THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

TRANSPARENCY AND CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Now that social media has become such a dominant form of communication and interaction among the population in general and in the business world, public sector organizations arguably have an important duty to adopt these tools in order to provide the types of personalized and transparent services expected by citizens and businesses. Governments benefit considerably from the use of these communications and engagement channels, using them to improve the effectiveness of public service delivery (both generally and when faced with emergency situations), to generate information and data, and to build trust-based relationships that help restore confidence in local government. Overall, the use of social media is likely to improve services of local government and contribute to more efficient use of public resources.

Adopting and generating value from the use of social media at the local government level requires knowledge and understanding of best practices, as well as the potential pitfalls and challenges. This study is intended to contribute to the knowledge and understanding of social media usage by local governments, based on a diverse sample of local government organizations nationally, which have already established social media practices.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Social media has caused revolutionary changes throughout society, becoming a dominant means of communication and transforming the ways in which organizations in both the private and public sectors need to interact with citizens. The literature suggests that local governments can achieve multiple advantages by employing social media in their citizen communications, outreach, and participatory engagement strategies (Belle, 2013; Cohen, 2015, Gentile, 2011; Hamidullah, 2016; Mergel, 2013; Mossberger, Wu & Crawford, 2013; Roberts, 2010; Shark, 2015; Tucker, 2011). However, this raises new issues for local governments about how to effectively develop and implement a social media strategy or initiative in order to achieve organizational goals and maximize value, while minimizing any risks and removing any obstacles to social media use.

Background of the Problem

The reach and significance of social media is difficult to overstate, particularly because it continues to grow exponentially in the number and types of tools introduced, levels of participation and its influence in many realms of activity (Banaji, 2008). Most importantly for local government organizations, research indicates that citizens who engage online with government agencies and utilize their website content demonstrate higher rates of civic engagement and interactive participation in community affairs, than do citizens who are not accessing government via online channels (Kang & Gearhart, 2010). Studies have also shown that the use of social media for civil engagement increases trust in institutions (Warren, Sulaiman, & Jaafar, 2014). These findings indicate a strong case for government agencies to create a social media presence that seeks to actively engage citizen participation and increase organizational transparency.

Social media has also been used to increase local government efficiencies in other areas, for example by helping to build communities and to encourage citizens to pursue civic improvements (Belle, 2013; Clarkin, 2009; Cole, 2009; Haya, 2010; Nabatchi & Mergel, 2010; Prall, 2013), increasing access to government services (Caylor, 2010; Dowd, 2010, 2011; Fleming, 2008; Guha, 2011; Heaton, 2011; Montalbano, 2010; Moody & Carter, 2011; Porter, 2011; Smetanka, 2011; Smith, 2010) and addressing public safety issues (Avery, Lariscy, Amador, Ickowitz, Primm & Taylor, 2010; Chavez et al., 2010; Cumber, 2010; Draper, 2011; Gray, 2010; Guire, 2011; Juliano, 2010; Kearns, 2010; Kingsley, 2010; Nabatchi & Mergel, 2010; Stephens, 2011). Compared with federal government, local government organizations may be more innovative in their uses of social media tools, since they are often less constrained in their exploration of alternative outreach mechanisms. While local governments frequently grapple with fewer financial resources this is counterbalanced by the advantages of having a smaller, well-familiar and understood, community to serve, which can make the efficient use of social media tools to target citizens well within reach (Bollwitt, 2009).

Problem Statement

Social media offers opportunities for local governments to address the challenges of increasing organizational transparency and improving citizen engagement. These issues are especially important and pressing for many local government organizations. Recent public management literature has provided evidence of antipathy and a lack of confidence towards government among the U.S. population, and has highlighted the need for more collaborative and participative approaches in order to improve service delivery, strengthen the democratic process, and rebuild trust in public agencies. In particular,

Yang and Holzer (2005) highlight erosion in public trust of government agencies, tied to the perceptions of citizens that these agencies are inefficient at best, and damaging at worst. They argue that by demonstrating performance effectiveness, government agencies could restore the public's sense of trust. Strategies for increasing citizen engagement in local government and improving transparency of government activities and policy-making can be expected to have positive impacts on public trust and on the personal investment of citizens in the workings of government. By the same token, greater citizen participation in the operations of government may motivate local government employees to feel more engaged in their work and contribute to a "performance-oriented dialogue" between public administrators and their communities that can improve services through informed feedback (Holzer & Kim, 2008, p. 21; also Schorr & Stevens, 2011; also Arnstein, 1969).

Social media offers the potential to increase personal investment in government, and to improve levels of engagement between citizens and government bodies. Social media tools allow for a paradigm shift in the citizen-government relationship from a top-down unidirectional approach to a more authentic two-way relationship that relies on the citizen's input (Macnamara, Sakinofsky and Beattie, 2012).

However, the successful adoption of social media by local government organizations in the United States requires understanding and awareness of how to use social media tools and strategies to achieve improved transparency and increased and productive citizen engagement (Mossberger, Wu, & Crawford, J2013). Though published evidence exists of many successful local government social media initiatives, little has

been done to investigate and document best practice in this area, or to identify the risks and challenges involved and how these can be overcome.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the impacts of social media at the local government level on enabling citizen engagement and increasing government transparency, based on a sample of local government organizations from across the United States which are renowned for their effectiveness in social media. In order to identify examples of best practice and to understand the benefits and risks of using social media in local government, the study also explored the wider experiences of social media use among this sample, including the factors driving the organization's motivation to use social media, forms of social media management across the organization, the selection of social media tools, the use of formal and informal policies and guidelines on social media usage and the ways in which the impacts of social media are monitored and measured.

Significance of the Study

The study has both practical and theoretical significance. The main objective is to provide evidence-based information for use by local government organizations in the identification and implementation of best practice in the use of social media for the purpose of improving organizational transparency and increasing citizen engagement. This has many potential benefits for local governments, such as ensuring that planning and policy development have a more robust evidence base, providing the ability to build trust-based relationships with local citizens, and improving the overall efficiency and cost-effectiveness of public service delivery and resource utilization. The study is also significant in contributing to the theoretical understanding of how social media is

changing societal relationships between organizations and individuals, and how these generate new forms of value, which are rapidly becoming important differentiators of organizational effectiveness and success.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is derived primarily from the work of Yang and Holzer (2005) as well as other academic researchers (e.g. Holzer & Kim, 2008; Kang & Gearhart, 2010; Riccucci, 2001; Schorr & Stevens, 2011; Krueathep, 2006; Krueathep, Riccucci & Suwanmala, 2010; O'Toole, 2010) who have investigated public management performance in terms of the relationships between government and its citizens. This acknowledges that public administrators have always faced the challenge of working in environments shaped by two different frameworks – political and administrative, which are informed by different, and sometimes competing, concerns. The balance of concerns has continually shifted over time, historically reflecting ideological differences about the role of government in American life, but increasingly also reflecting developments in information and communications technology, specifically the emergence of social media, which are elevating the importance and influence of the role of individual citizens, and necessitating a more collaborative and participative approach to public administration.

Nature of the Study

The study uses mainly qualitative methods to investigate the experiences of using social media, and the impacts of citizen engagement and organizational transparency, based on a stratified random sample of 18 local government organizations from different regions of the United States. Data collection methods consisted of a telephone interviews

and a semi-structured online questionnaire completed by individual representatives of these organizations. The research participants consisted of a nominated manager, elected official or other local government employee within each of the selected communities, who hold a decision-making role relating to social media. Using a phenomenological approach intended to capture the real-life experiences of using social media in local government environments and to provide "rich data", participants were encouraged to "talk" about their experiences using a form of "contemporary storytelling" (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998; McNamaram, 1999). The rich qualitative data that this generated was supplemented by more structured, quantitative data from the online survey, relating for example to the use of various social media tools. Qualitative data analysis was conducted using an inductive approach in which key themes and sub-themes were allowed to emerge from the data. The qualitative findings were integrated with the quantitative results on specific social media practices from the self-completion questionnaire to provide comprehensive insights into the use of social media in the participating organizations.

Definitions of Key Terms

Social media. "Social Media and Web 2.0 define activities that integrate technology, social interaction, and content creation. Social media tools use the "wisdom of the crowds" to collaboratively connect online information. Through social media, people or groups can create, organize, edit, comment on, combine, and share content. Social media and Web 2.0 use many technologies and forms, including RSS and other syndicated web feeds, blogs, wikis, photo-sharing, video-sharing, podcasts, social

networking, social bookmarking, mashups, widgets, virtual worlds, microblogs and more" (cited by Bryer, 2010, p. 74).

Local government. A governmental jurisdiction below the level of the state. In the U.S., there are two categories of local government, General Purpose and Special Purpose. In the case of this study, most of the participating organizations consist of municipalities, which comprise the local unit of government covering a city or town (http://www.nlc.org/build-skills-and-networks/resources/cities-101/city-structures/local-us-governments).

Citizen engagement. Though there is no standard definition of citizen engagement (Shark, 2015), this is generally distinguished from previous forms of e-government web applications by the higher degree of interactivity and co-production of content by government and citizens (Mergel, 2013; Mossberger, Wu, & Crawford, 2013). According to Shark (2015), some of the main features of engagement include "creating meaningful dialog", "two-way communications" and "meaningful participation" (p.85).

Social networks. Social networks have several characteristics, which include creation of a public profile within a defined system, the ability to connect with others, and user-generated content (Mossberger, Wu, & Crawford, 2013).

Facebook. "A popular free social networking website that allows registered users to create profiles, upload photos and video, send messages and keep in touch with friends, family and colleagues" (Whatis.com)

Twitter. "A service for friends, family, and coworkers to communicate and stay connected through the exchange of quick, frequent messages. People post Tweets, which

may contain photos, videos, links and up to 140 characters of text."
(https://support.twitter.com/articles/13920)

    Instagram. "An online mobile photo-sharing, video-sharing, and social networking service that enables its users to take pictures and videos, and share them either publicly or privately on the app, as well as through a variety of other social networking platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and Flickr." (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Instagram)

    Blog. "An abbreviated version of "weblog," which is a term used to describe websites that maintain an ongoing chronicle of information. A blog features diary-type commentary and links to articles on other websites, usually presented as a list of entries in reverse chronological order." (https://codex.wordpress.org/)

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Assumptions, Limitations and Scope

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    It is assumed that the individual research participants answered the interview and survey questions truthfully and to the best of their ability. It is also assumed that, based on the available published evidence on which the sampling frame is constructed, all of the participating organizations have successfully implemented social media initiatives. A possible limitation is the unintended exclusion of certain useful information about experiences of implementing social media due to the specific questions used in the interview guide and survey questionnaire. Every attempt has been made to avoid this by using a comprehensive review of the literature to inform the design of the data collection instruments and by using phenomenological methods to generate research data that reflects the real life experiences of the participants. The scope of the study is limited to those organizations that are already renowned for their effective social media usage;

based on the research and sample design it has not been possible to explore the potential

barriers and obstacles to social media use among other local government organizations.

Summary

This chapter has introduced the study and set out its purpose and research

questions. It has provided background to the issue and a statement of the problem, which

is the lack of adequate information and best practice guidance to enable local government

organizations to adopt social media for the purpose of improving transparency and

increasing citizen engagement. The chapter has also provided an overview of the nature

of the study and its methods, and highlighted some limitations and delimitations. The

following chapter presents the review of literature.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

As the use of social media continues to rise throughout our society, it becomes necessary for local government to evaluate their social media tools and determine if they are in fact providing advantages to the community. This study explores local government use of social media tools, particularly for the purposes of enabling citizen engagement and increasing government transparency. The literature reviewed explores why and how local governments employ social media to interact with citizens, and how government use of social media may be assessed and improved.

Overview of Literature Reviewed

The review begins by summarizing the literature that underlies the conceptual framework for the study (Yang & Holzer, 2005). This relates in particular to the government's relationship to the citizen (Holzer & Kim, 2008; Kang & Gearhart, 2010; Riccucci, 2001; Schorr & Stevens, 2011), and the role of networking in governance (Krueathep, 2006; Krueathep, Riccucci & Suwanmala, 2010; O'Toole, 2010). The emerging significance of the social media presence is also discussed in terms of its general effects across cultures and at multiple levels of communication and interaction (Banaji, 2008; Belle, 2013; Bryer, 2010; *Connecting through social media,* 2011; Holzer & Yang, 2005; Kang & Gearhart, 2010; McGuire, 2010; Mevorach, 2014; Nabatchi & Mergel, 2010; Prall, 2013; Rosica, 2009; Scales; Scott, 2009; Shark, 2010b Shaull, 2009).

Literature relating to the general uses of social media in local government outreach and communication with the public is then discussed (Bryer, 2010; Burroughs, 2014; Chavez, Repas & Stefaniak, 2010; Clarke, 2013; Kaplan, 2013; Krueathep et al., 2010; Riccucci, Meyers, Lurie & Han, 2004; Shark, 2010b). An overview of some of the

most commonly employed forms of social media is presented from the literature, in order to explain the functions of social networks such as Facebook and MySpace (Antil, 2009; *Backupify*, 2011; Bryer, 2010; *Editorial; Civil interest…*, 2011; Enyeart, 2013; Riely, 2010; Rogstad, 2009), microblogging sites like Twitter and Tumbler (Bryer, 2010; Chavez et al., 2010; Soon & Waner, 2010), blogs (Hernandez, 2011; Smetanka, 2011), MindMixer, video, Wikis, and mobile applications (Chavez et al., 2010; Maynard, 2013; Prall,2013; Shark, 2010a, 2010b; Yang & Holzer, 2006).

Previous research on local governments' effective use of social media to implement emergency and disaster preparation and response strategies is presented and discussed at length to illustrate how tools such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, mobile applications, blogs and podcasts are used alone or in combination to support and enhance more traditional forms of emergency management (Alford, 2013; Belle, 2013; Chavez et al., 2010; *Commentary; way to lead,* 2011; Dowd, 2011; Hamidullah, 2016; Kaplan, 2013; Kingsley, 2010; Morelli, 2014; Stephens, 2011). The review also examines how social media has been used to improve local government efficiencies, for example by helping to build communities and encourage citizens to pursue civic improvements (Belle, 2013; Clarkin, 2009; Cole, 2009; Haya, 2010; Nabatchi & Mergel, 2010; Prall, 2013), and improving access to government services, such as 311 (*An app for that,* 2011; Caylor, 2010; Dowd, 2010, 2011; Fleming, 2008; Guha, 2011; Heaton, 2011; Montalbano, 2010; Moody & Carter, 2011; Porter, 2011; Smetanka, 2011; Smith, 2010). Consideration is given to the ways social media has been proven effective in government efforts to address public safety issues (Avery, Lariscy, Amador, Ickowitz, Primm & Taylor, 2010; Chavez et al., 2010; Cumber, 2010; Draper, 2011; Gray, 2010; Guire,

2011; Juliano, 2010; Kearns, 2010; Kingsley, 2010; Nabatchi & Mergel, 2010; Shark, 2012; Stephens, 2011), and in informing and empowering citizens to engage more directly in their governments' efforts (Alexander, 2011; Bernstein, 2010; *Brief; North Front Range…,*2011; Caylor, 2010; DeFour, 2011; Haya, 2010; Nabatchi & Mergel, 2010).

Finally, the literature review considers research that has examined the role of social media applications for local governments' outreach, communication, and engagement efforts (Bryer, 2010; Belle, 2013; Chavez et al., 2010; Herbst & Lide, 2010; the Institute for Local Government, 2010; Kingsley, 2010; Manoharan & Bennett, 2013; Maynard, 2013; McCarthy, 2011; Mossberger, Wu & Crawford, 2013; Nabatchi & Mergel, 2010; Prall, 2013; Rosica, 2009; Shark, 2015; Young Foundation, 2010). Arguments about the potential for evaluation and accountability are examined, and it is noted that there is no current consensus as to what form of performance measurement may be most useful in evaluating social media integration effectiveness (Holzer & Kim, 2008); McCarthy, 2011; Riccucci, 2011; Yang & Holzer, 2006) or to authentically demonstrate authenticity (Holzer & Kim, 2008; Korkie; Mergel, 2013; Nabatchi & Mergel, 2010; Riccucci et al., 2004; Shark. 2010a; Yang & Holzer, 2006).

Main Themes in the Literature

Public Management

One of the challenges public administrators face is that they work in environments shaped by two different frameworks – political and administrative, which are informed by different, and sometimes competing, concerns. Yang and Holzer (2005) considered this balance of concerns through a modern historical prism, tracing the consideration of a

dichotomous relationship between politics and administration to an 1887 essay by Woodrow Wilson. Wilson first conceived of the two parts as separate and distinct but gradually came to a European-style understanding of the relationship as an interactional one. Initially, the American emphasis was weighted more heavily towards separation, which Yang and Holzer described as a natural expression of the young nation's need to have "a neutral, competent public workforce" that was regarded as independent of undue political influence. Nevertheless, the emerging institutions and the professional associations that sprung up to support those working in public management, reflected a strong "democratic ethos" – prizing justice, legality, and the values of public service – alongside the bureaucratic ethos of "efficiency, economy, and effectiveness," (Yang & Holzer, 2005, p. 115). Up until the early 1950s the balance of the political and administrative dichotomy favored neutrality and efficiency through a nonpartisan lens.

Social movements between the 1950s and the 1970s – including civil rights, women's liberation, anti-war, anti-poverty, and energy alternatives – influenced a rebalancing of the political and administrative dichotomy, weighing it more clearly in the direction of the political, democratic ethos. In fact, some researchers have argued that the shift could be viewed not so much as a rebalancing of the dichotomy but as a move away from this formulation entirely. Yang and Holzer (2005) contended that this is a misreading of the situation; rather, what was occurring was a honing of the central tensions between politics and administration, reflecting ideological differences about the role of government in American life. The impact of this shift towards a more political ethos informing government management discussions was substantial and introduced a greater amount of "bureaucratic discretion" on the part of public managers (Yang &

Holzer, 2005, p. 117). Public managers became more engaged in making value

judgments in relation to government work that may have had little in common with a

strictly administrative ethos. The underlying social, environmental, and cultural issues

informing ethical determinations effectively lay beyond the scope of public

administrators to resolve and thus these efforts were doomed to a degree of failure. In the

1980s, the pendulum began to swing again back toward a greater emphasis on the

administrative ethos in public management, but with an emerging focus on privatization.

Arguably, this resulted in an overreaction to the shift of dichotomous balance seen in the

previous period as government agencies increasingly embrace "managerialism" and

forego necessary attention to aspects of the democratic ethos of ethical administration.

Yang and Holzer (2005) described a prevailing condition of public management

in America as somewhat akin to the position of a "defensive crouch". Public antipathy

toward government agencies and workers had become high – as evidenced in the rhetoric

of the increasingly influential Tea Party movement, for example – and some political

candidates were building their popularity and careers on targeting government

"bureaucrats" as ineffectual, wasteful and lazy, and questioning the ability of government

agencies and workers to improve life in any meaningful fashion. This crisis of faith is

related, in part, to the confused nature of administrative ethics and American life over the

course of the 20th century. When political influences dominate government agency

conduct as they did during the "movement" response of government agencies from the

1950s through the 1970s, ethics will flounder. The same is true when managerial forces

hold power because official accountability is often eroded and administrative abuses will

invariably increase. Yang and Holzer argued that to restore citizen faith in democratic

governance it is critical that political and administrative reform entail ethics reform and they stated that the solution lies "not in expanding political control, but in collaborating with citizens, the ultimate principals of the democratic process" (Yang & Holzer, 2005, p. 122).

In a subsequent article, Yang and Holzer (2006) expanded on the argument that governments should seek to improve citizen participation as a means for increasing public trust, focusing on the role of performance measurement process in effecting this potential. Noting that most evidence indicates that erosion in public trust of government agencies is closely tied to citizen perceptions that these agencies are inefficient at best, and damaging at worst, they speculated that by demonstrating performance effectiveness, government agencies could restore the public's sense of trust. While some might argue for the role and significance that citizens' trust plays in the ability of government officials and agents to function effectively, Yang and Holzer observed that when citizens do not trust their government they are less likely to pay taxes or support government services. The implication is that while an empirical relationship between public trust and government effectiveness remains to be definitively evidenced, one can surmise that governments that are trusted by their citizens are more likely to have an easier time going about their business than those government agencies or officials who must overcome distrust or resistance from the public in pursuing governance efforts. Increasing citizen input is a strategy that may serve to meaningfully contribute to performance measurement practice while at the same time, and separate from performance measurement practice, may positively impact public trust by increasing citizens' personal investment in the workings of government. Consequently, strategies for encouraging citizen engagement

deserve greater consideration and exploration to determine how they can best be affected

and whether or not they can be empirically shown to transform government service

delivery and efficiency.

This is especially important in the light of findings by the Pew Center for the

People and the Press, 2010, cited in Mergel, 2013) that citizen trust and satisfaction in

government had dropped to historical lows. In response to the increasing distrust of

citizens in government, Shark (2015, p.80 observes that a "paradigm shift" has been

occurring, from "power through withholding information, to power through sharing

information" (Shark, 2015, p.80). Immediately upon taking up office in 2009, President

Obama made a public commitment to achieving unprecedented levels of openness,

transparency, public participation and collaboration (White House, 2009, cited in Shark,

2015), and issued a legislative memorandum which required use of social media by the

public sector as a means of citizen engagement (cited in Hamidullah, 2016). This was

soon followed up with an "Open Government National Action Plan" setting out a number

of major goals for increasing transparency of government, which are now being pursued

(Shark, 2015). These developments are greatly facilitated by advances in technology,

particularly the availability and increasing use of the Internet and social media. In 2016,

the United States reportedly has more than 269 million Internet users, accounting for 87%

of the population, and 180 million social media users, or around 75% of the population

(statista.com). As Hamidullah (2016) observes, social media usage spans the generations

and is therefore important for accessing and engaging citizens across all age groups.

In many spheres, social media is now being used as a tool to increase the citizens'

personal investment, and authenticate citizen engagement between the public and their

government. Social media tools allow for a shift in the citizen-government relationship from a top-down unidirectional approach to a more authentic engagement-based relationship that seeks the citizen's input. As Manoharan & Bennett (2013) observe, government adoption of ICT is likely to have a positive impact on democratization by providing opportunities for citizen participation in decision-making. In turn, this is expected to lead to increased trust in government: data from a survey of 522 citizens conducted by Warren, Sulaiman & Jaafar (2014) indicated that the use of social media for citizen engagement had a positive impact on propensity to trust, and specifically on trust in the institutions using social media for engagement purposes. Other studies have also demonstrated a positive impact of the use of ICTs by government on organizational performance as well as citizen trust (Tolbert & Mossberger, 2006).

Governance and the Citizen

Transparency is one of the cultural buzzwords in discussions about how government officials and agencies should regard their interactions with each other and with the citizenry. When government representatives are perceived as conducting critical business far from the public view, there is the potential for mistrust in these officials and in the business of government to take root and grow. Processes that encourage communication between government agencies and the public foster a sense of openness and dialogue and result in citizens developing a more favorable view of government officials and agency processes (Kang & Gearhart, 2010). As Bowers (2014) argued, social media is the backbone of transparent government. By the same token, greater citizen participation in the operations of government can stimulate government workers to engage more directly in their work and can contribute to a "performance-oriented

dialogue" between public administrators and their communities that can improve services

through practice-informed feedback and put the power back into the hands of the citizens

(Holzer & Kim, 2008, p. 21; also Schorr & Stevens, 2011; also Arnstein, 1969). As

Campbell (2005) describes citizen engagement it is "a way to shift power from the policy

experts, out-of-touch politicians, and distant bureaucrats to the public".

