

# Chapter 15

## Assessing the Social Media Presence and Activity of Major Greek Cities During 2014–2017: Towards Local Government 2.0?

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter describes how little is known about how Greek local authorities capitalize on the potential of social media as a communication channel. The authors present the results of following up on a 2014 study assessing major Greek cities' presence on social media at the time. The authors check whether and how Greek cities may have improved their levels of acting and reacting via social media so as to identify eventual positive changes and/or patterns and discuss potential ways to implement comprehensive strategies for social media as civic interaction tools for local governments. A set of 52 major cities all over Greece (administrative capitals of the corresponding prefectures), has been chosen as the research population. Findings show that local authorities are advancing in the exploration of social media for communication with citizens, but have not yet reached a level at which they would use them as catalysts for citizen interaction in order to enhance civic engagement.*

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-3706-3.ch015

## INTRODUCTION

Drawing on the existing literature of social media use in governments all around the world it becomes clear that they have the potential to introduce new forms of digital interaction between governments and their stakeholders (Bertot et al., 2010) as well as to increase democratic engagement, thus reaching a wide audience that has been traditionally characterized by apathy (Mergel, 2013).

Social media are also considered to enable governments in their effort to evaluate their own work and, as Noveck (2009) mentions in this line of thought, they also deliver a potential for playing an important role in the implementation of open government, so much so that they are widely used and adopted by the general public. These Web 2.0 platforms enable government agencies to ‘crowdsource’ useful fresh ideas from large numbers of citizens concerning possible solutions to social needs and problems, new public services or improvements of existing ones, or other types of innovations (Chun et al. 2010; Linders, 2012; Nam, 2012). This can lead to the application of open innovation ideas in the public sector (Hilgers & Ihl, 2010), and gradually result in ‘co-production’ of public services by government and citizens in cooperation (Linders, 2012).

This argumentation seems to be valid both for central government and local governments alike (Rutter, 2014) as local authorities are an important part of the everyday lives of citizens, both in the administrative and service delivery level as well as in the sphere of civic engagement and participation. They are considered as institutions that can more flexibly enable tools and processes towards more citizen-centric and participative forms of public policy-making with a stronger interaction with citizens, thus allowing the former to exploit the knowledge and the creative ideas of the latter with regards to pressing social problems, and at the same time increase transparency (Bertot et al., 2012; Snead, 2013) and accountability, in an effort to regain citizens’ trust (Azyan, 2012; Bryer & Zavattaro, 2011).

Or the adoption of social media by government has presented several constraints and in some cases disadvantages (Guillamón, 2016), linked to issues such as privacy and security; loss of control due to excessive transparency (Ferro & Molinari, 2010); low levels of participation as well as destructive behavior by users (Anttiroiko, 2010). Sound implementation of a social media adoption strategy is necessary in order for these tools to become powerful cost-effective ways that may effectively help to engage citizens.

Such a strategy would entail clear objectives, knowing the target audience, selecting the right social media for the task, and taking the time to develop the right policy that needs to be supported by traditional media channels. Social media evolves quickly, so it is a good practice to keep the social media policy platform-neutral, and subject it to frequent reviews and revisions in order to meet the needs of a changing environment. Recent findings, in this respect, show that the use of Facebook by Western European local governments has become commonplace, and the audiences of the official Facebook pages of Western European cities are rather high. Still, a high number of fans does not automatically mean an engaged audience, and citizen engagement in general is found to remain low (Bonsón et al 2017).

The objective of the research reported in this paper is to follow up from a 2014 study assessing the presence of major Greek cities on social media, as well as the extent and patterns in which these cities used social media. Towards this end the following research questions are raised:

**Research Question #1:** To what extent is there an increase in the presence of major Greek cities on social media during the 2014-2017 period?

**Research Question #2:** To what extent are major Greek cities present on social media actually using these in a regular way?

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