

**USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN E-GOVERNANCE AND
CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT IN PAKISTAN**

Amir Bajwa, Hamayun Masood and Tariq Nawaz

¹ Department of Mass Communication, Lahore Garrison University
Lahore, Pakistan. Email: amirmehmoodbajwa@gmail.com

² Department of Communication and Media Studies
University Sargodha, Sargodha, Pakistan.
Email: hamayunmasood1@gmail.com; tariq.nawaz@uos.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

In this day and age where social media has become such a significant and dominant form of communication. It has become immensely important for every kind of organization client communication, to adopt and utilize social media tools in order to provide personalized and transparent services to their clients. Social media can be incredibly helpful for government organizations in generating information and data, and building trust-based relationships that are likely to restore public confidence in local government. It can serve as an engagement channel between public organizations and the public and facilitate the delivery of correct, accurate and timely information both in and out of emergency situations. In general, the use of social media is can help in improving the services of the local government and contribute to a more efficient use of public resources. This study in an attempt to explore how the government of Pakistan has adapted to social media for governance purposes from the concerned officials perspective. A survey was conducted to get the picture how government citizen engagement through social media is working. The findings throw light on the way citizens are engaging with government departments and how government is facilitating the citizens. The findings revealed that Facebook is the most preferred social media platform of citizens to reach government offices. Citizen engagement level is good. However, there is a need to develop a uniform policy for running social media department and standard operating procedures to be implemented from content creation, to response and monitoring of the whole engagement process.

KEYWORDS

Social media, citizen engagement, levels of engagement, engagement management.

INTRODUCTION

Today, social media has become the prime mode of communication and interaction at every level in societies irrespective of private and public domain. Business sector, private organizations and governments are compelled to use these tools for efficient and effective working to stay in. Governments are also increasingly using these communications and engagement channels for effective governance. They use these channels to build trust-based relationships and improve public service that help restore confidence in government

also, they serve as tools to generate information and data. Generally, the use of social media is expected to facilitate good governance and help efficient use of public resources.

This study aims to observe the effectiveness of e-government particularly at the local government organizations in terms of citizen engagement in Pakistan. With the purpose to look at the broader experiences of social media use among the selected institutions, in terms of the selection of social media tools, kinds of social media management across the organization, institutional policies and practices regarding social media usage and monitoring and measuring the impacts. This study aims to consider the problems associated with the low response of citizens to the adoption of e-government in Pakistan.

The study is significant in advancing knowledge about the social media use as a tool for good governance. This study will provide empirical and authentic information to the local government organizations in identifying and implementing best practice in order to increase citizens' engagement and enhanced transparency. The findings of the study will be helpful to the authorities in planning and policy development for efficient and cost effective public service delivery and resource utilization to build trust based relationship with the citizens.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study is mainly informed by the work of Yang and Holzer (2005) along with other related works exploring public management in terms of the relationships between government and its citizens (e.g. (Holzer and Kim 2008, Kang and Gearhart 2010, Riccucci, et al. 2004, Schorr and Stevens 2021, Krueathep, Riccucci and Suwanmala 2010, O'Toole 2010) . The research informs that public administration is a blend of two realms - political and administrative, creating different work environments, at times with opposing concerns. Traditionally, the governance was seen as the role of government in relation to the citizens as a whole. But recently, with the rapid advancement in information and communication technologies and with the emergence of social media, the public administration is envisaged in relation to individual citizen, demanding a more collaborative and participative approach.

Yang and Holzer emphasize that means to win citizens' faith in democratic governance lies "not in expanding political control, but in collaborating with citizens, the ultimate principals of the democratic process" (Yang and Holzer 2005, 122). They advise that government should seek to increase citizens' participation to gain their trust by means of performance measurement process. The foremost source of erosion of public trust is closely linked to their perception of government as inefficient at best and damaging at worst. The citizens' mistrust results in less likelihood of paying taxes and support government services. Whereas when citizens trust their government they are more likely to invest in government programs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

E-government is deemed as the most effective and efficient way to adapting to the demands of information societies and modernizing and reforming governance (McLeans and Tawfik 2003). To become a modern democratic and fair society, reliable and trustworthy public e- services are essential (Pinter, 2004). E-Government refers to the

usage of Information and Communication technologies (ICT) for the delivery of public services. An e-service is a software that is used by the government to fully or partially automate a specific administrative process. This process can be initiated by citizen on request (Gorden 2002). E- Government services are supposed to be available to all citizens and easy to use. In developing citizen centric, seamless, responsive e-government services interaction between public and services is crucial which is possible through social media (Hafstrom and Hofbauer 2004). Therefore, the e-services which have social media presence and that encourages citizen participation.