There is a powerful argument to be made for encouraging and strengthening the

links between government services and the community. Democracy is grounded in

government that seeks to be truly representative by remaining responsive to the concerns

of all members of the public. Riccucci (2001) spoke to this matter when discussing the

impact of the National Performance Review (NPR) approach to considering the role and

goals of government. Citing theorists such as Moe and Carroll (1994, and 1995,

respectively, as cited by Riccucci, 2001, p. 172), Riccucci noted that NPR sought to

center determinant control and central governance authority in the executive, with

decreasing emphasis on institutional checks and balances on this power. This approach

to governance assumes the frame of the citizen as passive customer and, as such,

decreases the individual citizen's sense of connection and responsibility to the greater

community. Holzer and Kim (2008) noted the critical importance for government

agencies to engage diverse groups and individuals in conversations about policy

development and in setting goals toward community improvement. Among the benefits

of diversification is that such outreach tends to increase citizens' sense that they are

stakeholders in government efforts, which can lead to greater buy-in and support for

government efforts. Additionally, diversification can also result in new and innovative

approaches to problem-solving being introduced by citizens who may traditionally have

felt at arms-length from their government and whose voices remained outside the parameters of government discussions and thus, outside of consideration. Mergel (2013) refers to the creation through social media of "distributed democracy efforts" and "digital neighborhoods", in which citizens are actively involved in addressing some of the problems of government and improving their communities, sometimes even taking over non-critical government responsibilities and tasks.

One of the main challenges in using online forms of communication to increase transparency and citizen engagement, however, is the "digital divide" (Shark, 2015) between those citizens who use or have access to the Internet and social media and those who do not. A January 2014 survey by the Pew Research Center found that 13% of American adults do not use the Internet at all, though this had declined from 20% in 2013, while 2015 research by McKinsey & Company reported that 15% of the population never uses the Internet. The reasons for non-usage include personal choice, non-accessibility and the inability to afford broadband (Shark, 2012), but certain groups such as individuals with low incomes, low levels of education and people with disabilities have lower rates of Internet usage on average than others. This raises important questions about equity of access to the citizen engagement and participation process that must be addressed by government agencies.

For example, a 2015 study by the President's Council of Economic Advisers (CEA), which combined data from the 2013 American Community Survey (ACS) with the National Broadband Map (NBM) found that less than a half of households in the lowest-income quintile have access to broadband at home. The report revealed other socio-economic differences in Internet usage: more than 90% of households headed by a

college graduate had an Internet connection at home, compared with less than half of households headed by an individual who did not complete high school, and Black and Hispanic households were significantly less likely than white households to have Internet access. Similarly, For example, the McKinsey & Company study (2015) found evidence of a positive association between income and Internet usage and between education level and Internet usage, while the Pew Internet and Family Life Project (cited in Shark, 2012) found that 2% of American adults have a disability that makes it difficult for them to use the Internet.

In response to these disparities, the government program ConnectHome is currently being implemented to increase the geographical availability of broadband throughout the country (The White House, 2015), while proposals are currently being considered by Federal Government which would subsidize the cost of access to broadband by low income households (Williams, 2016). In the meantime, local governments cannot ignore the issue of the digital divide as they adopt social media strategies and programs. This is not just a matter of improving Internet access; as Epstein, Newhart and Vernon (2012) point out, technology is a tool enabling public engagement in policy-making but is not sufficient to ensure that effective participation is achieved. Other factors that must be addressed include digital skills, as well as the motivation and interest of citizens to engage with government (Epstein, Newhart & Vernon, 2012; Manoharan, 2012).

Social Media and Public Relations

The use of social media is also becoming increasingly important as part of local governments' public relations strategies, for influencing external press coverage of

government activities (Lee, 2012; Lee, Neeley, & Stewart, 2012; Horsley & Yang, 2012). Positive media coverage of government has been shown to have a positive impact on levels of citizen trust in government (Gross, Aday, & Brewer 2004). Liu et al. (2012) conducted a survey of 881 government and business organizations to explore the link between external government communication and media coverage, and confirmed "active media interaction, organizational support for communication, and adequate communication budget are associated with reporting more favorable coverage" (p.597). Since negative media coverage of governments has been increasing in recent decades (Liu et al., 2012), the use of social media to improve communications and relationships with citizens and the official media alike provides an opportunity to increase levels of trust among citizens, and to improve the overall image and legitimacy of local government.

Lee (2012) similarly highlights the important and changing role of public relations and external communications in the government context, citing the example of policy entrepreneurship skills that increasingly depend on the ability to conceptualize issues in ways that are acceptable to the news media. Lee (2012) argues that public relations has become "inherent to good public administration, whether for program implementation, public support, democratic accountability, public policy development or agency power" (p.271) and argues that success in this area now relies on high levels of constant communication, which utilizing continually evolving technologies and social media. Lee, Neeley and Stewart (2012) identify four main reasons why it is crucial for government organizations to adopt new social media tools in their public relations and external communications: first, these now dominate everyday life for many people;

second, public administration is itself largely defined in terms of communications, for the purpose of educating and informing citizens; third, communications enables government to fulfill its mission and be accountable to citizens, and fourth, as communication technologies continue to evolve and change, there is a need for public managers to understand their potential for two-way communication.

The Role of Networking

Networks in public administration occur both formally and informally, much as networks do in other areas of life. O'Toole (2010) identified the feature of "interdependence" as one of the most salient features of networking, placing the separate parties to the networking relationship on essentially equal footing, no part being subservient to any other part. In the realm of government operations, O'Toole stated that public managers who engage in external networking do for a variety of reasons such as seeking information, activating interest in the organization, creating and taking advantage of opportunities, marshaling support for the organization in response to pressures, and "negotiating" with other members of the network and drawing on them to join cause in policy endorsement and other efforts. These networks thus serve as a "web of action" that public administrators can tap into to further agency goals. It is also apparent that the very nature of public administration ensures that some form of networking will occur in governance work for many issues "cannot be effectively addressed without drawing together organizations and actors from apparently disparate sectors and often very different levels in the governance system," (O'Toole, 2010, p. 10). Krueathep, Riccucci and Suwanmala (2010) observed that networking enables government agencies to draw on "diverse partners" who may be effectively engaged to enhance government efforts by

supporting them with additional resources and by "increasing the steering capacity of public programs" (Krueathep et al., 2010, p. 158). DiTomaso et al. (2003) stress the importance of understanding the inter-relationships between groups within a community and creating means of dialogue that reflect diversity and present the means of challenging existing authorities, something that can be achieved by social media and networking.

The literature on networking in public administration is not very extensive and, as researchers have observed, there is some debate over the pros and cons of networking influence in various governance efforts and these often proceed from case-by-case analyses (O'Toole, 2010). While networking is perceived by many to invite collaboration and voluntary assent for networked undertakings, it has also been argued that the reality of networking in public administration may be effected through more hierarchical influences and with somewhat less voluntary agreement between network members who may have, what O'Toole referred to as "mixed motives" in their networked efforts (O'Toole, 2010, p.8). These discussions also focus almost exclusively on networks comprised predominantly, if not exclusively, of administrators from various public agencies and those representing private profit or not-for-profit organizations that have an impact on issues that affect the greater community.

The rapid growth of social media will potentially change this dynamic, inviting greater citizen participation into the very processes that networking facilitates. One way to counter growing public distrust of government effectiveness is to alter traditional approaches to public administration that is conducted by bureaucrats behind the proverbial closed doors and away from the public eye, by engaging citizen participation through networking (e.g. social media networking) with the goal of improving public

service efficiency (Krueathep, 2006; Krueathep et al., 2010).   Social media provides

access for citizens where prior to its existence left information to be transmitted "one-

way, top-down from elites (government, business, institution, etc.) (Macnamara,

Sakinofsky and Beattie, 2012). Many of the same issues that surround networking

among administrators conceivably apply to the consideration of networking between

citizens and government representatives.

The presence of social media in social, cultural and civic life has grown so

explosively that today it can be difficult to recall what communications were like just a

decade ago, prior to the advent of mobile devices, and the rise of YouTube, Facebook,

Pinterest, and Twitter and other tools. Holzer and Yang (2005) observed that with the

rapid growth of information technology and its increasing role in governing

communications and exchange of information at all levels through all walks of life there

comes both enormous opportunity and enormous responsibility. These researchers

couched their discussion of public agencies' embrace of information technology in terms

of considerations of discretion, and the possibility of effectively harnessing the

extraordinary range of options while safeguarding the privacy of individuals and the

security of privileged information and without compromising openness of government

and the conduct of fair practices.

Information technology has been so fully embraced at all levels of American

government that it is necessary to distinguish social media from other Internet offerings

such as chat rooms, websites and email.   A useful definition of social media was drawn

from the website of the Federal Web Managers Council and cited by Bryer (2010, p. 74):

Social Media and Web 2.0 define activities that integrate technology, social interaction, and content creation. Social media tools use the "wisdom of the crowds" to collaboratively connect online information. Through social media, people or groups can create, organize, edit, comment on, combine, and share content. Social media and Web 2.0 use many technologies and forms, including RSS and other syndicated web feeds, blogs, wikis, photo-sharing, video-sharing, podcasts, social networking, social bookmarking, mashups, widgets, virtual worlds, microblogs and more.

Web 2.0 refers to formats that allow for interactive collaboration and information sharing and represents a refinement of the Web 1.0 tools that provided only for passive viewing of websites and which were the standard of online websites in the 1990s for virtually all organizations, including governments (Nabatchi & Mergel, 2010; Rosica, 2009).

The reach and significance of social media is difficult to overstate, particularly because it continues to grow exponentially in the number and types of tools introduced as well as in its influence. This is demonstrated for example by the uses of social media to trigger activism (Banaji, 2008), build support for groups and communities, and provide on-the-ground reportage for such disparate events as the protest movements of the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street (or the "99% movement" as it is increasingly referred to in its incarnations around the nation), as well as the government and public response to the devastation wrought by Hurricane Sandy in October 2012 in areas of the Northeast U.S.. Kang and Gearhart (2010) reported findings that citizens who engage with government agencies and utilize their website content demonstrate higher rates of civic

engagement and interactive participation in community affairs, than do citizens who are not accessing government presence online. Taken together these findings indicate a clear argument for encouraging government agencies to create an online and social media presence that seeks to actively engage citizen participation. Diversity, transparency, and trust appear to be among the important benefits that government agencies can reap from embracing the networking opportunities presented by social media. Kenneth Bowers, Deputy Director of Planning for Raleigh, N.C., describes social media as "the backbone of transparent government" (Prall, 2014).

While the range of social media applications is substantial and will certainly continue to grow, currently the popular tools of Facebook, Google, Pinterest, Twitter, YouTube, and Wiki, along with mobile device functions that enable texting, tracking and notification deliveries, dominate the scene. Local governments have demonstrated keen initiative in co-opting these tools to engage with citizens in real-time response efforts about community matters, government initiatives, and emergency notifications, and much of this chapter explores the ways in which public managers are now employing these particular social media formats.

Social Media and Local Government

As observed by Mossberger, Wu & Crawford (2013) and Shark (2010b), local governments have been at the forefront of providing e-government services as well as implementing social media. In the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, e-government initiatives were largely centered on web-based communications. During this time many local governments, along with some state and federal government agencies, explored using discussions boards and text chats and began to incorporate some public functions

online, such as information-sharing and appointment-making capacities (Bryer, 2010).

With the emergence of contemporary social media applications, local governments have

been especially innovative in their uses of such popular tools as Twitter, Facebook,

Linked In, and YouTube, demonstrating an early adopter's innate understanding of the

advantages of social networking (Shark, 2010b).

Local government may be more innovative in their uses of social media tools, due

to the fact they are less constrained than state or federal agencies and governments, in

their explorations of alternative outreach mechanisms. While local governments

frequently grapple with fewer financial resources this is counterbalanced by the

advantages of having a smaller, well-familiar and understood, community to serve, which

can make the efficient use of social media tools to target citizens well within reach

(Bollwitt, 2009). In 2012, more than 90% of local governments were utilizing Facebook

and Twitter to communicate according to a study conducted by the Fels Institute of

Government. Today that number continues to rise as communities experiment with these,

and other forms of social media. According to a 2014 Digital Use Survey of a group of

local government employees, "88% of respondents reported that their local government

has a social media presence (ICMA January 23, 2015)"

In order for any social media applications to be truly useful in furthering the

efforts of local government agencies and representatives to engage with the community,

the goals of the integration of social media should be clearly identified. Clearly

articulated goals are in themselves particularly powerful management tools and goal-

setting is especially critical in situations of change (Riccucci, Meyers, Lurie & Han,

2004), for instance when new technologies and strategies are being introduced into

traditional processes. The political climate of local government may also have an impact

on agency determinations of whether to utilize social media and how interactive public

administrators will be with the public. In their discussion of networking practice in local

governments in Thailand, Krueathep et al. (2010) noted that local governments with an

associative political environment tended to embrace the networking of diverse

stakeholders in their jurisdictions while local governments characterized by "competitive

politics" (Krueathep et al., 2010, p. 167), in which different ideological and/or political

groups competed for dominance in governance, were much more resistant to

networking's invitation to broader engagement. These same trends would likely be

evident in the uses of social media with more open and collaborative local government

environments proving receptive to these citizen-engagement strategies, and more

politically competitive environments either resistant to, or inclined to shape, social media

toward more directed and political expressions of citizen participation.

Social Media Tools

These online sites tools are designed to connect people through online networks

and communities that may be highly specific in nature, or can be as wide-ranging in reach

as conceivable. The preeminent social networking system in the world is Facebook,

while LinkedIn is a popular example of a social networking system that prioritizes

business, education and interest connections. The most successful of the social networks

allow users to search for members based on "friends" and group associations, interests,

background, thus the potential reasons for motivating connections is virtually limitless.

Social networking has rapidly assumed such a central role in our public and private lives

that most Web 2.0 technologies, such as photosharing sites such as Flikr and Snapfish

and Wikis (like Wikipedia), as well as media sites like *The New York Times* online,

enable links to Facebook or have their own social networking aspects. The Federal Web

Managers Council suggests that government agencies can use social networking to a

good effect by using existing sites such as Facebook to create communities of

government employees and interested citizens in issue-targeted groups, to recruit

employees, or to build communities of cooperation across workers from different public

agencies and organizations (Antil, 2009; Riely, 2010; Rogstad, 2009).

Local governments would do well to devise best practices guidelines in their

efforts to embark on social media implementation. Bryer (2010) cited the City of Coral

Springs in Florida for being judicious and well informed in its social media integration,

noting that it was one of the first local governments to establish a Facebook page.

However, before launching the page, city administrators consulted with the state attorney

general's office to obtain guidelines for use in interacting with the community and in

terms of transparency and privacy requirements. Among the questions that were

considered was whether once a citizen "friended" the city on Facebook, would the

citizen's own Facebook page and identity become necessarily part of the public record?

In traditional public forums such as town halls or public hearings, citizens are generally

expected to identify themselves. In the world of social networking, some form of

anonymity is frequently employed. It has been observed that anonymity in social media

interactions often raises the level of incivility and that respondents may be more likely to

engage in reasonable exchanges when their identities attend their interactions (*Editorial:*

Civil interest. . . , 2011). Thus, public administrators may need to weigh "the potential

tradeoff between full privacy and civility" when devising their social media strategies (Bryer, 2010, p. 78).

The City of Coral Spring also explored whether interactions on Facebook were legally required to be archived and maintained as public records (similar to emails) and how city and state transparency requirements aligned with Facebook's transparency policies and user agreements (Bryer, 2010). City governments that pursue this type of important information up-front help protect themselves from legal challenges down the road. It may also benefit local government to look into backup systems that capture social media data so that information is not lost through error and is available for tracking (*Backupify*, 2011). Additionally, framing this type of informed inquiry can only contribute to public administrators' depth of understanding of both the limitations and the possibilities of maintaining a social media presence.

Blogging. Blogs are diaries or entries that are, ideally, targeted to a particular audience and regularly updated with new blog entries. Blogs are intended to be informal in communication in order to engage readers and to hopefully, stimulate a dialogue between blog contributors and the blog's readers. In terms of use in government, the Federal Web Managers Council has suggested that blogs can be effectively employed to engage with citizens on specific government matters and to put a more relaxed and approachable face on government work (also, Hernandez, 2011; Smetanka, 2011).

Microblogging. The concept of microblogging is essentially that of blogging performed in short, fast bursts that facilitate a rapid exchange of ideas between microbloggers connected to one another. The most well known of the microblogging formats is, Twitter, which allows users to post entries that run to 140 characters and no

more. These "tweets" can be read online or delivered as text messages to cell phones and

other mobile devices. Microblogging effectively creates a back-and-forth conversation

between tweeters responding to each other's brief posts. On the Federal Government's

HowTo website, public agencies and administrators are encouraged to think of the

applications for Twitter (or other microblogging tools such as *Tumblr*) in enabling two-

way conversations and seeking community participation in public forums. The website

observed that tweeting can be used to have citizens post questions to speakers during live

sessions, while also providing the useful tracking function of "hashtags" that create a

quick subject reference that means these microblog entries can be quickly searched and

retrieved (also Soon & Warner, 2010). Bryer (2010) cautioned that public administrators

not use Twitter or other microblog formats for attempting meaningful dialogue however,

since the text limitation of microblogging are better suited for the rapid transmission of

essential information.

One of the advantages of Twitter is that users can receive tweets directly to their

cell phones as texts – they do not need to be online and log in to a particular website.

This makes Twitter particularly effective for emergency alerts or notifications that

require a quick-turnaround, such as the announcement of a change of venue on the day of

a public forum (Chavez et al., 2010).

Visual Social Media. One of the main reported benefits of Facebook is the

ability to post information in a range of formats including photos and videos; other visual

social media platforms such as Instagram and Snapchat are also being highlighted for

their potential benefits to local government. For example a UK report reported a dramatic

increase in 2015 in the use of Instagram by local councils (BDO, 2015), and in Australia

it is reported that councils are using this tool extensively to share visual information about their work, as well as photos submitted by citizens, in order to help build and strengthen communities (Dean, 2014).

Video is also a compelling social media format as the wide-ranging popularity of YouTube has clearly demonstrated. Almost everyone with an email address has received a link to a video that has gone "viral" and is passed from viewer to viewer, receiving hundreds of thousands of "hits" (views), in a matter of hours. One of the most striking things about video is that it can be produced quickly and cheaply – or, with the proper resources it can reflect film production values – and free or inexpensive sites can be tapped to host the video so that potential viewers need only be directed by a link in an email or a posting on a website. Vine, a new video application, launched by Twitter, is a new app that allows organizations to share information and communicate with the public.

As Shark (2015) observes the use of video tools are becoming particularly important for improving transparency of government operations, and are expected to promote increased engagement, with high-definition (HD) video and sound facilitating virtual interaction between citizens and government representatives. Live streaming applications such as Periscope and Meerkat offer considerable potential for a major impact on transparency of local government through broadcasting of council meetings and other government activities (Beese, 2016). Mergel (2013) reports that video sharing is now being extensively used by government officials to disseminate background information about local issues, to broadcast video interviews with agency directors or to post "behind the scenes footage", among a range of purposes.

Wikis. Wikis are essentially a group of web pages that serve as a repository for information sharing and provide a collaborative and virtual workspace for users. Wikipedia represents the best known of the wiki sites and is characterized by its constantly evolving content that is created, shaped, added to or edited, by a variety of users. Wikis can be open, inviting contributions by anyone and allowing anyone to view the content of the wiki pages, or closed meaning their use (which may also be differentially determined) is restricted to particular community members. Wikis are useful mechanisms for sharing knowledge and government agencies can benefit from using wikis to develop policy through contributors' input and by having the ability to store a variety of materials in the wiki's communal library. The Federal Web Managers Council has identified some of the benefits of wiki use as engendering transparency by allowing members of the wiki community to review and respond to each other's comments and changes within the wiki workspace; creating engagement by encouraging participants to contribute to the evolving dialogue; and providing efficiencies through document storage and retrieval, and in providing a sort of living record of changes made to discussions and policy that members of the community can easily track and review.

Mobile Applications

In recognition of the growing popularity of mobile devices, the predominant use of websites for online communication with citizens is being replaced by a multi-channel engagement approach sometimes referred to as "m-government", (Shark, 2010b; Shark, 2012), and many local governments have seen the imperative of developing mobile apps (Clarke, 2013). Mobile device use globally grew from 5% in 1998 to 55% in 2008 and it is projected that by 2018, 96% of the U.S. population will be connected through mobile

communications (cited in Shark, 2010b). By 2015, a reported 97% of Americans were using a mobile device of some form, and levels of mobile usage overtook desktop computer usage in the U.S. for the first time (Beese, 2016).

Since there are now higher levels of mobile than broadband penetration among the U.S. population, with those in the lowest income groups often owning a mobile phone but lacking broadband access at home (Shark, 2012), government communication with citizens via these devices is being hailed as an important means of addressing the digital divide (Shark, 2012), as well as ensuring that all citizens have access to crucial information relating to public safety issues and emergencies (Liu and Levenshus, 2012). However, to achieve this it is important for governments to ensure that their websites and applications are optimized for use on mobile devices.

As with other aspects of e-government tools and technologies, local governments have demonstrated creativity and initiative in their employment of mobile applications to connect with town and government websites, and linking citizens directly to local agencies and first responders. If one visits the Maryland government website their intentions are clearly stated throughout the main pages "accessible government on all your devices", "engage with your government in ways you know and love", "Maryland gov.anywhere" (Maryland Gov website).

Governments at all levels are now working to move towards a "one-stop shopping" approach though mobile apps. In 2013, the Township of Maplewood, New Jersey launched a customized mobile app, free of charge. The app allows "access to Township news, alerts, event information, and make reservation requests for fields in the parks, submit service requests, and review information pertaining to Township facilities

including hours of operation, contact information and directions" (Lackey, 2013). The

City of Newark, New Jersey is at the cutting edge of empowering citizens and promoting

transparency through the launching of a mobile app an Open Data site called "My

Newark". This application as Mayor Baraka describes "is about offering 21st Century

government services" (Rutgers SPAA Partners, 2015). The Monmouth County New

Jersey Sheriff's office developed an application that brings all their social media tools

into one place. This as the Sheriff describes, "will be a one-stop shop for us" (Belle,

2013). Like other City governments around the country, the District of Columbia has

initiated a mobile phone application that allows citizens to download information about

Wi-Fi hotspots in the city, to see real-time tracking of city buses on their routes, and to

view police crime maps. As Shark observed, this technology "essentially takes the

concept of neighborhood watch to entirely new levels," (Shark, 2010b, p. 29). Rancho

Cucamonga, California, developed an app called RC2GO, which "not only allowed for

the reporting, but also served as a platform to promote business and tourism, and share

information with people about various city services" (Heaton, 2012). As part of the

City's initiative to "improve transparency and ultimately food safety", the City of San

Francisco, California partnered with Yelp to post restaurant inspection scores next to

dining review" (Burroughs,2014; Temple, 2013). New York City piloted a program over

a nine-month period during 2012-2013, and continues this program today, using Yelp

reviews to help identify unreported outbreaks of food-borne illness. Officials describe

one of the goals of this program as to help identify public health issues by using social

media and big databases, like Google Flu Trends and Twitter, to find reports of flu and

other concerns. "With food-borne illnesses, it's much better to reach people sooner," said

Dr. Sharon Balter, a medical epidemiologist with the city's health department. "When investigating an outbreak, we want to know what people who got sick ate, who else was with them and what items they all ate together. If you wait, people forget" (Newman, 2014).

