

Chapter 29

Subnational Governance Model from the Integration of Online Media and Social Networks: The Case of Medellin City, Colombia

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents a subnational model of governance in the city of Medellin, Colombia, based on the integration of information generated by citizens in an online news center, that may lead to the basis for government action through a collective and participatory approach to problem-solving. For this purpose, the online news center was chosen based on their interactivity characteristics. A population of 388 news items were selected resulting in a representative sample of 180 news items, chosen according to the highest scores obtained on the expansion/depth characteristics and serialization. A joint analysis of news and comments identified the problems that citizens consider as priority for solutions to finally provide a governance model based on the results obtained.

INTRODUCTION

Development economics emerged as a discipline after the Second World War with the seminal works of the 1940s and 1950s linked to theories of modernization, strengthening in the 1960s with the structuralism and neo-Marxist theories, and evolving in the 1970s and 1980s with neoliberal theories (Hidalgo, 1998).

However, in the current global context, some factors of the center-periphery model released by some of the theories of development have become outdated, principally by the emergence of new social actors

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-9860-2.ch029

at different levels and progress in information and communications technology (ICT) (Vélez, 2015). More applicable is a polycentric model in which it is possible to descend even to subnational level, such as regions and municipalities. Several recent studies have evaluated development at a local level (Mascarenhas, Nunes, & Ramos, 2015; Moreno Pires & Fidélis, 2012, 2015; Moreno Pires, Fidelis, & Ramos, 2014)

Moreno Pires and Fidélis (2015) found that the main obstacles to governance in municipalities were communication strategies and the mechanisms of participation, which provide tools for people to work towards solving public and private problems in different social groups. In this regard, governments should facilitate greater involvement by stakeholders, otherwise the government's actions may run the risk of losing legitimacy (Hezri & Dovers, 2006). In the context of local governance, territories do not need to adapt to policies; rather, policies need to adapt to territories. A suitable territorial development strategy (Farinós, 2008, IIG, 2002) would allow most of the population to be incorporated into the development process (Ferrer, 2013).

This chapter presents a governance model that describes how information from alternative media and social networks can be used as an instrument for intervening in political action at the local level. The case study investigated alternative means of communication that allow social participation and dissemination in social networks, in Medellín, Colombia. This city was selected because it is a Latin American city that was recognized as an innovative city or City of the Year by the Wall Street Journal and Citigroup in 2013, with improvement in ICT one of the main factors motivating this award. Medellín is therefore a city that exhibits strong social networks because of its robust technological infrastructure (Londoño, Velez, & Cardona, 2016), and the design of its governance structures facilitates people's active participation in solving social problems. Indeed, citizen participation is the first step towards collective action (Gordon & Manosevitch, 2011; Innes, 2004; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

The theoretical framework for this research presents a series of concepts related to understanding the communicative process in interactive digital communication, such as the characteristics presented by Scolari (2008) and the key aspects of user-centered communication presented by Jenkins (2009a). These are discussed in relation to the context of subnational governance.

The case study methodology was chosen for its relevance (Yin, 2009); that is, ensuring that the sample of the alternative media that enable social participation was representative, as defined by Scolari (2008). The main characteristics of interactivity and the technological transformation defined as digitization could then be defined, as well as the concept of reticularity, which is the process of interaction as a network generated by people every time they share comments.

Once the alternative media were selected according to these criteria, the next stage was to choose the news that the community considers the most relevant. This was done using the concepts of criteria of expansion and seriality (Jenkins, 2009b), which correspond to the number of comments posted in different social networks.

Citizens' priorities were identified by classifying the news into a number of categories. People tend to express views about the problems that affect most of society and share their information with online news centers. Social networks become a key input in the search for solutions. Likewise, analyzing the comments helped to understand the opinions and collective imaginary; these need to be taken into account since they suggest how society might respond if governments did not intervene to resolve the issues. This may be perceived as a power vacuum, because it could constitute a major threat to democracy and political stability if some groups were to take the law into their own hands, clearly not desirable for any society or for the balance of government.

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