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Government portals, social media platforms and citizen engagement in India: Some insights

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Abstract

Purpose: This study examines the current status of digital integration of five Indian state governments' departments' websites with social media platforms and suggests improvements for better customer engagement.

Approach: Content analysis of 259 government departments' websites was done to understand their integration with social media platforms, in top five populated states. The analysis on customer engagement was done in the light of Open Government Maturity Model.

Findings: While examining the websites, it is observed that despite the digital infrastructure of the government, the reach seems to be towards a particular kind of audience rather than for all citizens. The analysis of top five departments' websites from each state with presence of maximum number of social media platforms links showed absence of linkage with social media platforms.

Originality and value: Analysis of the presence and digital integration social media platforms of five state departments' websites was done till 1 May 2017. This research will provide insights about the status and need to design a framework to use social media platforms in Indian public system for citizen engagement.

Keywords: Social media; public–citizen engagement; digital integration; Open Government Maturity Model; Indian states.

1. Introduction

Social media is emerging as an influencing force in all spheres of life [1]. It is used by various organizations' to enrich communication strategies [2]. The use of social media and ICTs increases collaboration among various stakeholders, enabling feedback and promoting citizen participations. The innovative use of technology contributes to democracy by promoting "transparency, government responsiveness, and citizen participation" [3-

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5, p.347]. Public administration uses social media to connect with citizens to increase citizens' participation. Social media enables multiple ways to act as a bridge between the government and citizens [6].

Social media use in private sectors attracts attention in following areas: customer relation management, marketing and brand management [7], whereas not much steps have been taken to institutionalize social media in public administration [6]. There is limited research on Indian government's use of social media for citizen engagements. This paper highlights the presence and integration of the social media in 259 government websites of five Indian states and discussed about the Open Government Maturity Model (OGMM) for SMPs integrations.

2. Social media, citizen engagement and public administration

2.1. Public administration and citizen engagement

In new public administration, the managers (public servants) have to deliver services to customers rather than to the citizens. In this approach, administer needs to formulate efficient services [8]. The users and communities move beyond the participation and engagement to become part of the planning and production of the services; this approach is known as coproduction approach [9, p.847].

The public administration considers new transitions where technologies enable the conducive environment to engage with citizens [4]. The public managers consider the adoption of collaborative means of administration. The networking approach leads to the collaboration in the governance process, whereas its adoption is dependent on the readiness of government departments [10]. The networks of actors promote participation, which influences the regional development [11, p.216].

The government's use of social media enables "platform for public participation and collaboration"[12, p.492]. The citizen's involvement in the governance process influences the perception of citizens about the government [13]. The social media allows individuals to feel part of the engagement process, whereas in the traditional physical setting they were out of participation [14, p.3].

2.2. Citizens engagement through social media

Social networking sites (SNSs) emerged as popular platforms means of interaction [15, 16]. Social media platforms (SMPs) promote two-way communication [5, p.348], engage with people in real time, to build virtual community [17, p.316], helps to take informed decisions, and communicates about organisations [18, p.513]. Social media strengthens the public relations by reaching out and engaging with users [19]. The local civic network of individual, municipalities and business influences the social and economic development of the region and influences these actors with security risk [11, p.218]. The local information system can bridge the gap between the citizens and government [11]. There are various areas where social media can be used by the government; some of the areas are disaster management operations [21], civic engagement [22], and transparency at the local level [4] etc.

The open government initiatives taken by various countries and public system adopted social media for citizen engagement. The adoption of social media by the different organisations is not similar. Some of the reasons for not to adopt or poor adoption of SMPs lies in 'How?' How to adopt SMPs? The 'How' aspect of the social media adoption is untangled by the Open Government Maturity Model (OGMM); OGMM provides guidelines to organisation about identifying the present level of social media presence, what to focus at each level? What capabilities are needed? What are the probable outcomes? [12].

However, use of social media is not without limitations and challenges. In social media, one of the major challenges is the professionals to manage social media communications [18, p.512]. The government engagement with the public through social media remains a less explored area and usually government lack skills to initiate such engagements. The movement towards the transparent and participative engagement requires investment in