Mobile devices are also increasingly useful in reporting public safety issues, such as crimes in progress, and other problems or service deficits. Public safety agencies are encouraging citizens to provide information using a range of media including photos and video, a development that is facilitated by the widespread use of mobile devices and advances in digital photography. Further, mobile communications help solidify the move toward greater empowerment of citizens in effecting government services – a transition Shark (2010b) and Yang and Holzer (2006) described as moving away from the passive model of citizen as solely a consumer of government services to the much more active model of the citizen as stakeholder and activist for government services. This development is likely to produce greater civic engagement and a mirror effect of greater government transparency.

Any of the above-discussed tools, along with podcasts and RSS feeds and other social media formats that deliver current news quickly, can be utilized as notification systems by government agencies seeking to get real-time word out to the public.

Despite the potential for addressing the digital divide through m-government, statistics indicate that a digital gap remains even in the area of mobile device usage: the 2014 Pew Research Center study found that 42% of American adults do not own a smartphone, and 10% do not own a mobile phone of any kind. Again, certain groups are

overrepresented: a 2013 Pew study found that 52% of American adults without a high school diploma have neither a smartphone nor broadband access to the Internet, compared with 93% of those with a college education (cited in Boboltz, 2015). Although it can be expected that government programs to increase Internet access throughout the country will eventually reduce these figures, they serve as a reminder that social media and m-government should be used alongside more conventional forms of communication to improve levels of engagement with all citizens.

Other Uses of Social Media by Local Governments

Emergency and Disaster Response. The potential for social media to aid local governments in their efforts to prepare for and respond to emergencies and disasters is a subject that has gained a great deal of news media and research attention (Alfred, 2013; Gentile, 2011; McKay, 2014; Tucker, 2011). "Social media originally started out as a way to share information among family and friends. It is evident that it has evolved to serve other functions…its use in preparing for, responding to and recovering from disasters (Brooks, 2013)". Indeed, a Red Cross study (cited in Shark, 2012) found that more people than ever before now rely on social media in times of emergency to obtain critical information. As Hamidullah (2016) observes, social media can be used by government agencies not only to post information about emergency situations but also to communicate advance warnings.

While emergencies and disasters may differ greatly in the nature of the crises, they have significant effects and response requirements in common (Roberts, 2010). Crises that endanger lives and/or property require a mobilized and coordinated response so that challenges are not compounded through wasteful duplications of resources and

support responses or, conversely, through neglect of vital concerns because attention has been concentrated elsewhere and without a comprehensive vision. Disasters that impact large sectors of the community will tax resources and, in the immediate aftermath of a crisis or disaster, traditional communication systems are often overwhelmed as people try and reach out to emergency services, check on family members and friends, and this overload can be compounded if the disaster has negatively impacted services undergirding these communications, such as telephone and power sources or conduits. "People need to talk to other people when they're scared. And if we don't communicate quickly, it doesn't stop people from talking, it just means they don't have factual information to share." Not only are communities able to give real time information during a crisis, they are also able to receive this vital information through the use of social media (Morelli, 2014). In the case of disasters (as opposed to short-term emergencies, such as a water main break), the impact of the disaster may require months or years of support interventions before the community is fully functional again.

The various agencies involved in crises response bring their own protocols and systems of communication and processes to bear. The potential for overlap of delivery, for territorial disputes, and for disagreements over how to coordinate response and who assumes responsibility for what functions can arise as an unfortunate feature of non-synchronized responses. As Roberts (2010) described it, "vexing problems of communication, coordination, and collaboration during disasters are common themes in the disaster relief community," (Roberts, 2010, p. 88). Social media tools may help ameliorate many of these issues by providing real-time notifications and updates and by engaging citizens in the response so that issues of duplication or oversight are quickly

identified and can be addressed. Chavez et al. (2010) cautioned that social media should not be considered a replacement for existing emergency response systems but instead be integrated as a complement to traditional emergency management and communication systems. Particularly at this stage, when social media's presence is significant and rapidly growing, but is not yet in standard use among many segments of society (e.g. elderly, economically disadvantaged, developmentally disabled), it is critical to recognize the limitations in reach. However, this dynamic will continue to change in the direction favoring greater citizen interaction through social media tools and local governments would do well to get ahead of this inevitable development and begin to reap the benefits of social media's ability to engage the public immediately and directly in strategic planning and response efforts.

There are several examples in which emergency disaster situations such as hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, wildfires, train crashes, school shootings, beach closing, and man-made emergencies such as chemical or biological spills, have shown the power of social media when employed by local governments in their communities. For instance, after North Carolina ground to a standstill after the "snowpocalypse" in February 2014, government officials throughout the State "agreed using social media allowed them to communicate emergency procedures and ensure help was where it was needed most during the storm." Various tools were used, all with the same "positive outcomes" (Wells, 2014).

On April 15, 2013, when two pressure cooker bombs exploded during the Boston Marathon, killing 3 people and injuring an estimated 264 others, people immediately turned to social media to determine their next steps. Bill Braniff, Executive Director of

the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Response to Terrorism, explains "Authorities have recognized that one of the first places people go in events like this is to social media, to see what the crowd is saying about what to do next" (Gigoff & Lee, 2013). Social media allows situations like the Boston Marathon Bombing to go "viral" spreading beyond the affected area, and more quickly than through traditional media outlets.

Moorhead, a city in Minnesota, is subject to flooding from the Red River; in the spring of 2009 the flooding was record-breaking and caused widespread damage throughout the county and the surrounding area. The Moorhead government, anticipating even greater potential for dangerous flooding in 2010 thanks to high levels of winter precipitation, implemented a social media plan for emergency outreach to citizens, employing Facebook and Twitter in its preparation, alert and recovery plans. The government divided the city into eight different flood zones and created emergency management and response teams in each zone consisting of a member of the city's engineering department, a neighborhood liaison, a police officer, and a firefighter to coordinate actions like sandbagging, public safety responses, and to track and assess infrastructure features such as the integrity of water and waste lines and facilities and trash collection (Chavez et al., 2010).

On the city's website, public administrators reported regular updates on the status of the Red River and identified where and when flooding was expected as well as information regarding the flood zone management efforts and the city's emergency plans. Facebook and Twitter were employed to activate the static nature of the website information where city employees posted frequent updates on the status of flooding and

emergency preparations that immediately went out to citizens' Facebook pages or Twitter accounts. These notifications ran the gamut from notifications of zone management meetings to evacuation warnings to road closings. Facebook and Twitter were also employed to reach out to students of colleges and universities in the area, to enlist them as volunteers in sandbagging vulnerable areas near the river. One of the city managers noted that in the flooding of the previous year, a number of residents had been without phone service or were unable to power up their computers making it difficult to get updated word to them about evacuations or relief efforts (Chavez et al., 2010). Twitter notifications in particular skirt that limitation by being available to anyone with a mobile device or cell phone that can receive texts, and these same mobile devices can be used to access Facebook, so traditional problems of power outages and overburdened or damaged landline phone service do not present the same hindrances to communication that they once did.

Chavez et al. (2010) described how social media was deployed by the county government of Fort Bend, Texas to address concerns over the H1N1 flu virus that was having a severe impact on the region, with almost 160 confirmed cases and hundreds more suspected. In this instance, the government's embrace of social media was driven by the citizens' use of social media in the face of the. Public managers recognized that rumors were spreading rapidly on Facebook and Twitter, dramatically inflating the reports of the crisis and creating the potential for panic in the community. Staff from the county's Office of Emergency Management (OEM) began tweeting information and posting on Facebook and blogs, accurate information in order to dispel the rumors and connect citizens directly to the public health officers and staff. Information regarding the

government's flu response efforts, health services and locations of health providers, flu symptom checklists and contacts for various support agencies and services were posted, tweeted and blogged about and frequently updated. The direct engagement with citizens through Twitter and Facebook exchanges enabled staff to immediately and effectively identify and correct inaccurate information before it had a chance to spread rapidly and become entrenched as false knowledge. These efforts, as much as the information regarding resources and emergency plans, helped allay citizen fear.

Chavez et al. (2010) also discussed Alexandria, Virginia's City government's use of social media platforms to address public safety issues related to the H1N1 virus and for snowstorm communication and relief efforts.   Alexandria provided outreach and communication with citizens using a variety of formats – newsletters and printed materials to reach older members of the community, as well as radio and television, and the social media tools of Facebook and Twitter (Kingsley, 2010). The city noted or linked to the various communications on its website, where a frequently updated section (in both English and Spanish) was reserved for communications regarding the H1N1 outbreak and response efforts. Alexandria also created an "e-News" network that sent out messages to subscribers informing them where flu shots could be obtained and including useful information such as opening hours and the predicted wait time at various clinics. The reach of this subscriber service was amplified many times over as press outlets picked up these updates and ran them in their local programming.

Morelli (2014) described social media as being in the "infancy stage" in 2005, when Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans. When Hurricane Irene hit the northeast, social media represented an opportunity for local governments' social media efforts to come

into play. By the time Hurricane Sandy pummeled the same region in 2012, social media

had become one of the main sources of information sharing used by emergency managers

and those affected by the devastation.   Many of the initial reports following the

hurricane's landfall and the flooding and damage that ensued, highlighted the role that

social media tools – especially Facebook and Twitter – played in keeping citizens

connected to their local government authorities and helped to secure effective responses

to emerging problems (Bell, 2013;*Commentary: way to lead,* 2011; McKay, 2014;

Stephens, 2011; Morelli, 2014). Similarly, the first signs of the aftermath damage from

the 5.1 La Habra earthquake in Southern California came from posting on various social

media tools by residents. This influx of real time information offered "snapshots" of the

earthquakes effects, which first responders say they cannot ignore (Becerra & Xia, 2014).

"In urgent and emergent situations like the Oklahoma Tornadoes or the Boston Marathon

attack, reaching citizens and residents with information can be a matter of life or death"

(Kaplan, 2013).

Building Community. Cole (2009) provided a compelling argument for the

potential of social media to create communities of action among citizens that could be

tapped by government authorities to achieve a wide range of improvements (also Haya,

2010). Among other things, this researcher identified efforts to transition toward greater

resource sustainability and encouraging the formation of groups of volunteers who could

be activated to assist with creating and carrying out a community improvement plan.

Nabatchi and Mergel (2010) described a Wiki project initiated by the city of San Jose,

California that is designed to draw citizens into direct dialogue and invite their input on

city planning and development efforts. The researchers noted that because Wikis are

designed to be accessible even to those users are generally unfamiliar with more

sophisticated forms of Web programming and technology tools, this type of social media

approach has been an important and useful tool. Users simply enter the site through a

basic text editor window and they can register their thoughts and interact with others very

easily. In the case of the San Jose Wikiplanning effort, the city's goal was to enable

citizens to directly participate in transparent discussions and empower them to review

relevant documents in order to foster a sense of "joint ownership" in the city's planning

solutions (Nabatchi & Mergel, 2010, p. 82). Citizens could read and comment on reports

from city planners, various vendors, and view the comments of other citizens and know

that their own comments could be read and considered by these same parties.

Cities such as Palo Alto, CA, San Luis Obispo, CA, Alexandria, VA and

Loveland, CO, and Lake Oswego, OR, are among 50 leading government agencies that

carry out on-line civic engagement. These cities seek online feedback from their

constituents on topics such as "goals, budgets, quality of life and other big picture topics"

(Cohen, 2015). At federal level, the United States Census Bureau utilizes various tools of

social media including blogs, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube. These tools allow visitors to

join conversation, connect with data users, watch and share videos and sign up for email

updates on information related to census data. Some local governments are also now

beginning to employ social media tools in performing their collection of census data

(Clarkin, 2009). For example, one way to encourage citizens to register for the census

online is to provide information about how census data is used to determine funding

decisions and grants monies for development.   Reaching out to the public in this way,

and tying citizen participation to the opportunity to bring more monies into the

community and improve services can serve the two-fold purpose of meeting goals for census data collection and driving up citizen usage of local government web and social media presence.

Improving access to services. A number of cities and towns employ Twitter to connect residents with the local government's existing 311 service (Fleming, 2008; Guha, 2011; Montalbano, 2010; Moody & Carter, 2011). In addition, cities across the country are introducing a mobile phone application that connects to the city's 311 system, allowing citizens to register requests for service or ask questions of city administrators from the convenience of their mobile device. This development also enables real-time data captures of photos and video to be transmitted by citizens – such as trash dumping or graffiti – and quickly directed by the 311 managers to the appropriate departments. Having such an application can alleviate the burden on City employees who are tasked with managing the city's 311 system. (*An app for tha*t, 2011).

Another example of social media technology being used to achieve greater access and responsiveness is the SeeClickFix.com platform. This platform is based on application that originated in the United Kingdom and known there as fixmystreet.com. As the title suggests, this emerged as a networking platform for public administrators and citizens to work collaboratively to identify and rectify basic non-emergency problems, like potholes. The SeeClickFix.com platform allows these interactions to occur asynchronously and has been used by citizens in local communities employing the platform to report waste disposal issues, pest control problems, and government service delivery shortfalls. This platform, and others that are similar in design, frequently allow citizens to upload photos and tracking information so that local responders can locate and

address problems quickly and the responding agencies can, in turn, provide immediate

acknowledgment of complaints and keep citizens updated with progress reports. In

discussing the SeeClickFix platform, Communication Specialist in the City of Ann Arbor

Michigan Robert Kellar describes, "Before issues used to just disappear into the ether. If

you reported a pothole, no one ever told you it was fixed--- you'd report it into a black

hole. Now, we're reporting back to the folks (Smith, 2014)." In a similar development,

the city of Boston, Massachusetts is now using an iPhone application that links citizens to

city government called Citizens Connect and will send residents updates on their mobile

devices keeping them abreast of developments regarding a particular complaint or

concern they have submitted (Nabatchi & Mergel, 2010).

Access to government meetings and services can also be powerfully and

positively impacted through the use of social media. Streaming video or audio can allow

citizens to see or hear public discussions that they may not otherwise be able to attend

and these formats can be cached and archived on government websites (Caylor, 2010;

Dowd, 2010, 2011; Heaton, 2011; Porter, 2011; Smetanka, 2011; Smith, 2010).

Public Safety. One of the most frequent examples of local government use of

social media, after disaster and emergency response, is seen in the area of public safety

management. Within local government, public safety agencies such as the police

frequently maintain their own social media sites, which are becoming an important tool in

fighting crime and providing safer communities. Shark (2015) identifies three main areas

of public safety in which social media is being widely utilized by public safety agencies:

fighting crime, broadcasting safety information to the public, and encouraging citizens to

submit critical information, often using pictures or video taken with handheld devices.

Nabatchi and Mergel (2010) reported on the Virtual Ward Panels implemented in London, England, to build off the existing brick and mortar versions of the community safety ward panels in operation in neighborhoods throughout the city. Public meetings held and led by citizens were used to gather crime statistics and neighborhood safety concerns that were then passed on to the local police departments. The Westminster City Council launched the Virtual Ward Panels – a series of blogs and discussion forums that sought to engage citizen input through online surveys and voting systems – to supplement the public meetings and reach a larger group of citizens.

In addition to its leading emergency notification system based on social media tools, Philadelphia also employs its Integrated Public Warning System to provide crime and traffic alerts to citizens (Chavez et al., 2010). Local media sources reveal that in many communities, the police department or the sheriff's office is often the primary or sole user of social media formats to communicate with the citizens (Cumber, 2010; Juliano, 2010; Kingsley, 2010; Stephens, 2011). A number of these police and sheriff offices maintain Facebook pages to allow the public to contact them and comment on policies or interactions with the community while others are also employing Twitter to communicate (Gray, 2010; Guire, 2011; Kearns, 2010). Draper (2011) reported that for at least one police chief, the benefits for social media interaction were seen to be in the realm of encouraging community policing and making citizens watchdogs for criminal activities or other public safety hazards.

Informing and empowering citizens. Engaging citizens more directly in city planning and development efforts can be a meaningful precursor to achieving citizen buy-in, even when citizens may not fully agree with the local government's plans. The

evidence suggests that the simple perception of being heard can favorably dispose people to accepting or supporting efforts they might otherwise be inclined to resist. Alexander (2011) referenced best practices for the state of New Jersey as outlined by the Department of Community Affairs that encouraged local governments to post information regarding bidding and contracting processes, minutes and agendas for government meetings, proposed ordinances and public notices about relevant hearings, along with proposed and adopted budgets for at least three consecutive years including the current budget year. This level of transparency might be initially uncomfortable for some public managers to ponder but the advantages of making this information easily accessible to interested citizens outweighs the perceived disadvantages. Further, greater openness appears to be the direction in which most local governments are gradually moving and thus the expectation of transparency will continue to grow among citizens (*Brief: North Front Range . . .*, 2011; Caylor, 2010; DeFour, 2011).

Local governments that employ multilevel involvement tools can empower citizens by providing interactive systems that allow them to self-organize and support community improvement efforts. Some citizen groups have gotten out ahead of local government efforts and created their own social media networks designed to engage with town and city public administrators and create the potential for greater citizen input and influence (Bernstein, 2010; Haya, 2010).   Nabatchi and Mergel (2010) cited the social media network created by the Borough Council of Redbridge (www.redbridge.gov.uk/), a community in northeast London that entailed multiple opportunities for citizen engagement, ranging from basic news feeds and updates from the public administrators regarding community developments, to discussion and feedback forums that permit

citizens to communicate directly with their local councilors. Another local system in greater London – the Harringay Online (www.HarringayOnline.com) is a citizen led-site that connects with public administrators and services. Both examples illustrate how community building can occur through these tools fostering a "sense of place and social capital, empowering residents to take action to shape their neighborhood, and increasing the capacity to influence local decisions and circumstances through democratic processes," (Nabatchi & Mergel, 2010, p. 83). Both communities benefited from citizen-supported initiatives to address crime and to carry out other community improvement efforts such as cleanup and beautification of public spaces. When citizens actively participate in these efforts, local governments do not have to commit as many resources to these efforts and are able to build instead on these citizen-joined efforts. This benefit is of significant import at a time when local governments everywhere are finding themselves struggling with budgetary restrictions and reduced capacity to provide services.

Building Efficiency in Social Media Use

The newness of social media's presence in our lives – despite its ubiquity in our daily life – is reflected in the fact that there is little scholarship on the effects of social media's integration into government functions and what scholarship there is has been mixed in terms of what it captures. While many researchers have noted the potential benefits social media applications may bring to government transparency, citizen engagement, and collaboration, others have cautioned against relying too greatly on social media to produce open or good government practices simply through their implementation. Bryer (2010) presented research on the federal web portal,

www.regulations.gov, as illustrative of some of the negative features of social media and

citizen networking and the potential for misinformation to be propagated. An analysis of

public comments posted on this site revealed that the majority of the comments were not

relevant to a particular discussion, while others were flawed in their understanding of the

nature of the regulations, or the processes related to the regulations, for instance urging

other readers to vote "no" on a regulation where no vote was being taken. Many of the

comments were emotion-based, rather than grounded in demonstrable fact. Bryer further

noted that the ability to record these comments may have left some citizens believing

their comments would be used to inform decision-making and that, should the

government appear to proceed without making changes advocated by these citizens, these

individuals might be subject to resentment and come to mistrust the government's efforts

toward openness and transparency.

Another example of this potential difficulty in inviting citizen participation in the

working of government was the Obama Administration's use of IdeaScale technology to

create networking sites that encouraged citizens to comment on and help devise Open

Government Plans. The initiative has proven to be something of the proverbial albatross,

with transparency advocates charging the administration with being misleading in its

statements and not demonstrably interested in effecting real open government. Bryer

(2010) identified the source of the trouble as the administration's failure to outline

expectations for citizen participation; in neglecting to delineate the boundaries of citizen

input and influence and not explaining how the suggestions and feedback would be

considered and/or employed, the Open Government Plan initiative created false

expectations and, consequently, participating citizens reported frustration and

disappointment. The danger of this type of development is that citizens will become more disaffected in their interactions with government agencies, believing their voices are not heard and that it is not worth expending the effort. This is hardly the effect governments pursuing a genuinely democratic society want to engender but even if some authorities might see an advantage in discouraging high citizen participation so that they do not have to be answerable to others, there is invariably a backlash when citizens feel completely disenfranchised from their governments, as illustrated this spring and summer by the protest movements around the world and, in the case of the United Kingdom, widespread rioting.

Tips for Social Media Integration

Effective social media implementation in government interactions is realized when goals of the interactions are clearly articulated and expectations are identified and properly managed for both public administrators and citizens. Local governments must determine whether the intention of social media integration is intended simply to keep citizens informed, or whether the goal is to achieve greater collaboration and participation by consulting citizens and soliciting their views, empowering them to engage in community-building, and collaborating with them to achieve particular policy ends (McCarthy, 2011; Nabatchi & Mergel, 2010). Clarity is central to supporting efficiency in service and is likely to foster the most positive and beneficial relationships with the community (*Connecting through social media,* 2011).

One of the great advantages of the existing social media tools is that there is no need for local governments to try and reinvent the wheel – the most advanced technology tools and designs are readily available to them for free, and there is an existing user base

which local government can immediately tap into and build on from there. However, to realize platform integration efficiency, local governments need to link social media tools to each other and, where possible, to more static communications so as to reach older users who are not using social media and to those citizens who don't have access to mobile devices or cell phones. These segments of the population are likely to dwindle dramatically over the course of the next decade and represent a relatively short-term obstacle to social media's reach. Chavez et al. (2010) recommended that local governments use third-party applications, such as Hootsuite, to connect Facebook and Twitter tools so that notifications pass automatically between them and do not require public managers to duplicate entries on multiple platform sites. These researchers also recommended that local governments consider using free blog-hosting sites like Wordpress and Blogger, which can be seamlessly connected to Facebook and Twitter.

As evidenced by some of the local government case examples discussed earlier in this chapter, content from other sources such as federal agencies like FEMA and the National Weather Service, can be used effectively to supplement local messaging via social media. However, it is critical that local governments create their own content for social media communications – there is little incentive for citizens to access or subscribe to local government sites that don't provide content specific to the community and merely offer a regurgitation of information that can be found at larger and better known sites. Narrowcasting is the term for targeted messaging that is topic-sensitive and designed to provide current and specific messages to well-defined audiences. Chavez et al. (2010) describe examples of narrowcasting for the local governments that provided

snow alerts, flood warnings, and H1N1 prevention information among other specific local messages.

Another issue local governments must consider is how they will designate and empower specific government employees to manage social media integration and mediate communications with the public. This can be a sensitive area since interactions with citizens, particularly on issues of public safety and government planning, can be fraught with emotion and the rapid, reactive nature of social media exchanges coupled sometimes with user anonymity, can create problems that, in extreme instances, may have legal ramifications for the local government (Herbst & Lide, 2010; Institute for Local Government, 2010; Kingsley, 2010). In order to navigate these potentially dangerous waters, it is useful to devise social media policies guiding proper and effective interactions and that can provide structure for those government representatives designated to manage social media networking (Rosica, 2009; The Young Foundation, 2010). The ICMA provides examples of useful social media policies on its website and these can be referenced by local governments as they codify their own social media policies. Even in instances where these determinations are left to a public manager's discretion, existing social media policies for other local governments can provide a very useful tool for these managers to reference. Chavez et al. (2010) noted that some city governments have been effective in their practice of management discretion and noted these determinations were often made by small groups of individuals, for instance those working in the emergency management or communication offices of the government, and who were often previously tasked with citizen notification in other more traditional communication formats.

Evaluation and Accountability

The issue of accountability is a critical one for government agencies, particularly at this moment in American life when public mistrust of government work is one of the rallying characteristics of the increasingly influential Tea Party Movement and when critiques of the role of government have become highly politicized and the privatization of traditionally government services is increasing. Many researchers working in the field of public management and government services identify the need to demonstrate integrity in government practice and efficiency in service delivery. There is recognition that in order to effectively support democratic processes, government agencies, officials and employees must strengthen the ties and build relationships with the public in order to enable greater citizen participation. Yang and Holzer (2006) and Holzer and Kim (2008) focused on the part that performance measurement may play in identifying salient community needs and assessing the effectiveness of government in recognizing these issues and devising meaningful ways to address them.

