Chapter 5

Boosting E-Participation:
The Use of Social Media in Municipalities in the State of Mexico

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the authors show two case studies of the use of social media in municipal governments: Lerma, a small municipality with a significant growth, and Metepec, an important municipality of the State of México. The purpose of this chapter is to provide empirical evidence of how social media improves government to citizen relationship and promotes e-participation in municipal governments. The results are based on semi-structured interviews applied to public servants and a survey to evaluate e-government services by citizens. So, the citizen perception is contrasted with public servants' interviews. Citizens consider that electronic procedures and services implemented by their municipalities do not generate value. The efforts of governments should focus on avoiding corruption, making governments transparent, opening data, and properly managing the privacy of information.

INTRODUCTION

Social media is an important tool that foster citizen to government interaction (G2C) (Bertot, Jaeger, & Hansen, 2012; Khan, 2017), so that the government is closer the people. Social media has been used as a mechanism to increase openness and transparency (Sandoval-Almazán & Gil-García, 2014). In this sense, governments

around the world have used Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube as an alternative communication channel with citizens.

Traditional governments have been transformed into E-Governments 2.0 (Khan, 2017), and E-Government is transforming into E-Governance (Dadashzadeh, 2010). For many municipalities in México, social media has represented an emergent technology that has changed G2C improving efficiency in communication (Valle-Cruz, Sandoval-Almazán, & Gil-García, 2016) since citizens have used this kind of technologies to make information request and complaints.

In the State of Mexico, a central state, near Mexico City, each municipality has at least a Facebook account useful for disseminating information about social programs, supports, cultural and political events, and to improve interaction with citizens. Some years ago, citizens had to go to the municipal office to request information or to know about the different events promoted by municipal governments.

Nowadays, with the advantages that social media provides, citizens can interact with governments virtually from their homes, and through their smartphones. One of the functions of governments is to respond to the citizens' needs so that some governments have tried to improve citizen participation. Furthermore, engaging citizens in government decision making is an important value and priority in a democratic society (Huang & Feeney, 2016). For this reason, social media is a useful mechanism to improve E-Participation towards an Electronic Empowerment Participation (E2P) (Chesnevar, Maguitman, González, & Estevez, 2016).

Different scholars have studied the use of social media to foster E-Participation in municipalities (Al-Aama, 2015; Bershadskaya, Chugunov, & Trutnev, 2014; Bonsón, Royo, & Ratkai, 2015), but it is important to compare the citizens' use of municipal social media, against the objectives and strategies that public officials pretend. In this manner, we will be able to answer the question: How do social media affects citizen's participation?

In this chapter, the authors show two study cases regarding the use of social media in municipal governments. Lerma a small municipality with a significant growth, and Metepec an important municipality of the State of México, which are part of the metropolitan zone of Toluca's Valley. The purpose of this chapter is to provide empirical evidence of how social media improves G2C, and boosts E-Participation in municipal governments.

E-Participation occurs, when citizens read information in the municipalities' Facebook and make an opinion about municipal information. In this manner, ICTs disseminate information and helps the government to citizen interaction. Citizens' opinions represent a feedback for governments.

The chapter structure is divided into five stages including the foregoing section. The second stage shows the literature review. The third section will describe the two study cases and data collection based on interviews applied to government officials,

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