

Chapter 15

The Community Manager and Social Media Networks: The Case of Local Governments in Spain

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ABSTRACT

Local governments are increasingly embracing Web 2.0 technologies to encourage the use of means of bidirectional communication to change how they interact with stakeholders, thus providing the greater accountability demanded. Nonetheless, to make Web 2.0 tools efficient, there must be qualified people to operate and supervise the Web 2.0 and social network technologies implemented by local governments. These people, called “Community Managers,” play a key role in the implementation of social networks in local government, successfully or otherwise. In this chapter, the authors analyse whether the training and education of community managers in Spanish local governments is associated with the successful use of social networks by these local governments in their interaction with the public. Their empirical study of local government in Spain shows that the position of community manager is mostly held by men who are aged 25-45 years and have a university degree in journalism, performing in addition, tasks such as updating the municipal website or running the press office.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The implementation of Web 2.0 technologies has favoured reforms and modernisation within public administrations, changing the nature of political and public dialogue (Osimo, 2008) and encouraging participation by citizens, allowing them greater involvement in public affairs and enabling public managers to create more affordable, participatory and transparent models of public sector management (McMillan et al., 2008). The application of popular Web 2.0 technologies such as social networking (Facebook, MySpace), wikis, blogs, microblogs (Twitter), mash-up and multimedia sharing (YouTube, Flickr) can facilitate interactive information sharing, interoperability and collaboration (United Nations, 2010), thus promoting open and user-driven governance (Bertot et al., 2010a, b, c; Millard, 2009).

In the local government context, which has long been a prime focus of public sector reforms (Christiaens, 1999; Mussari, 1999; Ter Bogt and Van Helden, 2000; Pallot, 2001; Smith, 2004), social networks are becoming increasingly relevant as public sector entities are pressured by demands for improvements in information transparency and public sector services delivery, as part of the accountability required of municipalities (Gibson, 2010). Accordingly, local governments are increasingly embracing Web 2.0 technologies to encourage the use of means of bidirectional communication to change how they interact with stakeholders and to become more efficient in their response to stakeholders' demands, thus providing the greater accountability demanded (Redell and Woolcock, 2004; Leighninger, 2011).

In Spain, administrative structures were reformed in the 1990s (Gallego and Barzelay, 2010) and a process of managerial devolution was undertaken (Bastida and Bernardino, 2006). In addition, legislation promoted the modernisation of local governments by the implementation of new technologies. Thus, the Information Society Services and E-Commerce Act (No. 34/2002)

guaranteed access to government information, while the Local Government Modernisation Act (No. 57/2003) promoted the use of new technologies in order to: a) enhance participation and communication with citizens; b) enable administrative procedures to be carried out online; c) publish basic legislation on the Internet; and d) enhance interaction with municipal authorities. Finally, the definitive impetus to the inclusion of information and communication technologies (ICTs) at different levels of government – national, regional and local – in terms both of their relations with citizens and in their internal management, was given by the Electronic Access to Public Services Act (No. 11/2007), which guaranteed this right to all citizens. In view of these developments, this analysis is focused on the introduction of Web 2.0 technologies into local governments in Spain.

As a result both of legislation and of demands from the population, local governments in Spain are becoming more transparent and allowing greater public participation in municipal management, thus providing greater accountability. In this respect, social media could be an appropriate tool with which local governments could enhance their interaction with the public. Nonetheless, to make Web 2.0 tools efficient, there must be qualified people to operate and supervise the Web 2.0 and social networks technologies implemented by local governments. These people are known as community managers.

Community managers are the invisible face of local governments but they are responsible for interacting with local citizens and for creating the conditions that will underpin this relationship. Therefore, they play a key role in the success or otherwise of the implementation of social networks in local government. Accordingly, they require specialised skills, education and training to do their job well. Studies have shown that the existence of community managers and their level of professional competence are key factors in enhancing communication by municipal administrations (Cheng, 2009).

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