Holzer and Kim (2008) noted that many public administration degree programs acknowledge the useful role that performance measurement can play and have targeted courses for considering performance measurement practices across various functions such as budgeting, strategic planning, transparency efforts and E-governance. In fact, the awareness of the value of performance measurement in government services is such that government representatives can locate information and training online and outside the scope of degreed programs. Among the challenges facing those who would seek to implement performance measurement in government processes is that there is still no clear core curriculum that has been endorsed by a majority of researchers, policy makers,

or practitioners. Holzer and Kim also noted that efforts to embark on performance measurement of government practices may tax already limited government funding and other resources. Thus, finding ways to realize accountability through performance measurement that is valid, reliable and cost-effective is a goal that public management researchers need to continue to work toward (McCarthy, 2011).

In the interim, public managers would do well to try and implement performance measurement strategies informed by social learning theory, engaging the participation of the government agencies and workers being assessed and the citizens who are providing assessment, and Yang and Holzer (2006) outlined some possibilities for government officials to consider.   They described the input-output model of evaluation as too limited to account for the complexity of this type of participatory governance and suggested that forms of assessment that dig deeper – such as policy, program, and organizational analyses – provide some direction for the evolution of performance assessment of government services. Riccucci (2001) offered a somewhat similar perspective when she noted that an insistence on purely quantitative analyses of effectiveness in public administration as the only meaningful way to assess performance is misguided. The nature of public administration lends itself in some aspects to empirical study while in other aspects scientific empiricism is unlikely to capture a true picture. She reported that, "the field would be more consonant with recognition that knowledge is derived from impressions both on the intellect and on the senses," (Riccucci, 2001, p. 174). Yang and Holzer also noted the challenges inherent in assessment efforts, starting with the matter of defining what is being assessed – for instance, jurisdictional assessment (which also differs from federal, state, to local jurisdictions) versus particular agency assessment –

and what manner of community factors are to be taken into account in performing the assessment. Yang and Holzer clearly support the idea of engaging citizens directly in the performance measurement process but they also caution that this participatory focus can present some pitfalls, for instance whether the citizenry is informed enough on particular aspects of government work to provide useful input. They suggested that this may be a more significant issue at the level of assessment of national government efforts whereas at the level of local government, Yang and Holzer stated that citizens are "good evaluators of performance" because they are directly impacted by the work of the local government and can see the effects of government at very concentrated and basic level (Yang & Holzer, 2006, p. 120).

The obstacle to citizen engagement is not the civilians themselves but often the politicians and public managers' perceptions of the public and lack of interest in encouraging their greater involvement. Yang and Holzer (2006) observed that some bureaucrats will reference their use of periodic public surveys as their all-inclusive effort to engage the public and they contended that such surveys are not sufficient to the task of encouraging meaningful participation. Rather, citizens should be regarded as occupying multiple roles ranging from consumers of government services to owners and stakeholders of these same services, and all the attendant roles that apply across these functions. Consequently, effective performance measurement would ideally engage citizens' "[p]articipation, interaction, and communication," (Yang & Holzer, 2006, p. 123). This process may be particularly feasible in the case of local governments where many citizens have direct experience of local agencies and employees and will have formed opinions and concerns related to those interactions which can be harnessed by

responsive government representatives and used to streamline and improve service delivery with the presumed effects of improving citizen faith in, and support for, local government's efforts.

Demonstrating Efficiency

As applications for social media in local government continue to expand at a rapid rate, the issue of evaluating the efficiency and impacts of particular social media uses becomes increasingly important. This is especially important as previous studies provided only limited evidence of a positive impact of e-government initiatives on citizen engagement (Mergel, 2013). Shark (2010a) observed that most websites and social media applications have built-in analytics, enabling public managers to review real-time data on citizen access and use. However, research indicates that social media metrics and analytics are not widely in use. For example, Shark (2012) reports on a 2010 study by the Public Technology Institute (2010) which revealed very low usage of social media metrics among organizations generally, with the main reasons including lack of time, perceived complexity or lack of training and low interest among organizational leaders. One of the challenges in this area is how to capture the more qualitative aspects of social media usage, relating to the key goal of improved citizen engagement. In cases where the public managers did review metrics information, studies indicate that this is generally limited to the number of page views and the duration of visits and other basic tracking functions that revealed little to nothing about the effectiveness of the town's or city's online presence (Mergel, 2013). Shark (2010a) stated that this type of limited reference to the metrics of citizen use of local government websites represented a missed efficiency opportunity. He noted that the most frequently used social media applications all provide

useful metrics that can help local officials determine what types of issues are capturing

local citizens' attention and they can identify those citizens who might be engaged to

advocate for particular government services or to participate in supporting the

implementation of government efforts in the community – such as "Facebook fans" and

supportive "Tweeters." Mobile media networks that allow citizens to forward real-time

photos, video and, text reports of emergencies (such as road accidents or hazards) to the

proper authorities can enhance local agency response. Like Holzer and Kim (2008) and

Yang and Holzer (2006), Shark noted that social media can provide efficiencies through

citizen engagement while building public trust through participatory and responsive

governance and that public managers should remain open to social media's potential for

effecting more open communication and regular interactions with the public. Shark

(2015) reports on a global rating system for e-government, developed by Rutgers

University School of Public Affairs and Administration, which focuses on the categories

of security/privacy, usability, content, service and citizen and social engagement. This

type of tool might usefully be adapted to the quantitative and qualitative measurement of

social media performance.

Critical to the efficiency of social media applications is a judicious understanding

of social media's uses. Shark (2010a) noted that it is imperative that social media tools

be selected and employed with an eye to specific objectives in engaging the public to

ensure that the correct application is being used to communicate.   As with the

introduction of any new system or reform effort, it is critical that clear identification of

goals be articulated (Riccucci et al., 2004). To this end, Shark stated public managers

should seek to assess "exposure, engagement, influence and action" in utilizing social

media to further the business of local government (Shark, 2010a, p. 51). He also advocated that public managers look beyond the basic metric information of the number of page hits to more sophisticated metrics analyses evaluating the popularity of particular government services and offerings and whether differences in citizens' online and offline behaviors can be discerned using the social media metrics data. Another useful way to consider social media efficiency is to track rates of use and areas of interest for new users, particularly those who emerge as potential advocates through tweeting or liking on Facebook. In addition to considering the cost effectiveness of social media efforts (e.g., through cost per unique visitor metrics), it is important to define specific values so impact can be identified and tracked through user comments and recommendations. The most salient use of social media is to increase citizen participation, to improve responsiveness to citizen concerns, and to create greater government transparency and accountability. Social media can facilitate these efforts and can do so often via cost-effective communications.

Close attention must also be paid to how information gathered through social media networks will be processed, managed, and archived. While social media can greatly enhance and streamline communications, their effective use in government outreach to citizens necessitates care and attention. Public administrators and employees must be designated to maintain and monitor input and feedback and organize information so that neither citizen nor government users are overwhelmed or receive misdirected or improper communications. Public managers must determine what type of "back office" structures they must put in place to support their governments' social media efforts: "they must devise protocols and procedures for collecting, processing, synthesizing, and

evaluating information, and otherwise translating and transforming citizen comments in ways that are easily digestible and useful for public managers, elected officials, and other audiences," (Nabatchi & Mergel, 2010, p. 85). These systems can help public managers navigate the potential information overload that may come from engaging citizen participation across a variety of issues and, where applicable, multiple tools. It also enables them to keep the dialogue and discussions on track, establishing terms of use that can ensure the interactions and networking remains respectful, relevant, and constructive so that all members of the community can perform well and feel their voices are heard, even when policy decisions or other government determinations may not be in line with their desired approach.

Budgeting and Funding Considerations

One of the great advantages of many of the existing social media tools is that they are free to access and that many citizens are already comfortable users of the social media and this percentage will only continue to grow. Local governments can capitalize on the well-developed and popular systems already in place and shape their citizen engagement strategies knowing what features of communication and interaction are available to them so that they can identify what aspects and levels of networking they would like to utilize (Gibson, 2010). There is no reason to reinvent the wheel since many examples of effective integration of social media tools have been identified, some of which have been noted in this chapter. Local governments thus have access to the most advanced social media tools without having to make an investment in that sort of infrastructure and can reference best practices identified for towns and cities that have exemplary citizen engagement programs (Chavez et al., 2010). Some states use existing staff to develop

their apps, while others partner with private companies or piggyback on work done by other states (Maynard, 2013).

The investment in social media occurs at the management and data processing levels. As Chavez et al. (2010) observed, effective management of social media tools is time-intensive and requires employees skilled enough to use the tools effectively, for instance communicating by tweets requires a different writing style than one would use on a blog or a website. Local governments should perform a cost-benefit analysis to ascertain whether the ongoing resource commitment to creating, maintaining and managing social media communications is feasible given their budgetary requirements.

In order to realize efficiency in social media use, it is necessary to analyze incoming data and consider its effect on the governance efforts to determine where social media tools are succeeding and where improvements could be realized. These efforts also require a commitment of managerial talent and will entail some cost and these are factors that should be taken into account when considering social media integration plans.

In discussing the somewhat lagging status of New Jersey local governments' web and social media presences, Alexander (2011) offered a general overview of the cost calculations entailed in performing website improvements, including links to social media applications including video, photos, microblogging, and social networking:

> A typical website investment, along with the appropriate maintenance, will pay for itself in 12 to 24 months. Saying yes to the Department of Community Affairs' seven questions checklist for websites could, at a minimum, save a municipality an additional 1 percent of their State Aid in 2011. Based on private industry models, a municipality should set aside .2

percent of their budget to build their Internet capabilities. With this level

of investment, your website can become a key municipal service.

(Alexander, 2011, p. 4).

Summary

Social media tools hold great promise for advancing local governments'

interactions with citizens through ease of access, greater transparency, streamlining of

communication, and improvement of government service delivery (Kang & Gearhart,

2010; Krueathep, 2006; Schorr & Stevens, 2011) It is imperative that efficiencies be

determined and best practices identified so that local governments do not squander

precious and limited resources in pursuit of a good idea that they may not be prepared yet

to implement (Bryer, 2010; Shark, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c).

There is compelling evidence that social media tools can be successfully used to

facilitate effective communications and responses in emergency and disaster situations

(Alford, 2013, Avery et al., 2010; Becerra &Xia, 2014; Belle, 2013; Chavez et al., 2010;

Gilgoff & Lee, 2013; (Kingsley, 2010; Stephens, 2011). The literature also indicates that

social media tools can be used by local governments to encourage citizen engagement

and action toward community-building efforts (Burroughs, 2014; Caylor, 2010; Clarke,

2013; Cole, 2009; Haya, 2010; Heaton, 2011; Porter, 2011; Smith, 2010).   Several of the

researchers noted in this discussion argued that governments that engage with citizens

online in real-time formats and through other interactive social media efforts have been

shown to have citizens who are more engaged in their communities (Nabatchi & Mergel,

2010) and are more trusting of government officials and supportive of their efforts

(Institute for Local Government, 2010; Kang & Gearhart, 2010; Kaplan-Lieserson, 2011;

Kingsley, 2010). "Governments need to do whatever we can to communicate, and that

means you go where the people are (Shaull, Lynette, 2009)." As digital strategist Qui

Diaz expresses "The phrase if you build it, they will come' definitely does not apply to

social media (Leighninger, IBM Center)

Because the use of social media tools in building citizen engagement and

participation in local government is a continual development in the way governments do

business, there is no clear consensus as to how best to assess social media's effectiveness

and determine where improvements to efficiencies should be made (Holzer & Kim, 2008;

Riccucci, 2011; Yang & Holzer, 2006).

CHAPTER 3:METHODS

The purpose of this study is to examine the impacts of social media at the local government level on enabling citizen engagement and increasing government transparency, based on a sample of local government organizations from across the United States which are renowned for their effectiveness in social media. The intended audiences are local governments and academics who seek to understand the opportunities and challenges brought about with social media and how its utilization can enhance citizen engagement and government transparency. This chapter will describe the research design, the sampling procedure, the data collection methods and instruments, the methods of analysis and the limitations of the study.

Research Design

The study consists of qualitative research conducted with representatives of 18 local government organizations from across the United States. It is based on semi-structured telephone interviews and an online self-completion survey, designed to generate data that will answer the following research questions:

1. How do local governments use social media to enable citizen engagement?

2. How do local governments use social media to improve transparency?

3. How are the effects of social media tools on citizen engagement and local government transparency measured?

4. What obstacles do local governments encounter when using social media tools?

5. What are the main benefits and critical success factors in the use of social media by local government organizations?

Sample

The sampling frame included local governments throughout the fifty states, recognized for their best practices in social media. This list was compiled through a review of the literature, public sector award programs, and the assistance of relevant Associations including the Public Technology Institute (PTI), National Association of Government Web Professionals (NAGW), American Society for Public Administrators (ASPA), the International City and County Management Association (ICMA), GovLoop (GovLoop.com), and Government Technology (Govtech.com). Once the sampling frame had been established, the identified communities were placed into four federal regions as identified in the US Census Bureau (See Appendix1). A stratified random sample of eighteen communities, representing each of the four federal regions, was then drawn.

The individual research participants consist of Public Managers, Elected Officials, and other Local Government employees from each of the selected communities. In the case of most of the communities, one representative took part in the study; two representatives participated from two of the communities. The individuals were all required to meet the following criteria to be eligible for participation: (a) at least three months of experience working with social media in local government and, (b) currently holding a decision-making position in their organization.

Initial contact was made by telephone or through email to determine whether the identified individuals met participation criteria and whether they were interested and willing to participate in the study. During this introductory contact, if the person indicated their willingness to participate, a convenient time for an interview was

arranged, and they were also emailed a link to the online self-completion survey. Prior to their interview, a consent letter was emailed to each participant, containing a statement of the purpose of the interview, a brief description of the research study, and, the degree of confidentiality assured to them. In addition, permission to request a follow-up interview if needed was sought from each participant. This eliminated the need for additional signed permission, should follow-up be needed. Participants were also informed that they were free to discontinue participation in the study at any time.

Based on a potential need for follow-up, there could be no guarantee to participants of anonymity. However, they were guaranteed confidentiality, in the sense of reassurance that their identities would not be revealed. Organizations are not named in the study but identified by a unique letter, and by region and by size of community based on population estimates.

Data Collection Procedures and Instruments

Two main methods of data collection were used in the study: in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted via the telephone and an online self-completion survey, administered using the SurveyMonkey.com software program.

The semi-structured interview is one of the most popular methods in qualitative research that seeks "to discover, explain, and generate ideas/theories about the phenomenon under investigation; (and) to understand and explain social patterns (the "How" questions) (Hesse-Biber & Leavey 2006)." Because of its flexibility, the researcher has the ability to vary the order and wording of the questions (Power et al 2010), provide clarification to any ambiguities in terminology that may arise, and in some cases ask additional questions to probe for more information from respondents where

needed. This flexibility in the research method of data collection allows for further exploration into an issue that may not have been considered in the original research design. The open nature of the questions allows for new concepts to emerge which in turn assists in collecting of rich data (Hand, 2003, Dearnley, 2005).

A list of unstructured interview questions was designed (Appendix B) covering broad categories of social media tools, transparency and citizen engagement discussed in the literature review. These guiding questions were used during the interviews with additional follow-up or probing questions as necessary. The open nature of the questions was intended to encourage depth and vitality and allow new concepts to emerge, something that may not be achieved through self-administered methods of data collection. Through the open-ended questions, participants were encouraged to "talk" about their experiences a type of "contemporary storytelling" (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998; McNamaram, 1999) providing "rich data" (Ryan et al 2009, Hollaway & Wheeler 2010).

An additional benefit of collecting data using semi-structured telephone interviews is that these do not impose any limitations on the length of the response and respondents are free to talk and may provide more information then if they had to write their responses. Self-administered instruments have the potential for possible omission of valuable information due to a respondent not wanting to write a lengthy answer, their inability to adequately express their thoughts in writing, or uncertainty of terminology. Further, whereas other methods may be more time consuming and require multiple follow-up requesting participant responses or clarification, the telephone interview allows for clarification or probing for additional on the spot, avoiding the need for follow ups.

Finally, in contrast with face-to-face interviews, which often limit the participation of potential respondents, the telephone interviews afforded the researcher with access to the widely dispersed geographic population required for this study.

The online self-completion survey was designed to collect more factual information about the participating organizations' use of social media and specific social media tools in advance of the telephone interview. This enabled the researcher to make more efficient use of time and also provided useful background information for the interviews.

The use of a pilot study to test data collection instruments is often recommended (Tersine & Riggs, 1976). Pre-testing the questions helps to eliminate any ambiguities or misleading wordings and to ensure the questions asked are pertinent to the research problem. The pre-test participants in this research consisted of a number of individuals identified as experts in the area of social media and local government. Upon recruitment, participants were be briefed on the purpose of the study, and made aware that their participation in the pilot was solely for the purpose of instrument development. Feedback from the pilot study was used to develop and refine the final versions of the data collection instruments. The pilot participants were not included in the sample for the study and no content from the pre-test has been used in the data analysis.

Analysis and Reporting

After collection, the raw research data needs to be analyzed and interpreted to give it meaning. This includes transcribing the verbal interview into text, synthesizing, categorizing and summarizing the coded data, verifying the data is reliable and valid and finally, reporting the results. A computer software program, was utilized to assist in the

qualitative content analysis of the textual data from the telephone interviews. A process of thematic analysis was used, in which key themes and sub-themes relevant to the research questions of the study were derived inductively from the interview data. These were used to structure the presentation of results, with verbatim quotes from the interviews used to preserve the real-life experiences of the research participants.

The quantitative data from the self-completion survey were used to generate graphical representations of the reported social media practices, using Excel; these were then integrated with the qualitative findings in the results chapter.

Methodological Limitations

Potential bias and inaccuracies were risks in this study, resulting from the possibility that respondents would embellish their answers or provide false information in their desire to convey a favorable image of their organization's social media practices. In an effort to minimize this "social desirability", interviewees were told that the researcher was interested in factual information and honest views, and that these would help other communities in their pursuit of implementing social media.

Maintaining the interest and involvement of participants is a critical task for researchers. (Mitchell, 1991; Story et al., 2001). Attrition is a common problem, and high rates of attrition can compromise the validity of the results. Constructing surveys so that respondents are intrigued to continue and ensuring that all participants feel their expertise is being utilized fairly are recommended strategies to ensure continued participation (Hasson et al., 2000). Self-administered surveys run the risk of the respondent dropping out in the middle of completing the survey. In contrast, the advantages of telephone interviews include the rapport that can be established between

the interviewer and interviewee, with respondents being less likely to drop out midway. It is important participants understand the goal of the study and are made aware participation will allow them to contribute valuable judgments in the field. By providing this information, the present study achieved a high rate of participation in both the telephone and self-completion surveys. The following chapter presents the results of the study.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This chapter sets out the findings of a qualitative study of local government

organizations from across the United States, to investigate the impact of social media on

enabling citizen engagement and increasing government transparency. Data collection

methods consisted of a self-completion questionnaire survey, telephone interviews and a

review of social media-related documents provided by participants. A sample frame of

local governments recognized for their best practices in social media was compiled based

on published literature and information provided by relevant national and international

Associations. Stratified random sampling was used to generate a sample of 18 local

government organizations representing four main regions of the U.S.: Northeast,

Midwest, South and West. The research participants consisted of a nominated manager,

elected official or other local government employee within each of the selected

communities, who hold a decision-making role relating to social media. Two

organizations were each represented by two individuals, resulting in a total of 20

individual research participants representing 18 organizations.

The chapter sets out the findings of the research by key themes and sub-themes

relevant to the purpose of the study and the research questions. The themes and sub-

themes were derived using an inductive process of thematic analysis of the research data,

and have been integrated with the results of the semi-structured self-completion survey

data. In order to convey most accurately the real-life experiences of utilizing social media

in the local government context from the perspectives of those directly involved, the

findings are illustrated throughout with verbatim quotes from the interviews. To preserve

the confidentiality of organizations and respondents, the local governments are referred to

in the results only by a unique identifying letter and by region and size of community

governed.

Participants

The sample consisted of 18 local government organizations representing four

regions of the United States. The communities covered range in population size from

4,418 to 8,400,000. They represent a variety of local government forms, the majority

having a Mayor/Council or a Council/Manager governance structure. Table 1 sets out the

distribution of the sample by region and size of community covered, with the unique

letter identifiers used in reporting the findings.

Table 1

Participating Organizations and Representatives

Unique Identifier	Region	Size
Community A	Northeast	Small
Community B	Northeast	Medium
Community C	Northeast	Large
Community D	Midwest	Medium
Community E	Midwest	Small
Community F	Midwest	Small
Community G	Midwest	Large
Community H	South	Large
Community I	South	Small
Community J	South	Medium
Community K	South	Small
Community L	South	Large
Community M	West	Medium
Community N	West	Medium
Community O	West	Large
Community P	West	Small
Community Q	West	Large
Community R	West	Small

*Small = <100K, Medium = 101 – 450K, Large = >450K. Based on U.S. Census Bureau
population estimates, 2013 or 2014.

Twenty individual participants took part in the study on behalf of their employing

organizations, with two communities (A and C) being represented by two separate

individuals. In the case of Community A, just one individual took part in a telephone interview but two completed the online survey. In the case of Community C, both individuals took part in a telephone interview and completed the online survey. One community representative (G) participated in an interview but did not complete the online survey, so the online survey results reported in this chapter are based on 19 respondents representing 17 communities.

All the individual research participants hold senior level responsibility for social media within the organization, with the majority holding communications-related positions. The types of social media roles held include day to day management of the organization's social media sites, developing social media strategy, senior management of all staff dealing with social media and/or communications, and providing support to all departments using social media across the organization. Eighty-four percent in total (n=16) had been in their social media role for at least a year; 47% (n=9) had been in this role for three years or more (Figure 1).
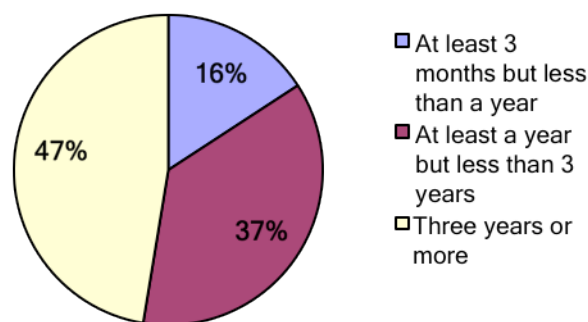
Figure 1. Length of time in social media role (n=19)

The participating organizations were found to differ in terms of the extent to which social media is used across the organization. In just under two thirds of the participating organizations (63%), all or most departments or all or most of those with direct citizen contact were reported to be using social media; in the remainder of the sample, only some departments were reported to be using social media usage (Figure 2).
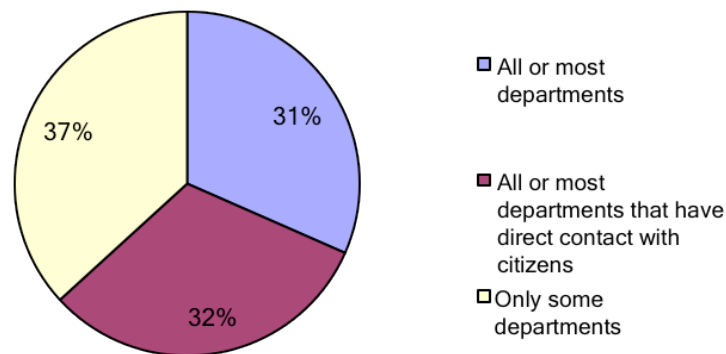

Figure 2. Social media usage by departments (n=19)

The respondents were also asked to indicate their organization's overall level of presence in social media, based on the following definitions:

- Low – we have a social media presence in which most of our messaging is one-way informing, educating, providing updates and notices by pushing information out to the citizen.

