Chapter 52

The Adoption of Web 2.0 by the State Government:
The Role of Political Environment and Governors

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of Web 2.0 introduced a new potential in e-government which empowers citizens to share information and mobilize spontaneously online, and enables citizens to communicate directly with the government and its elected officials while significantly lowering some of the traditional barriers of e-government adoption such as the lack of financial resources and technical expertise in government. This paper examined the pattern of Web 2.0 adoption on state web portals to identify key factors influencing its adoption. The results suggest that while the potential of the new technology is immense, its adoption is constrained by a number of political factors. In particular, the authors find that there is disinclination toward adopting Web 2.0 by incumbent governors while the technology was favored by governors who are newly elected into their office. Moreover, there was disinclination toward the new technology by governors with high approval rating while those with low approval rating sought to adopt them. Our findings point to a perception by governors about Web 2.0 as a powerful and effective instrument of communication but, at the same time, politically risky, creating disincentive to adopt the technology by governors with established political support. There is a "more to lose" mentality about Web 2.0 by political actors with high level of political support while "less to lose" by those with thin political support. This research sketches a picture of Web 2.0 adoption in government where political instability and newcomers facilitates the use of Web 2.0 increasing dialogue and communication with citizens while higher levels of political stability and support reduces the use of Web 2.0, diminishing the channel of communication created by the new technology.

INTRODUCTION

The introduction of e-government has been thought by many as a technological solution in improving citizen participation in public affairs, making government bureaucracy more transparent and accountable to citizens, and recovering citizens' trust in government (Applebaum, 2002; Halvorsen, 2003; La Porte, Demchak, & De Jong, 2002; Tolbert & Mossberger, 2006; Welch, Hinnant, & Moon, 2005). However, there has been a widely recognized pattern of e-government adoption at various levels of government where such democratic potential of e-government is vastly under-utilized while service-oriented applications flourish (Dawes, 2008; Edmiston, 2003; Ho, 2002; Scott, 2006; Thomas & Streib, 2005). This trend began to change with the election of President Obama whose Presidential campaign has revealed the power of Web 2.0 in mobilizing the political support that played a significant role in his election victory. Defined as a networked platform and a collection of social media that support individuals to create, share, edit and comment on content using diverse devices and technologies (Chang & Kannan, 2008; Chun, Shulman, Sandoval, & Hovy, 2010), Web 2.0 applications such as *Facebook, YouTube, Flickr,* and *Twitter* played crucial role in enabling the formation of a vast political network and creating a favorable image for the Presidential candidate.

The realization of the power of the Internet in the political arena has significantly improved the visibility and popularity of the Web 2.0 applications, which began to appear on government websites. The recent rise of Web 2.0 on government websites calls for a close examination as it signals a considerable shift in the direction of e-government development in the US and it may help materializing the much anticipated potentials of e-government in improving government transparency, accountability, and citizen participation. However, as we have learned from the history of e-government development, technology itself does not automatically translate into its full potential, rather technology and its potential is constrained or reflective of various institutional attributes of the adopting organization (Fountain, 2001). While the adoption (and consequent development) of e-government has been studied extensively in the literature, the adoption of Web 2.0 applications by the government has rarely been explored. This article examines the critical factors influencing the adoption of Web 2.0 applications by government. Web 2.0 applications are considerably different from traditional e-government applications. For instance Web 2.0 applications are developed and owned by private businesses and they are mainly designed to enable networking and communication among users. Web 2.0 is therefore more political in nature and the government does not have any direct control over these applications. It is then reasonable to expect that the adoption of Web 2.0 would be different from the adoption of traditional e-government. This article aims to identify key factors that influence the adoption of Web 2.0 by the government and speculate on the potential as well as the limitations of the new technology in e-government.

In the following sections, we will review the literature investigating the factors that influence the adoption of e-government, discuss the theoretical framework used to explain the adoption of Web 2.0 by the government and the hypotheses tested in this study. Then the sources of data, measurement and method of analysis will be examined. In the Findings and Discussion section, the results from the analysis will be discussed and the meaning and implications of our findings in the future of Web 2.0 in government will be speculated.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND BACKGROUND

The Obama campaign's strategic use of the Internet during the 2008 Presidential election has demonstrated the potential of the Internet and

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