratic governance. Social media can be a valuable tool for responding to crises, allowing governments to disseminate information quickly and effectively.

By analyzing social media data, governments can gain insights into public sentiment and identify emerging issues. However, the use of social media in public administration is not without its challenges. Governments must be mindful of privacy concerns, misinformation, and the potential for online harassment. To maximize the benefits of social media, it is essential for governments to develop clear guidelines and policies for its use. Social media offers significant opportunities for public administration to improve its effectiveness and responsiveness. By embracing this new tool, governments can build stronger relationships with citizens, enhance transparency, and promote good governance.

Bibliography

1. Abrams, E. M., & Greenhawt, M. (2020). Risk Communication During COVID-19. The Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology: In Practice, 8(6), 1791–1794. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaip.2020.04.012

2. Ades, A. S. (2023). Social Media Evolution in Saudi Arabia: An Analysis of Growth and Impact in The Past Decade. Journal of Southwest Jiaotong University, 58(2).

3. Bertot, J. C., Jaeger, P. T., & Grimes, J. M. (2010). Using ICTs to create a culture of transparency: E-government and social media as openness and anti-corruption tools for societies. Government Information Quarterly, 27(3), 264–271. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2010.03.001

4. Besley, T., & Prat, A. (2006). Handcuffs for the Grabbing Hand? Media Capture and Government Accountability. American Economic Review, 96(3), 720–736. https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.96.3.720

5. Birkland, T. A. (2019). An introduction to the policy process: Theories, concepts, and models of public policy making. Routledge.

6. Brunetti, A., & Weder, B. (2003). A free press is bad news for corruption. Journal of Public Economics, 87(7–8), 1801–1824. https://doi.org/10.1016/s0047-2727(01)00186-4

7. Bryer, T. A., & Zavattaro, S. M. (2011). Social media and public administration: Theoretical dimensions and introduction to the symposium. Administrative theory & praxis, 33(3), 325–340.

8. Castro, C., & Lopes, I. C. (2022). E-Government as a Tool in Controlling Corruption. International Journal of Public Administration, 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/01900692.2022.2076695

9. Criado, J. I., & Rojas-Martín, F. (2016). Adopting Social Media in the Local Level of Government: Towards a Public Administration 2.0? In: Sobaci, M. (editor). Social Media and Local Governments. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3319-17722-9_8

10. Demircioglu, M. A., & Chen, C. A. (2019). Public employees' use of social media: Its impact on need satisfaction and intrinsic work motivation. Government Information Quarterly, 36(1), 51–60. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2018.11.008

11. DePaula, N., Dincelli, E., & Harrison, T. M. (2018). Toward a typology of government socialmedia communication: Democratic goals, symbolic acts and self-presentation. Government Information Quarterly 2018, 35(1): 98–108.

12. Färdigh, M. A. (2013). What's the Use of a Free Media? Available online: https://gupea.ub.gu.se/handle/2077/34302 (accessed on 2 May 2024).

13. Feeney, M. K., & Porumbescu, G. (2021). The limits of social media for public administration research and practice. Public Administration Review, 81(4), 787–792. https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.13276

14. Figueira, Á., & Oliveira, L. (2017). The current state of fake news: challenges and opportunities. Procedia Computer Science, 121, 817–825. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.procs.2017.11.106 Ghanadpour, S. H., & Shokouhyar, S. (2021). Using Social Media in Open Innovation: Opportunities

15. Gómez Díaz de León, C. & de la Garza-Montemayor, D. J. (2023). Social networks and public administration: The challenges and opportunities of governments in the era of digital communication. Universitas XX1, 39, 79-101. https://doi.org/10.17163/uni.n39.2023.04

16. Greenberg, M. R., & Palenchar, M. J. (2012). Social media in disaster response: Framing the research agenda. Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management, 20(4), 675–687.

17. Hawking, S. (2016). A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes. Bantam Books.

18. Higgins, E. T. (2004). Making a Theory Useful: Lessons Handed Down. Personality and Social Psychology Review, 8(2), 138145. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327957pspr0802_7

19. Jha, C. K., & Sarangi, S. (2017). Does social media reduce corruption? Information Economics and Policy, 39, 60–71. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.infoecopol.2017.04.001

20. Kapoor, K. K., Tamilmani, K., Rana, N. P., et al. (2018). Advances in Social Media Research: Past, Present and Future. Information Systems Frontiers, 20(3), 531–558. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10796-017-9810-y