- Medium - we have a social media presence in which interaction is bidirectional and information is both pushed out to our citizens as well as pulled in through the form of feedback.

- High - we have a social media presence in which citizens are encouraged to become co-producers of content and partners in the decision and policy-making process.

Most of the participants (68%, n=13) of all respondents rated their organization as having a "medium" presence in social media, two (11%) said the organization has a "low" level of presence and four (21%) that it has a "high" level of presence in which citizens are encouraged to be co-producers of content and partners in the decision and policy-making process (Figure 3).
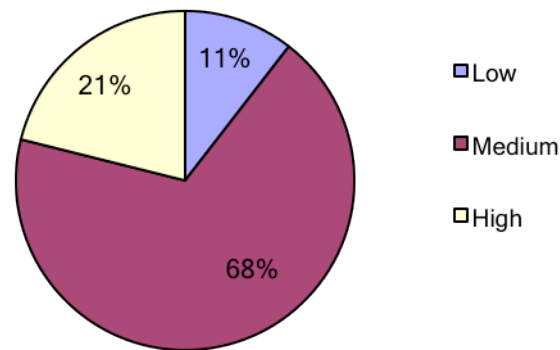
Figure 3. Stage of organizational presence in social media (n=19)

Overall, therefore, these findings confirm that the majority of participating organizations in this study are active users of social media, with the vast majority using this for two-way communications with citizens. The following section presents the research findings regarding the factors influencing decisions to use social media and the ways in which social media activity is managed across the organizations.

Key Themes and Sub-Themes

Implementation and Development of Social Media

Factors influencing the use of social media. In the interviews, the research participants were first asked to explain what had motivated their organization's decision to use social media tools.

Five respondents acknowledged that the use of social media was linked to the

organizational mission or goals, in a broad sense such as promoting transparency and

creating relationships with citizens and businesses, or as a tool to help achieve

departmental goals. None of the respondents indicated that the decision to use social

media tools had been the result of a formal mandate.

> Social media tied to the city's philosophy as a transparent government that reflects community values and interests. (Community M)

> One of our Council goals is to identify, nurture and build upon the qualities of Community F that attract, retain, create a sense of pride and bond residents and businesses to the community. Social media is one of those outlets that helps us create a bond. (Community F)

> Each agency and group has specific missions and social media are a tool to further those along. (Community C)

The strategic goal of engaging with citizens was highlighted by one of the

respondents as one of the main reasons for their social media program.

> In government or any other industry, when you are busy doing your job, you forget to tell what you're doing. In the public sector, since you are using people's resources, they want to know, they want a break down of what you are doing. If there is no trust they will not have an idea of where the resources are going. It is beneficial to be proactive and straightforward. If one person is asking a question or has a problem, then others are out there wondering the same thing too … Civic engagement is in one of (our) core strategic efforts. (Community E)

In four organizations, the personalities or interests of key organizational players

were identified as having had a significant influence on the adoption of social media, e.g.:

> The City manager is very progressive and likes to try new things, always wanting to be on the cutting edge. (Community O)

> The City Manager and Mayor's favorite words include "co-creation" and "innovation". (Community N)

When identifying the specific motivations for using social media, the factor most

commonly cited by participants was the need to align the activities of local government

with the needs and characteristics of citizens, many of which are now commonly using

social media as a dominant form of communications. Three of the participants stressed

the importance of adapting to new methods of communication if governmental

organizations are to continue operating effectively:

> Look at it as fundamental capabilities. It is surprising to see on the public sector side with agencies who don't see value or struggle with deciding to utilize social media. A community that does not use social media has a gaping hole. (Community P)

> Social media changed everything. Now, if you have a question you can post it on a variety of social media outlets. If the City isn't using that outlet, the question goes unanswered, or worse answered incorrectly. We felt it was important to be where the conversation is taking place instead of sitting on the outside looking in. (Community F)

Others highlighted particular characteristics of the communities they serve, which

elevate the need for the use of social media. In particular, having a high proportion of

young people, entrepreneurs, or a population that is already highly engaged in social

media usage or using smartphones were identified by several of the respondents as key

factors driving the adoption of social media tools in their organization.

> Community D is a University town with a huge number of college students and a tech savvy community. This population uses social media tools every single day as their main form of communication. (Community D)

> (Community M) is a high tech, university community that is heavily invested in collaboration with an entrepreneurial spirit. Social media is a mainstay of residents' daily information gathering. (Community M)

> (Community C) is devoted to meeting (community needs) where they are when it comes down to delivering services and information. These days (residents) are on social media. Additionally, most low-income (residents) are more likely to have a smart phone than a computer, so it makes even more sense. (Community C)

For at least two of the communities, an incident such as a snowstorm had been a

trigger increasing the organization's use of social media, either as a communications tool

providing emergency information, or because more citizens were using social media at

that time and the organization became more aware of the potential value of engaging

them using these channels.

> Looking back at the numbers we saw the spike and momentum shift happened
> with the 2013 snowstorm. Everyone was trapped inside with nothing to do, so
> they went on social media. While on social media they saw government presence.
> (Community K)

Social media management models. Three main models emerged from the

interview material relating to the management of social media within organizations:

Fully centralized. In this model, one department (usually the Office or

Department of Communications) has primary responsibility for maintaining the

organization's social media channels and liaises with individual departments to obtain

content and refer issues or questions to the relevant officer or team. The following quotes

identifies the perceived benefits to this structure among those organizations using it,

which include the ability to generate more followers, to post more consistently and to

generate more reliable data:

> The social media manager does all the monitoring so when stuff comes in they
> send it to the correct department, operations crew or human resources … The City
> finds having a centralized structure to their social media works best for them.
> People want to follow the city and not follow multiple pages. They have a good
> relationship with all the departments who provides them with content regularly.
> Data is the biggest champion to support centralization. With data we can show
> departments how engaged they are. For example the City may have 100k people
> following per week where a single department may only have 1k. (Community O)

> The Assistant City Manager is not a huge fan of decentralization of social media
> because it dilutes the power of social media. The concern is there are some
> departments that have their own page, yet do not support it ... It is just not a
> priority for them. (Community R)

Partially decentralized. In this model, individual departments such as the Fire,

Police or Parks Departments manage their own social media channels but with the

oversight and guidance of an organizational social media manager. This can spread the

workload of social media management, while ensuring that consistency and best practice

in the use of social media can be achieved. In this model, a city's main social media site

usually has links to other departmental sites and vice versa. When some departments in

the organization do not have their own social media channels, this model also enables the

organization to ensure that public comments or questions can be efficiently directed to

the right person or area of the organization and that they are followed up as necessary.

> Each department has an individual who is responsible for their specific
> Department's social media sites. The person responsible can be the marketing
> person, public relations person, or even a department manager. The City Social
> Media Coordinator is also responsible for the City's public relations, internal
> communications and social media. Most of her time is spent on social media. She
> spends time training and educating departments on using the different tools.
> Recently she started including in her quarterly reports tips and tricks and useful
> articles. The goal is to start meeting quarterly, if not quarterly hopefully twice a
> year to talk about trends and issues in social media. (Community N)

> It sometimes is a challenge to promote everything from other Departments on the
> city's main pages. However they do try and promote some of the different
> department's information on the main city pages. Departments such as Parks and
> Recreation will promote their individual social media and at the bottom of the
> page will have the links to the City's main social media site. (Community D)

> Not all departments have a link. The Communication and Marketing Director
> monitors what is going on and will post a response or tell the citizen the right
> person and bring it to their attention. (Community I)

> We allow a certain amount of freedom within a scope and then have a system to
> monitor it. We don't want to be too restrictive. The Mayor has had a general
> policy to let people have natural conversations. The Mayor feels the people have
> a right to voice their opinions. (Community L)

> *Decentralized.* Finally, a minority of the participating organizations reported a

more decentralized social media management structure, in which departments manage

their own channels and there is little or no overall co-ordination. In the case of

Community H, this approach is being used due to resource constraints and it is

acknowledged that greater co-ordination would be beneficial. Some degree of overall management is apparent, however, in the allocation of specific social media channels to different divisions.

> The City does not have a social media coordinator. It is something that has been talked about and recognized the need to address, but as with any public organization there are limited resources. What we have done in our department is to assign the appropriate division to the appropriate social channel … The City's main Twitter account is monitored by the media relation team, the primary channel station manager for television oversees YouTube and the Communication team oversees Facebook. (Community H)

Community A also uses a relatively decentralized approach, with the same channels such as Facebook being used concurrently by different divisions of the City.

> We went to website decentralized a lot so about 50 people can update it. Different divisions in town have their own Facebook page. Sometimes it is sporadic. (Community A)

Improvement over time. It was clear that at least for some of the organizations, social media activity had evolved gradually or organically over time, and only later had a more systematic social media strategy or policy been implemented which reflected a conscious decision to use social media for particular organizational objectives.

> At the time the Social Media Manager was brought in, it was all about building accounts. The City had about 4-5 Facebook pages and there was no social media policy. (Community O)

> Social media has evolved in the (Community J) almost organically and people just got on board up until this point … There has been a lot of activity both good and bad. (Community J)

A good practice example in this area is provide by Community R, which had conducted a survey to take the views of citizens into account when assessing the need for a social media strategy. The findings had provided support for the strategy, and demonstrated the need for a full time staff position with responsibility for social media.

> Around 2014 the City hit a wall in the area of communication between the city and its residents. Some old timers in the community are not very open and skeptical to social media and prefer public hearings. Whereas other residents wanted to move more towards electronic communication and social media … Out of this the citizen engagement position was approved. (Community R)

When the decision to adopt a more systematic approach to social media was reached, several of the organizations had created formal roles or teams with specific responsibility for managing social media; in one case this was reported to have resulted in streamlining of the overall social media activity of the organization:

> When he (social media manager) came into this position, he saw how many Facebook pages were within the City and after reviewing, closed down 15 because they were not being nourished. (Community G)

Other organizations appear to be at an earlier stage of development of their social media activities, and are only now acknowledging the need to streamline or better co-ordinate these.

> In the past the social media accounts were free for all and there were some accounts that were being created and many were not even touched, or did not have the best content. Now, the City is looking at streamlining the process and information and educating the social media coordinators. (Community N)

> The City is trying to figure out how to streamline process of their social media. To do this they recognize there needs to be more intentionality. (Community J)

This section has set out the research findings regarding the participating organizations' overall level of presence in social media, the ways this is structured across the organization and its evolution over time, to provide background and context for the more detailed results. The following section sets out the findings relating to the use of social media for engaging with citizens and increasing transparency of local government.

The Use of Social Media for Engagement and Transparency

In order to address the main purpose of the study, the survey and interviews investigated in particular the use of social media to a) increase local government transparency, by providing information about activities or policies, and b) motivate citizens to become more engaged in local government. The findings are discussed in this section.

One of the objectives was to examine whether local government organizations are mainly using social media for the purpose of increasing citizen engagement with government, or for disseminating information about government policies and activities. Using social media for information dissemination is important but not sufficient for increasing transparency of local government, so the study also explored the specific types of communications that social media is used for and the types of information disseminated in order to assess the extent to which transparency is being enhanced through social media activities.

Main purpose of social media usage. When completing the online survey, the respondents were asked to indicate which of the following statements best describes the main purpose of social media use in their organization:

- Social media is mainly used as a communication tool for *sending* information *out* to the community

- Social media is mainly used as an *engagement tool to develop dialogue* with the community – both *sending and receiving* information.

As shown in Figure 4, almost two thirds (63%) of respondents reported that social media is mainly used by their organizations as a tool for engaging citizens, in the sense of

both sending and receiving information. The remainder (37%) indicated that their

organization mainly uses social media as a one-way communication tool.
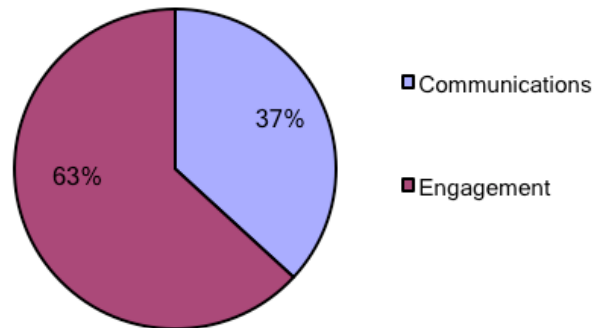
Figure 4. Main purpose of social media use (n=19)

Table 2 shows the distribution of responses to this question (column three), by

organization and by level of overall presence in social media as reported earlier.

Table 2

Participating Organizations – Level of Presence in Social Media

Organization	Social media presence	Main use
Northeast		
Community A	Low	Communication
Community B	Medium	Communication
Community C*	High	Communication
Community C*	Medium	Engagement
Midwest		
Community D	Medium	Engagement
Community E	Medium	Engagement
Community F	High	Engagement
Community G	Medium	Engagement
South		
Community H	Medium	Communication
Community I	Medium	Communication
Community J	Medium	Engagement

|		
Community K	High	Engagement
Community L	Medium	Engagement
West		
Community M	Medium	Communication
Community N	Medium	Engagement
Community O	Medium	Engagement
Community P	Medium	Engagement
Community Q	Medium	Engagement
Community R	High	Engagement

*The two participants from Community C gave different responses

The following sections present the detailed findings relating to the use of social media as an engagement tool and as a communication tool.

Social media as an engagement tool. First, to provide context for the research findings regarding the use of social media for citizen engagement, the survey respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which their organization is engaged with citizens, in general terms. In the questionnaire, overall levels or forms of engagement with the organization were defined as follows:

- Infrequent or one-time uses (ask a question, file a complaint, access forms, register or sign up for an event etc.)

- Regular or frequent – there is some dialogue with citizens

- Collaborative – citizens are fully engaged through extensive dialogue

The distribution of responses regarding overall levels of engagement with citizens is shown in Figure 5.
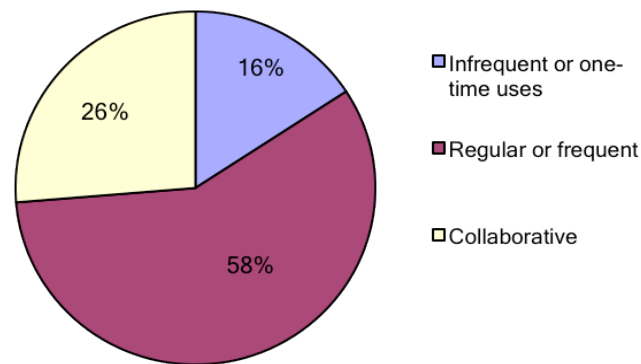
Figure 5. Distribution of sample by overall form of citizen engagement (n=19)

More than half of all respondents (58%) indicated that their organization has some dialogue with citizens, but that there are not yet high levels of citizen engagement. Around a quarter (26%) indicated that they have a collaborative level of engagement, in which citizens are fully engaged with local government through extensive dialogue. Sixteen per cent indicated that there is still a low level of engagement between the organization and local citizens, with this being infrequent or confined to one-time events such as asking a question or signing up for a event.

Figure 6 combines the data from Figures 4 and 5 to show the distribution of respondents by reported main use of social media and the reported general level of engagement of citizens with their organization.
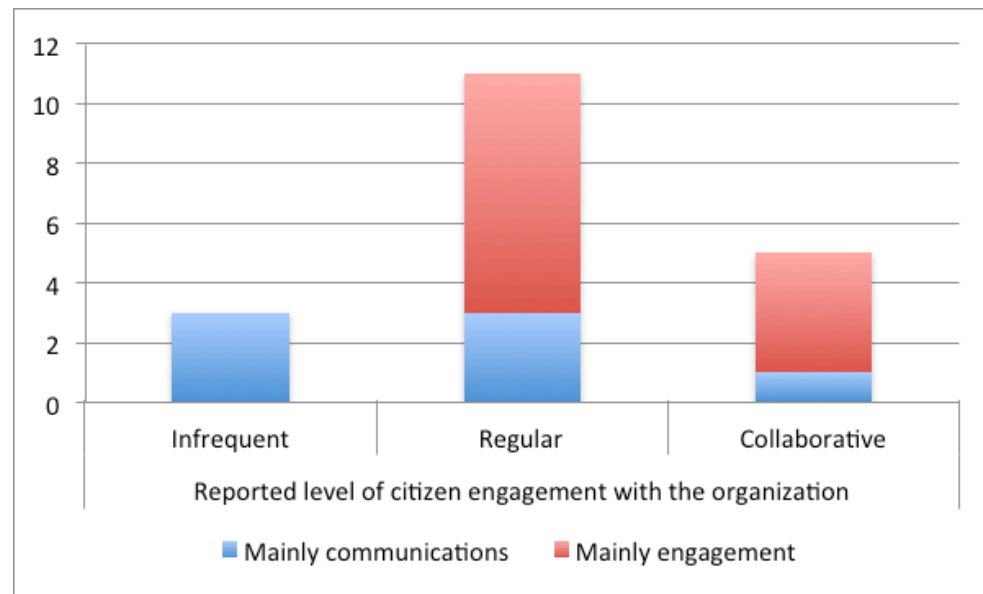
Figure 6. Main use of social media by overall level of citizen engagement (n=19)

The results show that in the five organizations reported to have high or "collaborative" forms of social media usage, this is mainly used to facilitate engagement, with four out of five respondents giving this response. Collaborative levels of engagement and the use of social media to promote this were reported by Community D, Community K, Community E and Community R.

In the eleven organizations reporting a medium presence on social media, the results were more mixed. Eight of the respondents said that social media is mainly used for citizen engagement purposes in their organizations, while the remaining three indicated that social media is mainly used just for one-way communications. This suggests that there is scope for using social media to a greater extent to support greater dialogue and engagement with citizens in these organizations. Finally, for the three respondents reporting low levels of presence on social media, the findings shows that this is mainly being used for one-way communications.

Defining and achieving citizen engagement. The telephone interviews were used

to explore the specific ways in which the participating organizations use social media for

the purpose of engaging with citizens. The respondents also provided insights into the

ways in which engagement is conceptualized by their organizations, with this spanning

various levels and forms of activity involving listening and responding to citizen

comments and concerns.

> Our definition of engagement: "creating and maintaining two-way communication. This conversation can take place as even posting a photo and having a conversation. " The issue is to at least provide an acknowledgement, letting them know we hear what you are saying with even a response such as thanks for visiting the city." (Community J)

> Citizen engagement is the ability to listen and respond on any platform, whether it is in person or through a device. (Community F)

> The City defines citizen engagement as having citizen reaching out to you and you responding back, a dialogue going and shows you are responsive and you will get back to them. (Community K)

> Community G defines engagement as a two way street. Engagement is not just telling things, it is listening too. Engagement allows for an education opportunity. (Community G)

When asked how their organizations use social media to increase engagement

with citizens, the respondents' answers fell broadly into three categories:

To promote in-person forms of engagement. This involves the use of social media

to invite people to comment on plans or policies, or to encourage them to attend public

meetings or participate in surveys or other community initiatives. Five respondents

specifically referred to these types of usage of social media, e.g.

> We call on people to comment on plans coming before Council, or call on them to testify in support of a policy we're bringing to City Council. (Community Q)

City seeks a lot of citizen input mostly through surveys, and community meetings. The City uses social media to promote these surveys and encourage citizens to come out to the meetings. (Community N)

For the budget process the city holds a hearing in the spring ... A few years ago the City changed the process because they wanted engagement at front end of the process. The City held a series of 2-3 hours citizen workshops explaining how the budget works … In these workshops participants are given play money and they have to allocate the money … This helps citizens realize what the City goes through, the process. The workshops are promoted and signups are spread on social media. (Community G)

To stimulate on-line discussion to understand citizen views and concerns. This involves the use of social media to invite people to comment on plans or policies. Four respondents specifically referred to the use of social media in this way, e.g.:

The City motives engagement by asking questions. They will Tweet looking for people to submit. Call to action, create something or check out the latest data set. Most of this is done via Twitter and Facebook. (Community C)

The City will pose issues on Facebook and Next door to stimulate good authentic conversations and share ideas. Conversations and sharing ideas such as what intersections in the town need improvement. People like that because they can offer their opinion. (Community R)

To build community relationships through "fun" events and initiatives: Several of the respondents cited creative social media initiatives that were used to help build a sense of community, or to increase their social media presence among citizens:

A fun example was during last football season the University of (Community O), reached out to the Mayor recommending the City proclaim "Wear Red Day" when they are playing their arch rivals. The Mayor loved it, and it got a lot of media attention. (Community O)

The City continues to try and increase their social media presence; they do so in creative ways such as the Twitter war. The challenge was between five communities to see which one could reach 2,014 Twitter followers by the end of 2014. (Community R)

To mobilize the community in emergency or other situations. Examples were given of the use of social media to seek volunteers for involvement in emergency initiatives, or as a means of contacting government in such situations.

> We deal with lake effect snow where some of the City gets packed full snow and different parts of the city get little if any. Last year there was one part of the City that got hammered ... On the other side of (Community B) citizens were raking leaves … Through Facebook we were looking for volunteers to help. They too couldn't drive but could walk in with shovels and help those we knew were stuck. They were calling in with 311 but social media was faster. (Community B)

> A specific example of how social media has been beneficial to the community was when the City experienced a gas line break near city hall requiring an evacuation of the building … Calls were directed to the water treatment plant. Unfortunately, the call forwarding system was not working. This was found from a post on the City's Facebook page informing the City the call forwarding was not working. Having a platform like Facebook allowed for the City to be alerted within minutes a mechanism they had in place was not working properly and they were able to correct the problem immediately. (Community D)

Tools used for achieving citizen engagement. Based on the self-completion survey results, one of the main differences between organizations with "collaborative" levels of engagement and "regular" levels of engagement appears to be that the former use social media as just one tool among many for promoting and facilitating engagement. In the online survey, respondents were asked to specify which of a number of listed methods are used in citizen engagement by their organization. Figure 7 shows the methods in "frequent use" by organizations, categorized by overall level of citizen engagement.
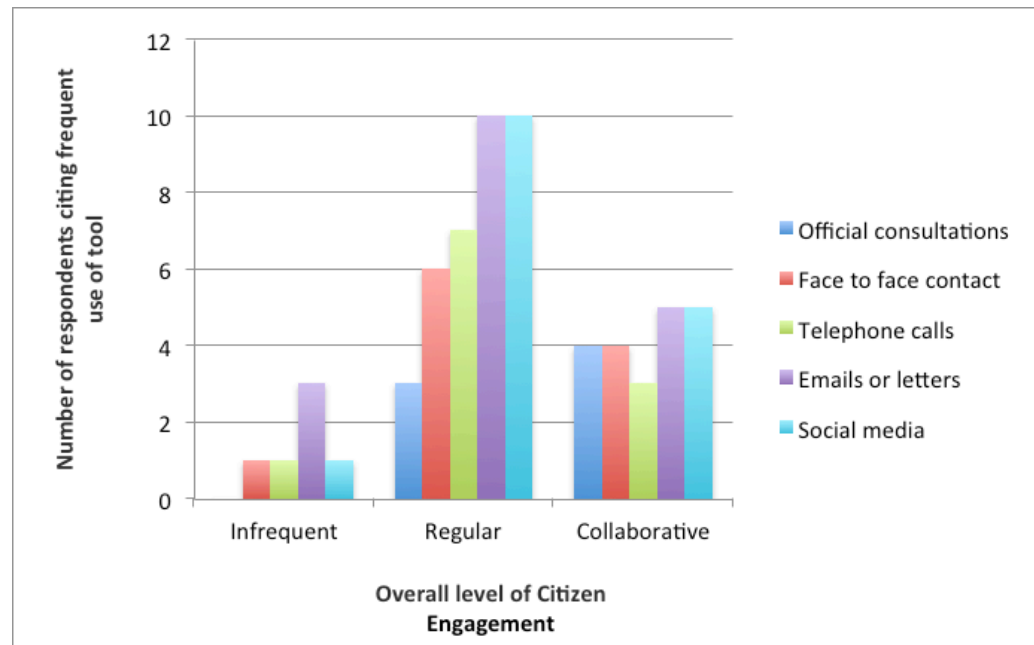
Figure 7. Engagement tools used, by overall level of citizen engagement (n=19)

This shows that among all organizations reporting "collaborative" levels of engagement, social media and emails/letters are in frequent use, but four out of five also frequently use official consultations and face-to-face contact for citizen engagement purposes. In contrast, organizations reporting "regular or frequent" levels of engagement rely more heavily on social media and emails/letters compared with other methods, and only a minority in this category report using official consultations, though more than half use face to face contact. For those reporting infrequent levels of citizen engagement, only one uses social media frequently, while all use emails or letters frequently to engage citizens.

