Chapter 9
The Use of Social Network Sites to Market E-Government to Citizens

María de Miguel Molina
Universitat Politècnica de València, Spain

Carlos Ripoll Soler
Universitat Politècnica de València, Spain

ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the authors explore the different literature that analyses the application of Social Network Sites (SNSs) in e-government to help government managers to improve citizens' communication and participation. The use of Web 2.0 tools is perceived as a new way of communication not only in the political arena but also on the government level to improve civic engagement, to coproduce public services, and to increase service personalization. Citizens still like traditional communication tools, and it is important not to overload them through SNSs. The authors show possible new trends for future analysis on the application of SNSs.

INTRODUCTION

The majority of governments today are using Social Networking Sites (SNSs) as a way to improve their relations with citizens. However, scholarship has paid more attention to the application of SNSs on the political than on the public administration level.

It is important for politicians to have an online presence (Jungherr, 2012); nevertheless, while electoral web campaigns are keen to adopt Web 2.0 technology, they sometimes lack a good design, which leads to limited interactivity (Lee, 2014).

For example, Vergeer, Hermans, & Sams (2013) showed that many candidates use SNS reluctantly and predominantly for electoral campaigning and only occasionally for continuous campaigning. That is, candidates normally use SNSs only for electoral purposes in the short/medium term but do not take all the possible profit of SNSs for the long term. Although the first degree networks of the candidates are frequently relatively small and

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-3691-0.ch009

unconnected, these authors have observed that their second degree networks are quite extensive. This is an opportunity to be covered.

Moreover, the use of SNSs in the public administration environment has many facets to be explored. New trends such as geo-localization services, coproduction of public services, and civic engagement using SNSs need deeper attention.

BACKGROUND

Governance networks are those groups or networks of constant relationships between governments and civil society (business, associations, NGOs, and so on) that are mutually implicated in certain public policies. However, in the field of e-government, as a way to deliver information and services by the government through the Internet or other digital means, SNSs can play many different roles in the political process (De-Miguel-Molina & Ripoll-Soler, 2012). For example, SNSs can have different implications on Open Government (Nam, 2012). Those who value transactions with e-government have a positive attitude regarding Open Government and Government 2.0. On the other side, the use of SNSs contributes to positive attitudes towards Government 2.0 and general trust in the government.

Broadly speaking, SNSs could be a complementary communication tool for e-government, where citizens not only receive information but also can collaborate on generating it.

Web 2.0 Definition

If we define Web 2.0 as the online service generation based on networks that allow users to contribute to online contents as co-developers, the key of SNSs would be that they allow users to generate public profiles that collect personal data and information in order to provide tools with which others can interact, related to that published profile (AGPD & INTECO, 2009). In other terms, an SNS is a community of users who establish personal or professional relationships and who share knowledge and experiences. They are normally housed on open websites that are constantly under construction and that involve a group of people with common needs and interests coming together to exchange and strengthen their resources (ONTSI, 2009).

Acquisti and Gross (2006) defined, at a very basic level, an online social network as "an Internet community where individuals interact, often through profiles that (re)present their public persona (and their networks of connections) to others." Moreover, Boyd and Ellison (2008) put forth that SNSs are "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system."

For SNS businesses, the revenues come from all the users' information that allow advertisers to personalize efforts. After joining an SNS, an individual answers a series of questions. The profile is generated using the answers to these questions, and most SNSs also encourage users to upload a profile photo or add multimedia content (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). We could then separate SNS contents into two categories: those related to relationships (friendship, photos, and message exchanges) and those related to entertainment and information (participation and opinion) (Campos, 2008).

Facebook and Twitter are two of the most relevant SNSs. Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe reviewed in 2007 the evolution of Facebook from its creation in 2004. But seven years later, in January 2014, Facebook has reported over 1 billion registered users. The site includes the possibility of creating groups, even by institutions. For example, a city council can create its own group and interact with its citizens in a different way than just providing a website. Facebook also allows an advertisement system that can deliver messages