

Chapter 13

Adoption of Social Media Services: The Case of Local Government Organizations in Australia

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ABSTRACT

The increasing diffusion of social media is attracting government organizations worldwide, including local government. Social media can help local government improve the manner in which it is engaged with community and its responsiveness whilst offering cost savings and flexibility. Yet, there is paucity of research in relation to the adoption of social media Web services in local government organizations. The aim of this chapter is to investigate the factors that drive the adoption of social media Web services within Australian local government. Using qualitative evidence, the authors find technological, organizational, and environmental factors that drive the decisions of local government organizations to adopt social media Web services. In addition to extending the existing body of knowledge, this chapter offers insight concerning important managerial implications for helping local governments to better understand social media adoption in their organizations.

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INTRODUCTION

The increasing diffusion of social media is attracting government organizations worldwide including local government (Anttiroiko, 2010). Social media can help local government to become more responsive to its citizens, engage with the community and promote both accountability and transparency (Accenture, 2009; Australian Government, 2009; Eggers, 2007). Social media can also offer cost savings and flexibility (Lim & Palacios-Marques, 2011) to both local government and citizens using it whilst providing opportunities for improving service delivery and obtaining community feedback effectively and efficiently (Chang & Kannan, 2008; Markova, 2009; Osimo, 2008). In fact, evidence is emerging on how local government in the United Kingdom, United States, Australia, Germany and New Zealand are using social media for improving their services to the public (Anttiroiko, 2010; Purser, 2012; State Services Commission, 2008; Towns, 2010).

There is general agreement in extant literature that social media can be defined as any interactive Web-based application based on Web 2.0 technology that offers Web services enabling interactions between or amongst Web users and enhances their ability to create and share information on the Web (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; O'Reilly, 2007). Although social media and Web 2.0 are distinct concepts they are used interchangeably in the literature. Web 2.0 represents a newer platform foundation of the Web which consists of a set of technologies (e.g. Adobe Flash and RSS) to enable richer content to be published on the Web (O'Reilly, 2007). By contrast, social media refers to Web services that enable user generated content (UGC), that is, various forms of media content created by Internet users and available on the Web based Web 2.0 (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Examples of social media applications include blogs and micro blogs (e.g. Twitter), wikis (e.g. Wikipedia), social networking (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn), multimedia sharing services (e.g. YouTube), content syndi-

cation (e.g. RSS feeds), podcasting (e.g. iTunes) and content tagging services (Anderson, 2007; Hansen, Shneiderman, & Smith, 2010).

Despite the growing number of local governments taking part in implementing social media and federal government investment in terms of financial and organizational resources to improve social media initiatives (Steward, 2012), the uptake by government organizations in Australia, including local government has been sluggish and not as good as the development in the corporate world (Samuel, 2009). In a survey conducted with 235 local governments across Australia (Purser, 2012), only 25 percent of the local government organizations were identified to use social media and only six percent of local government organizations were identified to use social media extensively. Another recent survey of 560 council websites found that many local government websites are still based on one-way interaction designs and only eighty-two councils had social media applications promoted on their websites (Howard, 2012).

Like other IT projects, investment into Web services such as social media by governments often requires organizational change to culture, people, structure and processes if effective results are to be accomplished (Dadashzadeh, 2010; de Kool & van Wamelen, 2008). According to Osimo (2008), government organizations need to have a clear social media strategy to ensure the success of social media initiatives. Thus, in order to utilize the full potential of social media, a systematic approach is needed to identify the key determinants that influence successful adoption. Although various studies (Chang & Kannan, 2008; Meijer & Thaens, 2010; Wigand, 2010) and reports (Howard, 2012; Osimo, 2008; Purser, 2012) exist concerning the use of social media to enhance service delivery and the many benefits they offer, there is agreement amongst scholars that their adoption across local government remains under-researched (Millard, 2010; Nam, 2011; Wigand, 2010). Specifically, only limited studies have been found that can improve the understanding of the

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