Based on information provided in telephone interviews, Facebook and Twitter are the main social media tools used by the participating organizations for the purpose of engaging citizens. More detailed findings about the use of these tools are provided later in the chapter. Four of the respondents indicated that their organizations also have

dedicated platforms for engagement purposes, which are used for purposes such as

citizen surveys and forum discussions on particular issues.

> When we have an active issue and we would like to get feedback we direct
> them through the social media to SPEAKUP (the City's dedicated platform).
> The City launched SPEAKUP, which is an open channel for citizens, to
> provide ideas or feedback. (Community H)
>
> We use an online engagement tool open city hall and have a feature we built
> an online commenter. Every council item is on it and people can comment on
> it. (Community P)
>
> The City has been recognized for their A2 open city hall. One of the reasons
> this tool has proved to be so useful is it maps responses by ward and outside
> the community (Community D)
>
> We have a citizen engagement platform, which we use as our "digital town
> hall." Various city departments have used the platform to solicit feedback
> from residents about issues and engage in a two-way dialog online.
> (Community M)

Citizens' use of social media: To provide a fuller picture of how social media is

used for engagement between citizens and local governments, the online survey asked

respondents to indicate how frequently citizens use social media for various specified

purposes. The results are presented in Figure 8.
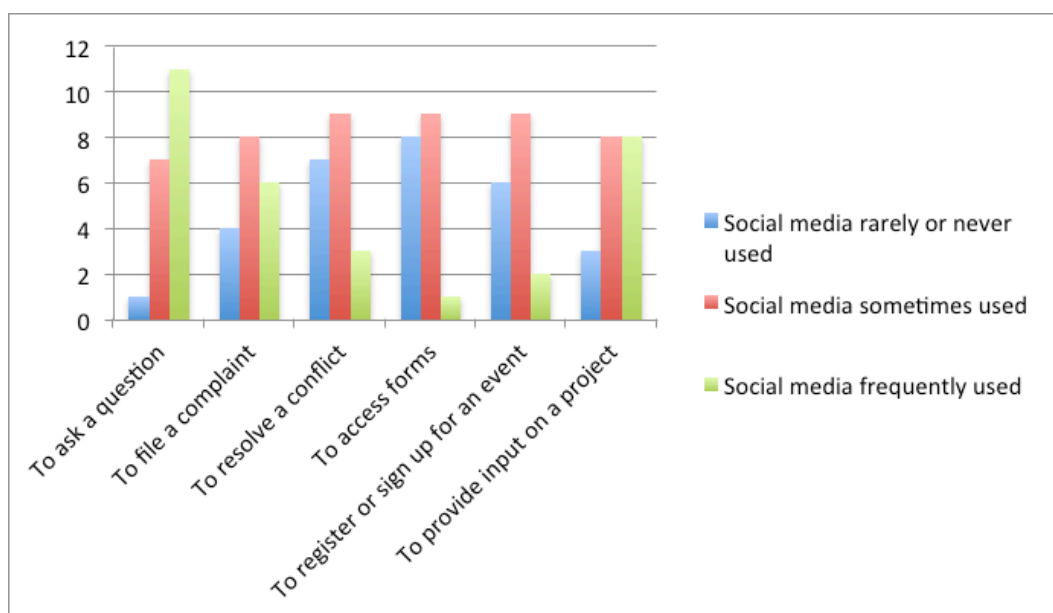
Figure 8. Use of social media for various purposes by citizens (n=18)

This shows that, across the sample as a whole, social media is most frequently used to ask questions of local government and to provide input on projects. It is less likely to be frequently used for the purpose of solving conflict, accessing forms or filing complaints. This suggests that social media is being used by citizens for genuine forms of engagement with government rather than more superficial forms of contact or those which are more likely to require in-person interaction such as conflict resolution.

Informing policy and planning. The interview data provided various examples of the ways in which these local governments have used information generated from citizen engagement through social media to inform planning and policy development. For example:

> Trending comments are shared with elected officials and departments to inform them of public feedback prior to making policy decisions and to adjust messaging when necessary. (Community M)

> There had been some discussion of bike share as a transportation option, but no formal action. The activity on Speak Up has helped provide the Transportation Department with additional grassroots "evidence" to help the Council move forward a decision on a pilot program. (Community H)

> Last year the City Council wanted feedback on the way they meet and the committee system. The City brought all their resources to table. They televised, telephoned out to all, used poll everywhere so folks could vote on whatever was being talked about. We even publicized a text number, and twitter hash tags. Community engagement folks moderated and tracked the discussions. Each tool was used to expand the accessibility of the engagement. (Community H)

> A resident asked a question (on Nextdoor) about access for residents to Community Fk, our Fiber network. This question was taken to our Chief Information Officer. We decided it would be great to hear more about this from our residents. A public meeting took place last week with another one schedule this week. A standing room only crowd discussed the need for high-speed connectivity for home businesses in Community F. Based on this

meeting we are looking at options to possibly make this a reality. (Community F)

(Community R) held a successful campaign sharing real facts about transportation and how we get from here to there. The City wanted to look at pedestrian related deaths and what areas need sidewalks. From this campaign, 1700 people were reached and they received 49 comments. (Community R)

Social Media as a Communication Tool. In around a third of the participating organizations, social media is mainly (though not exclusively) used for one-way communication of information to the community. Along with the engagement initiatives discussed above, the use of social media for communicating information to the community is an important way of increasing the transparency of local government as well as improving its services to citizens. The interview data indicated that the types of information disseminated through social media by these local government organizations falls into three main categories:

Governance information and activities. This form of information dissemination is directly concerned with increasing the transparency of local government, and the interviews indicated that several of the participating organizations are making maximum use of the potential of social media in this area. Best practice examples demonstrated by the participants include streaming council meetings live on the City website; providing real time updates on social media sites during meetings; and posting information about policy initiatives on the sites.

Local cable company records all meetings, the links are on the website. We then send out tweets about "Hey, watch us on TV!" (Community A)

We share information about upcoming public meetings and citizen engagement opportunities. We also promote every City Council meeting and provide links to agendas and live video streams of meetings. We promote individual boards and commissions meetings when they deal with issues of

broad community interest. City policies, particularly those that are new or timely, also are shared on our social media channels. (Community M)

The City uses social media to promote public meetings and all opportunities to interact with the City. For example we stream our Council meetings live. In advance we post on Facebook, Twitter and eNews that residents can tune in live. (Community F)

One of the services folks come to appreciate is we use Twitter to provide real time updates during council meetings with local reports. Providing this real time update allows folks to watch as decisions are made on the real issue, they are able to know right away. (Community H)

General community and event information. Though more directly concerned with enhancing the delivery of government services to citizens, the use of social media to provide basic community information also helps increase the transparency of the range of services and facilities provided by local governments. This covers a wide range of information types, from information on how to access government services to updates on major projects and initiatives.

Posting is not all about the sexy stuff it's the vegetables, the basics. (Community A)

The City will use social media to disseminate information (about) something big like a utility project or a city event. (Community P)

The City tries to cross promote and encourage people to provide their input at all eighteen special events that are held a year including city picnics. (Community E)

Emergency or essential information. Many examples were provided of the use of social media to disseminate emergency information, such as hazardous weather updates, to the community. The benefits of social media for this purpose include the ability to provide real-time information and to target individuals living in affected areas and provide information tailored to their needs.

Flood trends allowed the city to respond to community requests for additional press conferences carried on city platforms rather than relying on network news that was covering the region. It also was used to provide additional information on road closures and resources available to victims. (Community M)

Street crews have access to the City social media and are able to update on roadwork during snowstorms for example. (Community N)

At one point 86% of residents had construction in front of their homes. The Village needed to communicate to the people in the masses and they were able to do this electronically to everyone on the construction route keeping them informed and updated. (Community E)

Tools and strategies used in social media communications. For communications as well as citizen engagement initiatives, the interviews indicated that these local governments typically employ a range of social media tools and channels, including for example Facebook and Twitter, an organizational website, and other tools such as eNewsletters and citizen engagement platforms. The findings of the interviews and online survey regarding specific social media tools and channels used and the reasons for their selection are presented in the following section.

Usage of Social Media Tools

This section presents the research findings relating to the types of social media tools used by the local government organizations, and the reasons for their choice of particular tools.

All social media tools used. In the online survey, participants were asked to indicate which of a list of social media tools are currently used by their organizations, and which three are utilized the most. The results are shown in Figures 9 and 10 respectively.
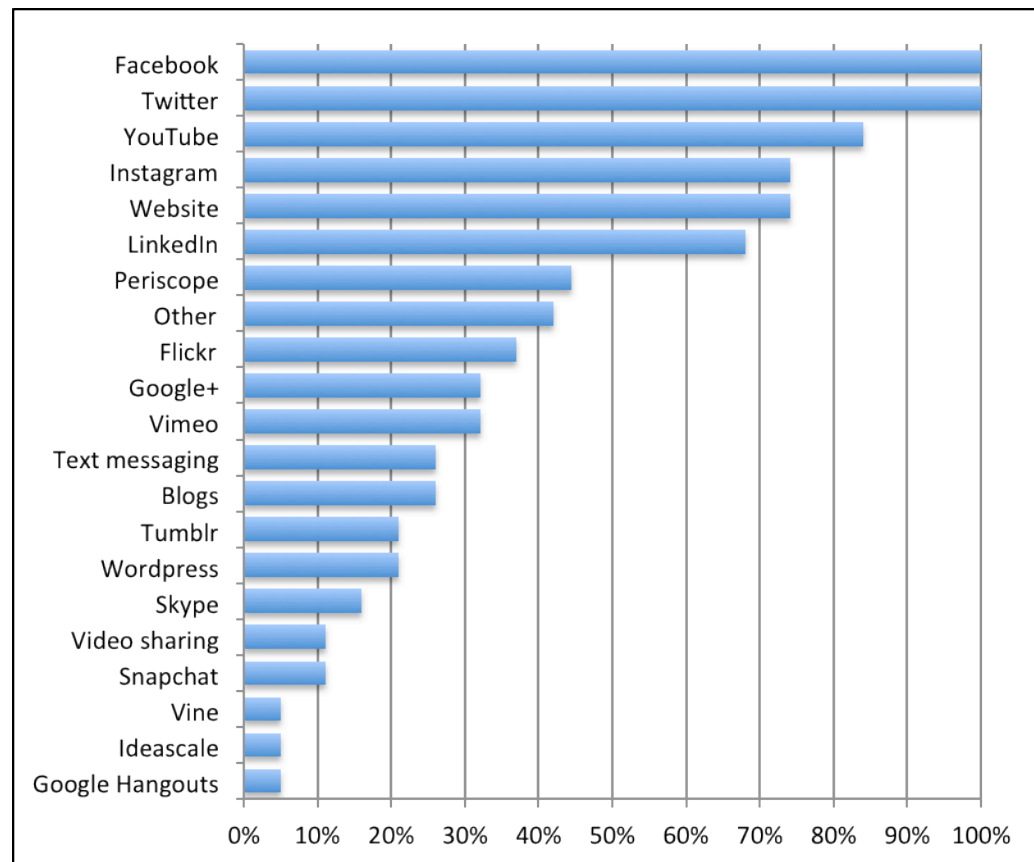
Figure 9. Percentage of sample using various social media tools (n=19)

Overall, the results demonstrate that Facebook and Twitter are the social tools most used by these local government organizations, largely reflecting the popularity and widespread use of these tools in the population more generally. Without exception, all of the respondents reported at least some use of both Facebook and Twitter (Figure 9), and more than 90% in each case included these among the three social media tools they use the most (Figure 10).

However, Figure 9 reveals that the organizations by no means rely just on these two channels; a wide range of social media tools is being used by the participating organizations. After Facebook and Twitter, relatively high percentages of respondents overall reported that their organization uses YouTube (84%), Instagram (n= 74%), the

organizational website (74%), and LinkedIn (68%) (Figure 9). Additional tools reported

to be in use by several respondents, but not among the top three most used, included

Periscope, Flickr and Google+. Others mentioned by individual respondents as being

used by their organizations to some extent included Nextdoor, Pinterest, Snapchat and

Whatsapp.
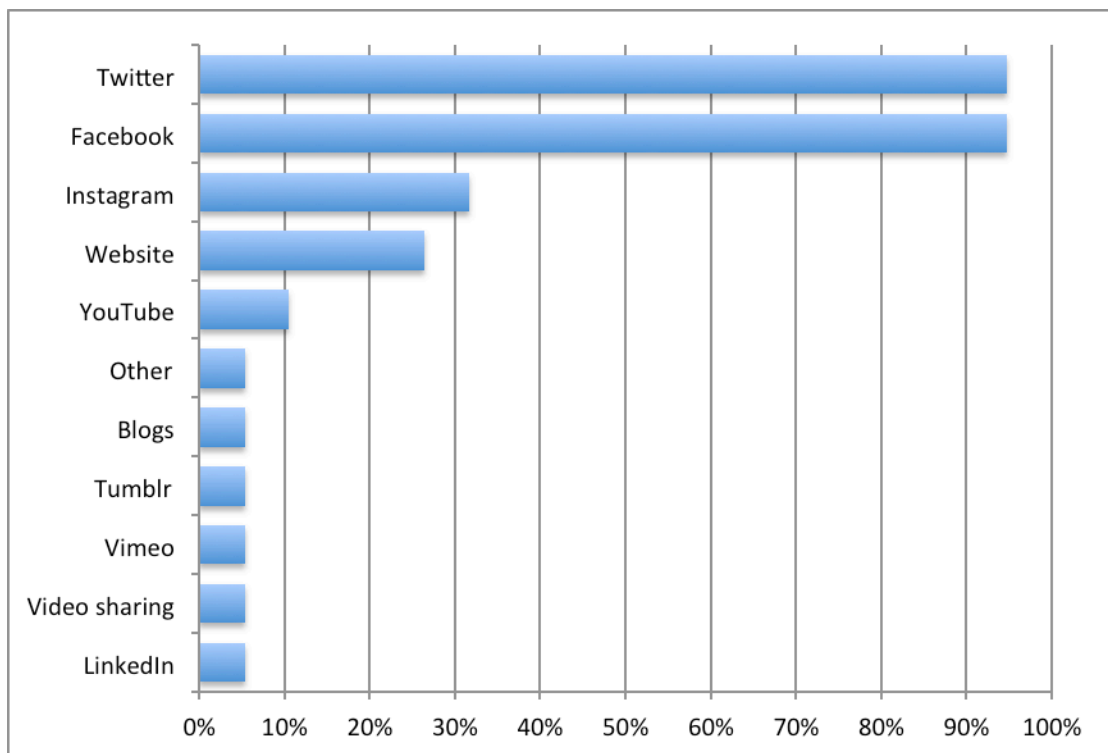
Figure 10. Social media tools most used (% of sample citing tool in top three) (n=19)

Apart from Facebook and Twitter, however, no other tools were cited by more

than a third of respondents as being among their three most commonly used. Instagram

was the third most commonly cited as a high usage tool, with around a third including

this in their top three most commonly used tools, followed by the organizational website

and YouTube (Figure 10). Other social media tools cited by individual respondents as

being in their top three most used included LinkedIn, Tumblr, Blogs, video sharing and Vimeo.

The interviews as well as the survey data indicated that it is common practice for several channels to be used concurrently in the social media programs. In many of the organizations, a range of different social media channels are being used to achieve different purposes and to reach more citizens, often with linkages and cross-promotion between them and from other media to help drive traffic to the sites.

> Just because information is on one platform does not mean everyone has seen it. We need to use multiple platforms. (Community G)

> We actively work to cross-promote our social media channels, so content from one platform is regularly referenced or linked to on another. We also include prominent links to our social media channels on our website as well as in many of our popular electronic newsletters. Our government TV station also frequently promotes our social media channels. (Community M)

> Several of the respondents described a particular reliance on Twitter and

Facebook, along with a video or photo-sharing site:

> The three top platforms the City uses are Facebook, Twitter and Youtube. In our mind these are default tools that everyone should have, the core social media tools. (Community P)

> Twitter, Facebook and Vimeo are important but Instagram is our rising star. (Community F)

> The Village is very active on Facebook and Twitter and is moving toward using Instagram more. (Community E)

Factors influencing the choice of social media tools. The telephone interviews explored the reasons for the choice of specific social media tools by these organizations; the answers fell broadly into four categories:

Popularity of tools within the community. The extent of usage of particular social media channels by citizens, both locally and nationally, was cited as an influence on their

uptake by the organization by a third of respondents (n=6). This was a commonly cited

reason for adopting Facebook in particular, though the adoption of Twitter and Instagram

had also been influenced in this way in some organizations.

> The City's decision to adopt these platforms was based on frequency of popularity by the Community. (Community D)

> The popularity of a social media platform, both nationally and locally, is the main driving factor. (Community M)

> Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are most widely used by (residents), so most frequently used …. to reach constituents … Factors included (residents') interest and existing level of engagement. (Community Q).

> ***Fit for purpose or audience.*** A third of respondents (n=6) indicated that their

choice of social media tools was determined by the audience they are aiming to reach, or

by the type of information being communicated. This was clearly one of the main reasons

why a variety of different social media tools were being used in many of the participating

organizations.

> You have to throw the resources where people are expecting the information. People saving animals are not on Twitter as much as Facebook where they are big on sharing photos. (Community H)

> The tools used by (Community G) depend on what information they are trying to communicate. The City tries to be strategic. (Community G)

> We don't need a blog to accomplish the goal of keeping constituents informed … we need quick hits to supplement news coverage. (Community Q)

> The City uses a number of different social media channels to reach various audiences. (Community J)

> Twitter meets the needs of Community R's younger population. (Community R)

> ***Based on a systematic analysis.*** Two of the participants described systematic

methods for determining which social media tools to adopt, which including analyzing

user demographics, the role of the tool within the overall social media strategy and the

expected time and resource requirements involved in the use of the tool.

> We take into account user demographics on the platform, how the platform might compliment or duplicate existing channels; workflow and time commitment to support the platform; expected return on investment of time and resources to use the platform; and how the platform fits into our overall social media and communication plans. We have a formal process in place to pilot new social media platforms and evaluate their effectiveness. (Community M)

> We have a social media policy and we have a business needs process which is a business justification plan that has to be completed before the launching of any new properties. … Through the business needs process piece, it can be deemed the tool may not meet what the intended need is. An example was the City Manger said they needed a Twitter account. After discussion and being told the importance if you have an account it is a commitment and requires tweets everyday, they do not have the twitter account. (Community H)

> ***Ease of implementation and use.*** Three participants cited the ease or cost of

implementation and use of particular tools as a factor influencing their use by the

organization, or conversely as factors hindering their adoption:

> Tumblr is easy out of box solution not a lot to get up and running. From a Department perspective it doesn't cost anything and looks good. (Community C)

> Vimeo is our preferred platform due to its customizable interface and ad-free service. (Community M)

> Vimeo has been our online video host of choice. It allows us the quality and flexibility we need to post videos. (Community F)

> Social media tools won't be useful unless someone can monitor them. It is important to choose a few well, rather then all. Nextdoor is one example the City does not have staff or resources to actively monitor or post. (Community D)

Main uses and perceived benefits of most popular tools.

The interviews explored the ways in which Facebook and Twitter are used by the

participants, and what their perceived benefits are, and the findings are presented below:

Facebook. Overall, the results indicated that all the participating organizations are

using Facebook at least to some extent, reflecting the widespread use of this channel

within the community. One respondent emphasized that there is an expectation that

government organizations will now have a Facebook page; another mentioned that

Facebook generally gets more "hits" than other forms of social media and is therefore an

important tool for reaching the community. Facebook is generally used concurrently with

Twitter for complementary purposes: several of the respondents mentioned that while

Twitter is used for real-time, instantaneous communication and updates, Facebook tends

to be used more for "multimedia content" such as photos and videos, and for sharing

news and information at a high level.

> Utilizing the strengths of each platform, we primarily use Twitter to share
> breaking news and information. Our Facebook page is more focused on
> multimedia-related content, building a sense of community and high-level city
> news and information. (Community M)

> Primarily photos and videos drive the City's Facebook page. Normally historical
> base or downtown stuff, or opening of a place photos are up there to view.
> (Community O)

> Facebook is more resident based and allows us to: update residents; share photos
> and videos; easily engage in conversation (Community F)

An example of the multi-media benefits of using Facebook to support government

services was provided by the a respondent who highlighted the benefits of using photos

rather than just text in their leaf collection service information:

> Our leaf collection service is a good example of how Facebook works for us. We
> used to give detailed text descriptions of how residents should rake their leaves to
> the side of the curb but never into the street. No one read this. Using Facebook we
> can show photos of how residents can 'rake 'em right' (Community F)

The success of Facebook as part of a local government social media strategy,

however, relies on the ability and willingness of the organization to post content on a

regular basis and interact with citizens on the page. The Community O respondent indicated that their City posts on Facebook up to three times daily, for example. In contrast, the Community C respondent reported that success in using Facebook has been limited due to difficulties in creating content.

> (Community C) hasn't found much success with Facebook. They may have a post once a month but the content is really not there – they struggle with creating content. (Community C)

> Several of the respondents observed that different social media sites tend to be used by different demographic groups, and that this is one consideration in their selection for use. In the case of Facebook, the Community Q respondent stated that, in contrast to Twitter, "Facebook engages a more critical crowd, but is useful for monitoring dissent".

> *Twitter.* As noted above, Twitter is generally used to share up-to-the-minute news and to generate real-time responses and comments from citizens. It is widely used by the participating organizations to disseminate information on breaking news and event updates, or essential or emergency information, and is favored by respondents for the ability it offers them to interact on a personal level with citizens.

> We primarily use Twitter to share breaking news and information. (Community

M)

> The City has found Twitter to be a really good platform because it enables back and forth engagement, providing of quick answers, and it is an easy tool for people. (Community G)

> Twitter is driven by real time information and is used for the City to share a lot of event information … Twitter has at least 10 up to even 20 posts per day. (Community O)

> A good example of how Twitter has worked for us is when we opened the latest roundabout in the City. Tweeting to almost 7,000 followers at the time, using less than 140 characters we reached over 8,751 people in less than 30 minutes when we were retweeted by our followers. (Community F)

Performance and Sustainability

One of the objectives of the research was to explore the ways in which the organizations measure the effects of their social media tools on organizational transparency and citizen engagement. In the telephone interviews, the research participants were therefore asked whether their organization either formally or informally monitors or measures its social media performance and if so to describe how this is done and how the findings are used by the organization. The findings are presented in the following sub-sections. The section concludes by presenting the research findings relating to the overall perceived benefits and the challenges involved in the use of social media at local government level. These findings are relevant to an understanding of the overall impacts of social media on local government as well as the potential risks or difficulties involved and how these can be managed or minimized.

Performance measurement and monitoring methods. More than half (n=11) of all the participants indicated that their organizations carry out some monitoring or measurement of social media performance. Three reported that they do not currently carry out much formal monitoring and measurement of their social media activity, largely due to resource constraints.

> The biggest challenge of monitoring metrics is the time required to track, record and analyze the data. (Community M)

> The City does not have staff or resources to actively monitor or post. (Community D)

> The tool is there and available for all departments, but not all have been trained up on it or they do not realize the value or importance of it. It is both a training and capacity issue. (Community H)

Although the majority (11) did report some monitoring and measurement of social

media activity, in the main this relies on the use of the analytic tools built into sites such

as Facebook and Twitter, and focuses on the measurement of performance against basic

quantitative metrics such as numbers of views or numbers of "likes".

> Community G uses analytic tools that come with each social media platform.
> (Community G)

> The City uses a number of metrics to measure. We measure the number of users
> and number of transactions. (Community P).

> The City utilizes Facebook insight tools, Twitter insight tools and YouTube
> analytics for tracking. Measures are put into a gigantic spreadsheet. (Community
> N)

> The office does monitor use and feedback. They had monitored the times and
> dates that are most successful for posting, target goals for impressions, for likes
> for posts etc. (Community L)

These are typically used to compile dashboards and other regular reports that are

used in planning future social media activity, in general with the objective of increasing

the reach of social media and identifying the types of posts that are most popular with

users.

> The Communications Director … keeps track of likes/comments on Facebook and
> Instagram posts, and retweets/engagement on tweets. We compile an informal
> report for the weekly staff meeting … We keep track of what constituents are
> concerned about, supportive of, etc. (Community Q)

> The goal is to meet weekly benchmarks for message reach, so low-performing
> content is typically paired with highly engaging content on any given day to
> achieve this goal. We aim, for example, to reach at least 10,000 people with our
> Facebook posts each week; this helps ensure our followers are growing and our
> content is appearing to a wide range of users … We recently shared annual
> metrics about our social media performance across our organization, including
> with City Council. The Communication Department felt this would help those
> throughout our organization better understand how we're using social media and
> the growth we're experiencing on these platforms. (Community M)

The top Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Nextdoor posts are identified weekly in a "Social Media Snapshot" report. Each month, detailed statistics for each social media network are recorded in a "Traditional, Digital & Social Media Dashboard" report. (Community F)

Measurements are presented to Council on progress of social media. They use metrics that show rate of growth and the amount of interaction. (Community P)

Two communities acknowledged the need to measure more qualitative indicators of performance, such as engagement and reactions to posts, and reported that they were using or developing methods to do so.

In the past, the City has used raw "follow/like" metrics in their performance measures. That's something the City is trying to move away from in the coming year. The City is experimenting with the new tools provided in the Archive Social contract. The challenge is that those tools are pretty limited, and the more robust tools are simply out of the range of most governments. (Community H)

One of the biggest goals of the City of Community N is engagement. In the past when measuring was new, the City was just looking at impressions and followers which doesn't tell enough story. For example looking at impressions it could be the same person looking at the post five times. There is a push from leadership who wanted more concrete numbers around things. The City moved from just looking at impressions and likes, to measuring reach and consumption. Now when looking at reaches, the City can know exactly the number of people seeing the post. Just from this, the City has noticed that on average most people see something twice. Consumption shows how many times clicked, liked, comments made etc. Consumption can compare reach and consumption and see how many reached and interacted with the post. (Community N)

Overall, the results suggest that local governments are not typically measuring the performance of social media on citizen engagement and on organizational transparency, even though these are explicit or implicit organizational objectives of the use of social media.

Sustainability measures. The research participants were also asked about any measures that had been put in place to ensure continued operation of their organization's social media efforts. The majority of responses related to staffing: seven of the

respondents indicated that their community now has a dedicated social media manager or

team, and stressed the importance of this for ensuring the sustainability of their social

media activities.

> The City council realized the need to have someone on staff to put out
> information. This is where the social media manager came in. (Community G)

> Having a Social Media Manager took the pressure off employees, now all they
> had to do was just provide information. (Community O)

One participant explained that their community has a high-level committee to oversee

and guide its social media activity and expressed the view that this level of oversight is

crucial for sustaining the program.

> It is important for someone at the top of the organization to be behind social
> media and programs. The City has a social media committee which meets
> quarterly to discuss issues and trends. (Community O)

> Five of the organizations emphasized the importance of training to support their

social media initiatives; particularly as social media tools are continually changing. One

of these respondents noted that there are many free resources available online so training

and skills development does not necessarily require a major financial outlay by the

community.

> There is enough free online training and opportunities for communities to become
> familiar with the different social media platforms. Communities have a whole
> toolbox of citizen engagement, and would be ignoring a whole shelf of tools if
> they were not on social media. (Community R)

> The City initially brought in training specialist. The City does have quarterly
> social media training with all managers in addition they meet individually with
> social media managers. Because Facebook is always evolving and changing, it is
> important to stay up to date with new things. (Community K)

> Members of the social media team are at times able to attend conferences and
> workshops, and they report back social media best practices to the group.
> (Community M)

One of the communities reported that they have implemented a comprehensive training program for all employees and departments interested in setting up their own social media pages, to ensure that good practice in the use of social media is achieved throughout the organization.

> The City developed something unique to government, the Employee Ambassador program … The City trains how to use social media programs and the social media policy to those employees who are interested in their own personal social media pages. The training helps them provide an understanding on how to set up their page and teaching them about best practices … When a department comes in and wants to do social media, we enroll them in the Employee Social Media Ambassador program … Through the Employee Ambassador program, employees feel involved and build their own brand but don't have to run their own page. (Community O)

Only two respondents specifically referred to the importance of a social media budget to support sustainability of their program.

Benefits of social media use. On the whole, the local government participants in this study reported very positive experiences of the use of social media and appear to have encountered very few obstacles to its use. The research data indicates that there are three main potential benefits to local governments from the use of social media:

Building trust and citizen engagement. Three participants highlighted the ways in which social media facilitates the ability of their organizations to engage with citizens and build trust-based relationships:

> Social media is a blessing for communities. A decade ago citizens rarely came into contact with the City except to pay a parking ticket. Or, they were only visible when something was bad. Fast forward to 2016, and a Community can be as engaged or disengaged as they choose or motivated to be. (Community P)

> If you engage in people where they are in a creative way, not just through surveys etc. and the engagement is in that moment, it develops an emotional contact so when we need hardcore participation in a survey residents are willing, it is a natural because they already have been engaged. (Community G)

Improving efficiency and cost effectiveness of public service delivery. Two participants mentioned that the use of social media has improved public service delivery, either by reducing the amount of in-person contact needed, or enabling the organization to respond more quickly to reported problems.

> Social media allows the City to be responsive in a timely manner. For example a resident was mad about huge pothole on a road, social media allowed the complaint to be heard and a team fixed it within hours. (Community O)

> It reduces in person and phone contact because people have such confidence in what we are putting out on social media. It has reduced the amount of people contact. (Community E)

Generating information for policy and planning. Finally, one of the participants stressed the ways in which information generated on social media has been used to improve planning and policy-making.

> Trending comments are shared with elected officials and departments to inform them of public feedback prior to making policy decisions and to adjust messaging when necessary. Two examples include the 2013 flood and the xx Street right-sizing project. (Community M)

Challenges and obstacles in social media use. The obstacles and challenges of social media use cited by the participants fell broadly into four categories.

Resource constraints. One of the obstacles to the more effective or widespread use of social media, reported in various ways by four participants, is limited organizational resources for allocation to social media usage and management. In particular, these respondents conveyed an awareness of the need for better integration or monitoring of their social media activity, and indicated that a lack of staff resources is currently the main obstacle to this.

> When the City expanded their social media, there was not an increase in staff. The City's current staff members have just added social media to their list of duties. (Community K)

The tool is there and available for all departments, but not all have been trained up on it or they do not realize the value or importance of it. It is both a training and capacity issue. (Community H)

The biggest challenge Community I faces is having enough staff to be robust enough to have current information coming out. The communication and marketing department has three people and an administrative person on staff (Community I)

Our major challenge is ensure that each agency has adequate staff members to carry out strong digital communications. (Community C)

Ensuring access to all citizens. Another potential obstacle to the potential of

social media for increasing transparency and citizen engagement, which emerged in two

of the interviews, is that not all citizens are users of social media. There is a risk that

certain groups, particularly the elderly, may be excluded from transparency and citizen

engagement initiatives that rely too heavily on the use of social media. These respondents

mentioned explicitly that their organization deliberately adopts a range of communication

formats, such as emails and in-person communications, to overcome this obstacle.

The City still has to keep in mind the senior populations and be sure we are adequately capturing their sentiments. The Senior Center's staff recognize this and offer training to the seniors on how to use Facebook. The library offers training on how to use smart phones, Facebook for dummies and other social media issues. (Community R)

Social media is great when people are looking at it. The Town still frequently uses email because once the email is there it does not go away, people look at it. (Community A)

Ensuring that citizens use appropriate communication channels. A further

challenge mentioned in two of the interviews was the need to ensure that citizens use the

right communication channels for particular purposes, and do not rely too heavily on

communicating via social media, for example when complaining about services.

The challenge is getting citizens to understand when there are complaints - the method for a formal complaint is not social media. (Community C) tries to push people to the proper channel. On the website – we have list on home page – ways to file a complaint. (Community C)

Dealing with negative social media posts. Three respondents mentioned the

challenge of dealing with negative or inaccurate posts on social media, but in general this

had seldom caused a major problem, and was seen as one of the risks of two-way

communication that was outbalanced by the benefits.

The only challenge with social media is when an outlet provides inaccurate information and it is taken as gospel. There are a few facebook groups that have provided their version of facts. The best way to discredit their information is to post truthful timely information on their outlets. (Community F)

The level of vitriol when grappling with difficult issues (e.g. homelessness) is a challenge—balancing free engagement with basic decency. We have HR rules that allow us to delete comments fairly easily, but that's not always the best solution to critiques. (Community Q)

The City has been contacted by Managers and assistant managers of other communities inquiring what we do if someone publically attacks the Mayor or states something untrue or a volatile issue or control issues. Our response is the City's web site is one way and you control everything that goes out on it. Social media tools are meant to be two-way. Yes, there will be people who will state something not in agreement with council, however, this forum allows for a dialogue and to be effective, social media needs to be embraced as two-way communication. (Community D)

Social Media Policies and Processes

In order to explore the extent to which the use of social media is formalized

within the sample of participating organizations, and the coverage of any policies or

guidelines on social media use, the interviewees were asked whether their organization

has clearly defined processes or procedures for posting to social media and if so to

provide details of these. They were also asked how the policies or guidelines are

communicated to users, both within and outside the organization, and the procedures for enforcing any violations.

Use of formal policies or guidelines. The findings were mixed, with over half (n=10) of the participants indicating that their organization does have a formal social media policy or guidelines on social media use, and the remainder describing a variety of other arrangements including no formal policies or guidelines (1), departmental-level policies or guidelines but none covering the whole organization (1), and the use of guidelines but no formal policy.

Policies vary in the extent to which they are prescriptive; several of the respondents indicated that these provide general guidelines but it is left to individuals and departments to manage their own social media content.

> She (Social Media Manager) put together a comprehensive policy with guidelines for the whole town. It covers you are responsible for your content but here are some guidelines, Copyright issues because people may not be aware of what they are (Community A)

> HR has administrative rules for social media posting and monitoring, but the mayor's office only loosely uses them since we're an elected office (Community Q)

The use of general guidelines seems to be characteristic of the partly decentralized models of social media management;

> There is one social media policy for the City that all departments have to follow. The policy is a fairly high level it is guidance its professional it provides sound advice. (Community P)

> Social Media managers know they have to follow the Office of Communication guidelines. (Community K)

However the approach to formalized policies is also influenced by organizational culture regardless of the management model used. For example, Community I with a

decentralized model reports "there is not a written policy for any department except for Police, EMS and Fire. This is primarily because the City is generally not a policy driven organization, they are more practice than policy". Similarly the Community H respondent stated that their City regards social media as "just another form of communication" and "does not have a social media policy. We already have expectation of professionalism through out HR policy for electronic communication".

Participants indicated that policies and guidelines are generally communicated to employees through internal documents and training, and to external social media users by means of policy statements on the relevant social media pages.

> If the social media platforms allows it, it is directly included on the page; this is the case for our Facebook page. The city's commenting policy and social media policy is available on our website. It also is available on our intranet for staff; it is made available to new Communication Department staff members in the on-boarding process. (Community M)

> For external users, the social media policies are written on social media pages encouraging the city has the right to reserve to remove inappropriate post. They actually do not delete but they hide the comments that violate the policy. Because the city receives so many photos, there is a policy on the main Facebook page that says photos may be used for other purposes etc. (Community K)

Coverage of policies and guidelines. Regardless of whether the organizations used formal policies or informal guidelines, the interviews indicated that these generally covered three main issues permissions for and acceptable use of social media, and approval procedures for the establishment of social media sites or pages by departments.

Response times. The majority of research participants (n=15) referred to the use of policies, guidelines or established practices relating to the timescale for response to comments or questions posted on social media. This timescale generally varies depending on the type of social media post, and typically ranges from within an hour to two, to

several days. Most commonly a 24-hour maximum time for response was reported,

though organizations varied in terms of whether response times were formally

communicated to citizens. It was also noted that some types of social media posts do not

require a response.

> Responding in a timely manner is the City's goal. The City does not post a response time policy, yet the aim is to respond within a 24 hours time period, if not sooner. If a question comes in after 5:00 pm we respond the following morning. Not all postings require a comment, some posts when it comes to a volatile topic are stated opinions, and since the City does not challenge opinions, these do not warrant responses. They do require one if it is to correct misstatements. (Community D)

> The City does not have a formal policy dealing with response times for social media. However, we follow our department's customer service standards or responding to inquiries with four hours for priority inquiries, 24 hours for general questions and with 2-3 days for answers that require research. In general, constituents are informed on day one when a response will require additional time. (Community M)

> There is no published policy on response time yet it is understood the City will respond within a 24-hour period. In most cases a citizen receives a response within one hour of asking a question. If the answer is not known at the time they at least receive an acknowledgement. (Community K)

> There is no official response time it all is dependent upon the questions asked. For Facebook there is usually a 48-hour turn around time frame to answer questions or respond to a post. There is sometimes a lag time, which they feel they could do better. They do not respond to all questions, in some instances they will redirect them to the proper person, email or ask for a phone number to follow-up. As for Twitter, the response is usually instantaneous. (Community L)

> *Permissions and acceptable use.* Policies and guidelines in this area cover the

ways in which employees and departments are allowed to use social media, including the

specific individuals allowed to do so on behalf of the organization; requirements for

minimum numbers of daily posts, and the organization's right to delete inappropriate

posts made by employees or citizens. Nine participants referred to the use of these kinds

of policies or guidelines.

The social media policy is critical when questions of promoting private events and organizations arise. We refer back to the policy which covers us, saying the City's social media sites are only for posting city information. (Community R)

The Village's information policy is not to get into a big debate. The Village does not want to start a war of words so they have a policy where they will reply after 2 times. After that they will ask for a number so they can call to discuss on the phone. (Community E)

It covers the purpose, scope, conditions and restrictions that pertain to the city's use of social media. It also deals with employee comments on social media and when the city can delete a comment by a member of the public, including procedures for archiving it. (Community M)

The policy addresses responsibilities, moderation of third party content and public record keeping for official use, and general guidelines for employee use as it relates to their work and professional goals. (Community F)

The belief is it is ok for citizens not to agree and post their feelings, however any postings or comments that are blatantly negative or racist are automatically deleted. (Community L)

Approval procedures. Eight participants referred to the use of a policy or

guidelines to specify the procedures Departments must go through in order to establish

their own social media tool or page.

If a Department wants to open up a social media page, they need to fill out a form and justify what they want to achieve. This makes them reflect on concerns such as, do they have the intended audience, and are they not creating pages just to create a page. What is it we want to accomplish? Is there is a need? (Community K)

Agencies have to ask the Mayor's Office before starting any new accounts to make sure we don't have many unused accounts … when any agency creates a new account they must consider two main aspects: 1) Do they have the bandwidth and personnel to keep up a whole new account. 2) How does the addition of this account further the agency's core goals? (Community C)

Recognition and Success in Social Media

Formal awards and recognition. Just one of the participating local government

organizations, Community K, reported receiving awards specifically for its social media

initiatives.

Seven of the local government organizations reported that they had received formal awards or recognition for achievements that social media had contributed to, rather than for social media initiatives per se. As the Community H representative explained:

> Our biggest success isn't just social media tools. It is less to do with what tools of social media and more to do with how social media contributed to the success of a program. The City's media team has been recognized for a number of things. The biggest successes haven't been a product of social activity as it has been on the ability to utilize social media. (Community H)

Of the organizations that had received awards for their wider technological initiatives, four (Community D, Community M, Community F and Community P) had received *Digital Cities* awards in recent years. This is an annual national survey that recognizes leading examples of U.S. cities using technology to improve services and boost efficiencies. It focuses on ten initiatives across four categories including citizen engagement. One of the participants (Community M) had also received international awards for its government media and digital communications initiatives.

> The City has been recognized by Digital Cities for many years for their successes. These successes are not specifically highlighting the social media tools. However, the tools have assisted with the successes. (Community D)

> The City has been awarded top (Digital Cities) web award at least 3 years in a row. The awards were not specifically social media, but shows how we embedded social media into our website. (Community P)

> The City … has been recognized by Penn State twice for best practices in government media. Western Sydney University recognized the city's digital communications as a best practice in Australia, United Kingdom and the USA. The city has received consecutive Digital Cities Awards for its website. (Community M)

> **Advice to other local government organizations.** In concluding the interviews, participants were asked what main piece of advice they would give to other local

government organizations embarking on the use of social media. All the participants

offered at least one piece of advice and the responses fell broadly into four categories:

Don't hesitate to adopt social media. Eight participants emphasized the

importance of local governments adopting social media and the risks of falling behind in

this area.

> Not having social media is a bigger risk of not having a voice. Without social media you are missing an opportunity to engage with your people. (Community J)

> Overall recommendation, if you are not on social media that is a problem. Do not be hesitant, because you control the message and what you want them to see on the platform. (Community L)

> We are well beyond the point of is it a good idea, or is it going to stick around. If your community is not on the bus, the bus will hit it, and the community will be the one hurt. If your City is not out there listening on social media, the citizens will form their own pages, someone will fill the void. (Community R)

Allocate adequate resources and support. Eight participants offered advice

relating to the need to ensure that social media programs receive the right level of

investment and staffing, including the allocation of people to social media posts who

have appropriate skills and interests in this area. Respondents also noted the importance

of having structures and processes in place to support the program.

> Make sure you have the strategy, processes and resources in place to support every social media channel, and don't take on more than you can effectively maintain. (Community M)

> A City really needs someone who enjoys change and can embrace the tools. These tools aren't that formal there is something to be said to have a personal voice versus just words. The intent of social media is the personal dialogue, the personal contact with a person that goes beyond just the City. (Community D)

> City Managers need to be certain their staff is skilled. Nothing worse then a citizen tweeting and being ignored, this can damage your brand. (Community P)

Understand the audience and purpose. The main advice offered by seven

participants involved the need to understand the audience and their needs, and to clearly

define the purpose of using social media.

> Think about what you would want to hear. Listen to audience. Step out of your
> own biases. Set the expectations you can meet. Try to raise the bar but don't
> overextend. Remember it takes years to build to credibility and only seconds to
> take it away. (Community A)

> If launching a page, have a purpose don't just do it because everyone is doing it.
> When launching a page, remember it is social, so you need to be social, don't
> make it seem like a government page. The relationship is social, similar to
> speaking with a colleague. Keep up to date on what is being talked about. If
> people are talking about a tragedy, you should too. (Community K)

> Don't underestimate people and what they might want to know. Something as
> simple like trash or garbage you get the dialogue going. Basic stuff people want to
> have. (Community B)

> Have a goal in mind for every social media post you publish, whether it's
> increasing engagement, informing the public, or affecting change. (Community F)

Use appropriate tools and methods. Finally, five participants emphasized the

importance of understanding and using the right tools and methods in order to achieve the

desired objectives of social media usage. This extends to regularity of posting as well as

using a variety of media including photos and videos.

> Engagement and consistent messaging are key. Engagement helps gain
> followers—because if no one's paying attention, there's no point when you're
> government—and consistent messaging is critical in a virtual world where users
> remember everything and can pull up documentation to prove it. (Community Q)

> A recommendation for other Cities is to start using one tool, start small. Really
> focus on using that one tool well. (Community D)

> Followers quickly lose interest if pages are not regularly maintained, and
> responsive to questions, as well as if your messages are not crafted using social
> media best practices for each platform … Multimedia, like strong photos and
> videos, is very important for driving engagement and it must be a component of
> your strategy, including efforts to share user-generated multimedia. (Community
> M)

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The literature suggests that local governments can achieve multiple advantages by employing social media in their citizen communications, outreach, and participatory engagement strategies (Belle, 2013; Cohen, 2015, Gentile, 2011; Roberts, 2010; Tucker, 2011). Researchers have highlighted the potential benefits of social media usage in this sector and for enhancing local governments' interactions with citizens through greater ease of access, improved transparency, streamlining of communications, and improvement of government service delivery (Kang & Gearhart, 2010; Krueathep, 2006; Schorr & Stevens, 2011).

The main objective of this qualitative study was to examine the impacts of social media at the local government level on enabling citizen engagement and increasing government transparency, two of the most important potential benefits of social media usage in the public sector. Recent public management literature has provided evidence of antipathy and a lack of confidence towards government among the U.S. population, and has highlighted the need for more collaborative and participative approaches in order to improve service delivery, strengthen the democratic process and rebuild trust in public agencies (Yang & Holzer, 2005).

The study has examined the impacts of social media on enabling citizen engagement and increasing government transparency among a sample of 18 local government organizations from across the United States. In order to identify examples of best practice and to understand the benefits and risks of using social media in local government, the study also explored the wider experiences of social media use among this sample, including the factors driving the organization's motivation to use social

media, forms of social media management across the organization, the selection of social

media tools, the use of formal and informal policies and guidelines on social media usage

and the ways in which the impacts of social media are monitored and measured. The

sample organizations were selected from among those known to be successful in the use

of social media, in order to help maximize the value of the study in generating

information that can inform the wider adoption of effective social media practice in the

local government sector. The individual respondents all held senior level responsibility

for social media management in their respective organizations. Data collection was based

on in-depth telephone interviews and a semi-structured self-completion questionnaire,

administered online using SurveyMonkey.

Specifically, the study has addressed the following research questions:

1. How do local governments use social media to enable citizen engagement?

2. How do local governments use social media to improve transparency?

3. How are the effects of social media tools on citizen engagement and local
   government transparency measured?

4. What obstacles do local governments encounter when using social media tools?

5. What are the main benefits and critical success factors in the use of social media
   by local government organizations?

This chapter summarizes the findings of the study and discusses their practical

and theoretical implications. The chapter is structured as follows. The following sections

set out the key findings of the study in relation to the research questions. Following this,

the practical significance of the study is highlighted, with a view to providing guidance

on effective practice for other local government organizations considering the adoption or

expansion of social media. In the following section, the theoretical implications of the findings are discussed. This draws on the main themes covered in the literature review, and identifies the ways in which this study builds on the theoretical literature or helps to fill any gaps in understanding. Subsequent sections discuss the limitations of the study and set out recommendations for further research in this area.

Discussion of Findings

How do Local Governments use Social Media to Enable Citizen Engagement?

Overall, the findings confirmed that the local government organizations in this study are highly active in social media usage, with almost 90% overall reporting either a "medium" or a "high" level of presence. Four of the 18 participating organizations (21%) indicated that they use social media in a "collaborative" approach in which citizens are encouraged to be co-producers of content and partners in the decision and policy-making process. More than two thirds (68%, n=13) of the sample reported that they have a social media presence in which interaction is bidirectional and information is both pushed out to our citizens as well as pulled in through the form of feedback, indicating that nearly all the participants are achieving some level of citizen engagement through social media. However, when asked about their main use of social media, the percentage indicating that the tools are mainly used for citizen engagement purpose was somewhat lower, at 63% or 12 organizations, with the remainder said that their organization mainly uses social media as a one-way communication tool. It should be noted, however that the interviews revealed similarities and overlaps between these two categories of respondents when describing their social media activities in practice, suggesting that citizen engagement through social media is being achieved in the vast majority of organizations whether or

not this is recognized as a specific objective by the organizations concerned. It was also apparent from the interview responses that engagement as a concept is perceived in quite different ways between organizations, ranging from any level of two-way interaction between government and citizens, to an all-embracing philosophy that drives the actions and strategic focus of the organization.

The organizations specifically using social media tools for citizen engagement purposes reported a variety of ways in which this is achieved. One of the main methods is the use of social media channels to direct citizens to in-person engagement opportunities such as public meetings and other community initiatives, or to other online participation tools such as community surveys. Many of the participants also described the ways in which social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter and dedicated citizen engagement platforms are used to encourage and promote the ongoing engagement of citizens with local government. This is achieved by posting information about policies, initiatives and events, inviting questions and comments and participating in dialogue with users. This ongoing engagement is likely to be very important in building relationships and trust between local government and citizens within their communities, and one of the main benefits of social media in this respect is the ability to interact on an individual, personal level. Many of the participants demonstrated an astute understanding of the ways in which particular social media tools can be used for different engagement purposes and different audience to maximize their positive impacts; for example Twitter is important for interacting in real time and facilitating dialogue on up-to-the-moment issues; Facebook helps build a sense of community in the longer term by generating a historic record of events using multi-media, and facilitating an ongoing dialogue; dedicated

citizen engagement tools can be used to provide local government with the specific forms of public input they need to inform policy and planning.

The results also showed, however, that the organizations which are most actively engaged in collaborative ways with citizens do not rely too heavily on the use of social media; instead, these tools are just one component of an approach to engagement which also involves frequent use of official consultations and face to face contact. Since social media is frequently used to drive citizens to other types of engagement opportunities, the findings suggest that local governments might best see social media as an important tool for promoting citizen engagement but not necessarily the main vehicle by which this should be achieved. Social media facilitates various forms of interaction between governments and citizens that can help build trust-based relationships and ensure that policies and services are most effectively tailored to the needs of the community. However, full engagement and participation in local government will often require more in-depth, in-person forms of interaction such as involvement in public meetings. The findings of this study indicate that the participating organizations have a good understanding of this, and many are using social media in ways that maximize its impact on citizen engagement.

How do Local Governments use Social Media to Improve Transparency?

Just over a third of the sample (n=7) indicated that social media is mainly being used for one-way communications. This is not necessarily a negative finding - it cannot be inferred that these organizations are not also using social media for the purpose of citizen engagement; just that communication of information is currently the dominant use. The main objective of the study in this area is to determine whether social media

communications are being effectively used by local government organizations to increase

transparency, based on the interviews and questionnaires completed by all respondents.

The findings strongly indicate that this is the case: virtually all of the participating

organizations reported that social media is being used to publicize local policies,

initiatives and the activities of government, including budget planning and community

spending. Many of the respondents referred to the use of their organizational websites for

this purpose, and though it is questionable whether websites generally fall within

definition of social media, it seems to be the case that the participants' websites are

frequently used as social media portals, being the first point of online contact from which

other social media sites and pages are reached. In the case of participants reporting the

use of dedicated citizen engagement platforms, these are generally the location for

posting information about governmental policies, initiatives and activities and inviting

public comment on these.

      Among the best examples of increasing local government transparency through

social media are the organizations that stream live feeds of council meetings and public

meetings on video sites, and provide live updates using Twitter or other tools. This also

has the impact of greatly increasing citizen engagement in local government, since

significantly higher numbers of citizens are likely to participate in the meetings online

than in person.

      In addition, the day-to-day use of social media to disseminate information about

government services, community initiatives and events and, when necessary, emergency

or other essential urgent information is equally important in improving the overall

transparency of local government, while providing opportunities for the types of citizen

and local business input that can be used to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public service delivery. All the participating organizations appear to be highly active in the use of social media for communications and information dissemination in this way. This can also be expected to have positive impacts on community building and on the growth and sustainability of the local economy and the non-profit sector, by raising public awareness of various events and local initiatives and encouraging participation in these.

How are the Effects of Social Media Tools on Citizen Engagement and Local Government Transparency Measured?

The research findings indicate that there are currently significant gaps and weaknesses in the measurement by local governments of the impact of social media on citizen engagement and government transparency. Some of the participants reported that they do not currently carry out much formal monitoring and measurement of their social media activity, largely due to resource constraints. The majority did report that some monitoring and measurement of social media activity, but in the main this relies on the use of the analytic tools built into sites such as Facebook and Twitter, and focuses on the measurement of performance against quantitative metrics such as numbers of views or numbers of "likes". A small number of organizations acknowledged the need to measure more qualitative indicators of performance, such as engagement and reactions to posts, and reported that they were using or developing methods to do so. Overall, however, the results suggest that local governments are not typically measuring the performance of social media on citizen engagement and on organizational transparency, even though these are explicit or implicit organizational objectives of the use of social media. The

development of effective practices in this area will be important to generate information for use in improving the effectiveness as well as the cost-effectiveness of various social media tools and strategies.

What Obstacles do Local Governments Encounter when Using Social Media Tools?

On the whole, the local government participants in this study reported very positive experiences of the use of social media and appear to have encountered very few obstacles to its use. The main obstacle to the more effective or widespread use of social media, reported in various ways by a number of the participants, are limited organizational resources for allocation to social media usage and management. Several conveyed awareness of a need for better integration or monitoring of their social media activity, and indicated that a lack of staff resources is currently the main obstacle to this. It can be expected that if additional resources are allocated to social media in local government organizations, the overall effectiveness and value generated by this function are likely to increase through improved efficiency and through the generation of more useful performance data to inform the ongoing social media strategy.

Few participants referred to the perceived risks or problems involved in social media usage. However, the interview findings suggest that these local government organizations do have an awareness and understanding of the inherent risks, such as negative publicity, data security and privacy issues, and inappropriate use of sites by employees or other parties. These are successfully managed, on the whole, by the use of policies and guidelines and it seems that violations of these are very uncommon. Some participants reported that their organizations had considered risks of reputational damage through negative posts, but had determined that on balance these were outweighed by the

benefits of increased transparency and improved levels of citizen engagement.

Continuous monitoring of posts and appropriate organizational responses were seen to be

crucial however, in protecting the reputation of the organization, building trust-based

relationships with citizens and ensuring that inappropriate or offensive posts are removed

in accordance with the social media policy. This of course has resource and workload

implications and is one reason why the majority of organizations have adopted a

centralized or coordinated approach to social media management. In contrast with

decentralized models in which departments maintain their own social media channels,

these appear to pose the lowest levels of risk in the use of social media by local

governments, while increasing value and efficiency by ensuring that the available social

media expertise is utilized to the greatest benefit of the whole organization.

     Another potential obstacle to the potential of social media for increasing

transparency and citizen engagement, which emerged from several of the interviews, is

that not all citizens are users of social media. There is a risk that certain groups,

particularly the elderly, may be excluded from transparency and citizen engagement

initiatives that rely too heavily on the use of social media. A number of respondents

mentioned explicitly that their organization deliberately adopts a range of communication

formats, such as emails and in-person communications, to overcome this obstacle. A

further challenge mentioned in some of the interviews was the need to ensure that citizens

use the right communication channels for particular purposes, and do not rely too heavily

on communicating via social media, for example when complaining about services.

Again, these points highlight the importance of regarding social media as just one

component, albeit a central and important one, in local governments' transparency and citizen engagement strategies and initiatives.

What are the Main Benefits and Critical Success Factors in the Use of Social Media by Local Government Organizations?

The research data indicates that there are three main potential benefits to local governments from the use of social media: the ability to build the trust of citizens and a sense of local community; the generation of information on citizen views and concerns for the purpose of planning and policy development, and increasing efficiency and cost-effectiveness of public service delivery, by reducing the need for in-person contact and by ensuring that services more effectively target the needs of the community.

However, achieving these benefits requires the ability to develop and implement a high quality social media program that is designed to maximum value to the organization and the community alike, while reducing any risks or challenges for the local government body. The following critical success factors can be identified from analysis of the overall findings of this study:

1. The allocation of sufficient organizational resources to the social media program, especially staff resources and adequate time to develop the program and to monitor and manage social media on a daily basis.

2. Ensuring that all employees with responsibilities and involvement in social media are adequately trained and have the right skills and expertise. These include the technical and quantitative skills involved in establishing social media platforms, identifying suitable metrics and measurement systems and monitoring and reporting on impacts. Equally, they include the more qualitative skills involved in

using social media in creative and personal ways to interact with citizens and develop trust based relationships.

3. Establishing effective and efficient social media management across the organization, which involves appropriate levels of integration and co-ordination of departmental social media activities.

4. Establishing suitable social media monitoring and measurement systems that enable the organization to determine impacts on key indicators such as transparency and engagement.

5. A commitment to and the ability to utilize performance measurement data to continually improve the social media strategy and program.

6. Utilizing a range of social media channels and tools, with each selected for its best fit to the intended purpose and audience, and with linkages between them.

7. The use of comprehensive and clear guidance to all social media users, which might consist of a formal social media policy or more general guidelines.

8. An approach to social media which views this as one component of a wider approach to organizational transparency and citizen engagement, and which includes other methods and tools targeted to the needs of the organization and its community.

Practical Implications

The main target audience for this study consists of local government organizations throughout the United States, who seek to gain a deeper understanding of available social media tools and tactics and the critical success factors for effective social media use. Now that social media has become such a dominant form of communication

and interaction among the population in general and in the business world, public sector organizations arguably have an important duty to adopt these tools in order to provide the types of personalized and transparent services expected by citizens. However, governments themselves can also benefit considerably from the use of these communication and engagement channels, using them to build trust-based relationships that help restore confidence in local government; to generate information and intelligence for use in policy and planning and to improve the effectiveness of public service delivery, both generally and when faced with emergency situations. Overall, this is likely to improve standards of local government and contribute to more efficient use of public resources.

However, adopting and generating value from the use of social media at local government level requires knowledge and understanding of best practice as well as the potential pitfalls and challenges. This study is intended to contribute in a practical sense to social media usage by local governments by contributing to this knowledge and understanding, based on a diverse sample of local government organizations from across the nation which have already established effective social media practices.

Theoretical Implications

Another target audience consists of academic researchers who seek to understand the opportunities and challenges associated with the use of social media and how its utilization can enhance citizen engagement and government transparency. A growing body of research is examining the impact of social media on the development of networks and relationships and on the types of value being generated by these. Since organizations are now able to use social media to interact on an individual level with citizens, clients

and customers, the ability to develop trust-based relationships and to deliver the types of personalized services they now expect are rapidly becoming important differentiators in organizational effectiveness and success. Across the United States and in other countries, local governmental organizations have in recent years been at the forefront of developments in eGovernment services, which enable citizens to access public information and services online, a development that has received considerable attention in the academic literature. The adoption of social media is a potentially a natural and important complement to these services, but one which has not yet been researched to a significant extent in the academic literature. This study therefore helps address an information gap in this area by providing empirical evidence of the use of social media by local governments in practice, and on the ways in which they build relationships within local communities using this approach.

Limitations of the Study

The study has several imitations that should be taken into account when interpreting the findings. The first relates to the overall design of the study and the sample, which were intended to generate maximum information about the use of social media by local government organizations known to have successful initiatives in this area. A limitation of this approach is that relatively little information was obtained on the types of challenges and risks that may more commonly be encountered by local government organizations when adopting and using social media. In other words, there may be a slight bias in the overall findings towards the provision of practical guidance on achieving the benefits of social media rather than addressing the challenges and risks. A further limitation of the study is that, although in-depth interviewing methods were used

to collect information from respondents about social media use, many of the responses were quite concise and did not provide the depth of information or insight needed to truly understand the relevant organizations' experiences of using social media to improve transparency and increase citizen engagement. In this respect, the study findings provide an important record of current social media practice in local government organizations but one which can be further built to obtain more in-depth understanding of the impacts, particularly on key issues of practical and theoretical interest such as relationship-building, networks, citizen engagement and organizational transparency. Finally, the study relies on data that is self-reported by the research participants and it is possible that these respondents may have over-emphasized the benefits of their social media programs and under-emphasized the difficulties and challenges faced, in order to convey a positive image of their organizational activity in this area. None of these limitations are believed to have had a major negative impact on the overall value of the study in generating useful information about social media practice in local government organizations that can be used by similar organizations wishing to adopt social media and by academic researchers to help understand the role of social media in public management.

Recommendations for Future Research

Further research into the use of social media by local government organizations is needed to build on the findings of this study and to provide a more comprehensive understanding of this issue. A large scale representative survey of local government organizations, conducted at national, regional or state level, could be used to provide a more accurate overview of the current state of social media usage at local government level, and to provide information on the factors hindering its use as well as those which

have driven its adoption. This information would enable local governments to address potential obstacles to the adoption or effective use of social media, and also enable best practice guidance to be developed which is tailored to the characteristics of particular types of local government organizations. It is also recommended that pilot studies should be implemented and evaluated with the purpose of developing best practice guidance on social media performance measurement, an area in which little guidance or knowledge of best practice currently exists. Finally, it is recommended that in-depth organizational case study research is developed, using a range of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods such as interviews with employees and community members and analysis of social media performance data, to provide material for the development of comprehensive case studies that can be disseminated to local government organizations throughout the United States, with the objective of raising awareness and understanding of how to implement best practice social media initiatives.

Conclusion

This study has generated a wealth of information on the real-life experiences of using social media in the local government context, based on a sample of local government organizations from across the United States renowned for their successful social media initiatives. Given previous information gaps in this area, the research makes an important practical and theoretical contribution to knowledge and understanding of the potential of social media for improving local government performance and increasing citizen engagement in public service delivery. It is hoped that the findings will be widely utilized in the further development of practical guidance and academic research, in order

to help ensure that the benefits of social media for local governments, citizens and wider

society alike can be achieved.

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APPENDIX 1

Appendix A: States by region of the United States (U.S. Census Bureau)

	United States Regions Map
Region 1 (The Northeast)	
Division 1 (New England)	**Division 2 (Middle Atlantic)**
Maine	New York
New Hampshire	Pennsylvania
Vermont	New Jersey
Massachusetts	
Rhode Island	
Connecticut	
Region 2 (The Midwest)	
Division 3 (East North Central)	**Division 4 (West North Central)**
Wisconsin	North Dakota
Michigan	South Dakota
Illinois	Nebraska
Indiana	Kansas
Ohio	Minnesota
	Iowa
Region 3 (The South)	
Division 5 (South Atlantic)	**Division 6 (East South Central)**
Delaware	Kentucky
Maryland	Tennessee
District of Columbia	Mississippi
Virginia	Alabama
West Virginia	
North Carolina	**Division 7 (West South Central)**
South Carolina	Oklahoma
Georgia	Texas
Florida	Arkansas
	Louisiana
Region 4 (The West)	
Division 8 (Mountain)	**Division 9 (Pacific)**
Idaho	Alaska
Montana	Washington
Wyoming	Oregon
Nevada	California
Utah	Hawaii
Colorado	
Arizona	
New Mexico	

Appendix B: Telephone Interview Guide

(Interviewer instructions in italics)

Introductory text:

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research about local government use of social media, and for completing the email questionnaire *(if applicable).*

(if questionnaire not yet completed, check that the email and survey link were received by the interviewee, and request that they do so following the interview)

The consent letter you received included information about the purpose of the interview and the ways in which the interview data will be used. The interview is expected to take between 30 and 60 minutes. Do you have any questions before we begin?

A. IMPLEMENTATION AND TOOLS

1. **First, can you please explain what motivated your organization's decision to utilize social media tools?**

   Probe if necessary:
   - Please describe the main motive(s).

   - Was the decision to utilize social media tools a result of a mandate? If so, please describe this.

   - Was the initial decision to utilize a social media tool triggered by any particular event(s)? If so, please explain this.

   - Are social media efforts in your organization tied to the organizational mission or strategic goals? If yes, please explain this.

2. **Now, I'd like to explore further the specific social media tools most often used by your organization.**

   In the self-completion questionnaire, you indicated that the following three social media tools are used most extensively by the organization *(cite from questionnaire responses in advance of interview if available, or ask respondent which three social media tools are used the most).*

   Please briefly explain why these are the preferred social media tools for your organization? What features or benefits do they each offer your organization?

   (record answers for each of three tools cited)

3. **Once the decision was made to implement social media, what factors were taken into account when determining which specific tools to use?**

Probe if necessary:

- Personal experience with the tool

- General popularity of the tool

- Results of a formal evaluation

- Advice of consultant

- Other factors?

4. **Did or does your organization actively publicize its social media tools to citizens? If so:**

- Please explain how this was or is done

- How effective do you feel the efforts to publicize the social media tools have been?

- How might their effectiveness have been improved?

5. **Has your organization encountered any major challenges in relation to its social media initiatives?**

Probe if necessary:

- Please describe the challenges encountered

- Why do you think these challenges arose?

- What solutions did your organization use to overcome these challenges?

USES OF SOCIAL MEDIA

6. **Does your organization use its social media tools to provide information about local government activities or policies to citizens?**

 a. If yes, please describe how this is done.

 b. Have there been any difficulties or challenges in the use of social media to provide information about local government activities or policies. If yes:

 - Please briefly describe these.

 - What actions were taken to overcome the challenges? Were they successful?

7. **Does your organization use social media to motivate citizens to become more engaged in local government?**

    a. If yes, please explain how this is done

    b. How would you, in your own words, define "citizen engagement"?

    c. Does the organization offer any incentives to citizens for participation in social media initiatives? If so, please explain what these are.

    d. Have there been any difficulties or challenges in the use of social media to engage citizens in local government? If yes:

        • Please briefly describe these.

        • What actions were taken to overcome the challenges? Were they successful?

8. **How does the organization evaluate any comments and feedback provided by citizens via social media?**

9. **Please provide examples of how citizen comments and feedback provided via social media have been used in the decision-making or policy-making process.**

PERFORMANCE AND SUSTAINABILITY

10. **Does your organization either formally or informally monitor or measure its social media performance? If yes:**

    a. Please describe how monitoring or measurement of social media performance is carried out.

    b. Which specific tools are utilized to monitor or measure social media performance?

    c. How are the findings regarding social media performance utilized by the organization?

    d. Have there been any difficulties or challenges in relation to monitoring and measurement of social media performance? If yes:

        • Please briefly describe these

        • What actions were taken to overcome the challenges? Were they successful?

11. **What measures have been put in place to ensure continued operation of your organization's social media efforts?**

Probe if necessary:

- Staff-related

- Financial resources

- Training or skills development

- Technology-related

- Other measures

POLICIES AND PROCESSES

12. **Does the organization have clearly defined processes or procedures for posting to social media? If yes, please briefly describe these.**

13. **Does the organization have a policy on standard response time for inquiries or complaints? If yes:**

    a. Please describe this policy

    b. How is the policy communicated to the citizen user?

14. **Does your organization have a formal policy on social media and its acceptable use? If yes, please briefly describe this policy.**

15. **How are your organization's social media policy and/or guidelines communicated to users?**

    Probe if necessary:

    - Internal users – organizational staff
    - External users – citizens or other stakeholders

16. **What are the consequences if the policy or guidelines violated? Are these enforced?**

RECOGNITION AND SUCCESS

17. **Please describe any social media programs for which you have received formal recognition and/or awards.**

18. **What is the main piece of advice you would give to another local government organization embarking on the use of social media?**

OTHER

19. **Is there anything you would like to add relating to the use of social media by your organization?**

20. **Do you have any questions for me before we conclude our conversation?**

Thank you very much for participating in the interview.

Appendix C: Self-Completion Online Questionnaire

<u>**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**</u>

1. **What is your position in the organization?**

2. **Please describe your role in relation to the organization's use of social media?**

3. **Approximately how long have you held this role?**

   a. Less than three months
   b. At least three months but less than a year
   c. At least a year but less than three years
   d. Three years or more

<u>**ORGANIZATIONAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA**</u>

4. **Which departments of your organization are currently using social media?**

   a. All or most departments
   b. All or most departments that have direct contact with citizens
   c. Only some departments (please give examples)

   …………………………………………………………………………..

   …………………………………………………………………………..

   d. Not sure

5. **Which department(s) in your organization is responsible for the creating of social media content and on-line updates?**

6. **Which department(s) in your organization is responsible for the posting of material on social media?**

7. **Which individual(s) or department(s) in your organization is responsible for responding to questions and or comments posted by citizens?**

8. **Which individual(s) or department(s) in your organization is responsible for monitoring and/or measuring social media performance?**

9. **Which of the following statements would you say best describes the main purpose of social media use in your organization?**

   o Social media is mainly used as a communication tool for *sending* information *out* to the community.

   o Social media is mainly used as an *engagement tool to develop dialogue* with the community – both *sending and receiving* information.

10. **Which of these statements best describe the stage of your organization's presence in social media: (Please select one)**

    o *Low engagement* – we have a social media presence in which most of our messaging is one-way informing, educating, providing updates and notices by pushing information out to the citizen.

    o *Medium engagement*- we have a social media presence in which interaction is bidirectional and information is both pushed out to our citizens as well as pulled in through the form of feedback.

    o *High engagement*- we have a social media presence in which citizens are encouraged to become co-producers of content and partners in the decision and policy-making process.

11. **Which of the following social media tools does your organization currently use?**

    o Blogs
    o Facebook
    o Flickr
    o Google+
    o Google hangout
    o Ideascale
    o Instagram
    o Instant messaging
    o LinkedIn
    o Meercat
    o Periscope
    o Photo sharing
    o Scribd

- o Secondlife
- o Skype
- o Slideshare
- o Snapchat
- o Text messaging
- o Tumblr
- o Twitter
- o Video sharing
- o Vimeo
- o Vine
- o Website
- o Wordpress
- o YouTube
- o Others, please specify _____

12. Which three social media tools does your organization utilize the most?

1 …………………………………………………………………………..
2 …………………………………………………………………………..
3 …………………………………………………………………………..

CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

13. Now thinking about citizen engagement with your organization (in general), which of these statements would you say best describes the current level of engagement?

- *Infrequent* - one time uses – (ask a question, file a complaint, access forms, register or sign up for an event etc.)

- *Regular or frequent* – there is some dialogue with citizens

- *Collaborative* – citizens are fully engaged through extensive dialogue

14. Please indicate the extent to which the following methods are used in citizen engagement with your organization.

Frequently used   **Sometimes used**   **Rarely used**

Official consultations

Face to face contact

Telephone calls

Emails or letters

Social media

15. **For each of the items listed below, please indicate whether social media is frequently, sometimes or rarely/never used by citizens for this purpose:**

	Social media frequently used	**Social media sometimes used**	**Social media rarely used**

To ask a question

To file a complaint

To resolve a conflict

To access forms

To register or sign up for an event

To provide input on a project

Others (please specify)

The telephone interview will give you the opportunity to provide more information on your organization's experiences of using social media. However, if you have any additional comments at this stage, please include these in the box below.