The use of Social media is a vital part of governments' public relation strategies and for influencing press coverage (Lee 2012, Nabatchi and Mergel 2010). Responsive and proactive media interaction leads to more positive coverage in media. Positive perception of governments in social media likely to increase citizens; trust in their governments and provides legitimacy and improve overall image of government (Liu, Horsley and Yang 2012). Lee, Neeley and Stewart (2012) stress that governments must adopt new social media tools to improve their public relations and external communication with public. The reasons include; 1) social media dominates many peoples' everyday life; 2) public administration in essentially includes communication to inform and educate citizens, 3) communications aid government to accomplish their goals and be accountable to citizens, and 4) with new communication technologies public managers need to understand and benefit from two way communication.

Social media affords government institutions to engage in external networking with the citizens forming a "web of action". O'Toole identifies five major functions that web of network serve for the organizations; information gathering, stimulating interest in in the organization, creating and availing opportunities, mustering support in times of pressure, and 'negotiating' with the other network members in policy endorsement and other efforts in the public service (O'Toole 2010, 10). Studies also acknowledge that social networking through social media channels allows government to bring in "diverse partners" who may bolster government efforts by additional resources and by improving administrative capacity of public programs (Krueathep, Riccucci and Suwanmala 2010, 158).

All kinds of interactions of the government officials and agencies with citizenry must have a perception of transparency. Government officials are perceived to be conducting administrative processes away from public view therefore, they are more susceptible to mistrust. The processes that are conducted transparently and fairly, especially online, create a sense of openness and dialogue developing a favorable view of government agencies (Kang and Gearhart 2010). Additionally, for government operations approaching citizens through social media necessitate government workers to involvement directly with citizens and engage in "performance oriented dialogue" between administration and communities thus empowering citizens by enabling practice informed feedback (Holzer and Kim 2008, Schorr and Stevens 2011, Arnstein 1969). Citizen engagement and participation through social media therefore, shifts power from the policy experts, distant bureaucrats, and negligent politicians to the public (Campbell 2005).

Social media and social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube etc. are characterized by user driven content and forming social networks. Public administration experts see potential in these channels to engage public in government

decision-making, public service delivery, and policy implementation (Mergel 2013, Zavattaro and Sementelli 2014). The ease of use, ability to voice their concerns and opinions, and to interact with public officials directly in real time generates an optimism towards advancing democratic and transparent administration these channels might advance (Bertot, Jaeger and Grimes 2010, Hand and Ching 2011). These collaborative online spaces can enable more interactive, transparent, and trusting relationship between the community and government (Wachhaus 2017, Ayanso and Moyers 2012). But in reality, governments use social media to disseminate information and seldom engage in public dialogue (Gunawong 2015, Hand and Ching 2011). There is a growing critique that the benefits of social media in theory may not be as promising in practice. Many believe that instead of transforming government community relationships social media is rather reinforcing the power imbalance and reducing the quality of communication between the government and citizens (Piccorelli and Stivers 2019).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This is a survey study to observe the practices of using social media, and the impacts of public service delivery and organizational transparency, using a purposive sample of government departments from various regions of the Pakistan. The study attempts to comprehensively answer the following research questions:

- R1: How government agencies of Pakistan are using social media to enable citizen engagement?
- R2: How citizens engage with government departments?
- R3: What is the nature and level of government citizen engagement in Pakistan?
- R4: How social media team manages citizen government engagement in various government organizations.

Data Collection

The data was collected from the nine government departments by means of online Google survey form. The survey questionnaire was sent to the department heads to get it completed by the officials that are related to social media management in various government organizations. The names of government departments from which data was collected are as follows:

1. Overseas Pakistani commission
2. Agriculture department
3. Livestock department
4. Planning and Development
5. Anti-corruption Establishment
6. Law Department
7. Communication and works
8. Auqaf and Usher department
9. Population welfare department

The questionnaire included 13 questions in total. The participants (n=50) of the research were purposively selected. It was ensured that all the participants fulfil two conditions:

first, they have at least three months of experience working with social media in government and, second, they are currently holding any decision-making position in their department.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The data was analyzed using google form analysis and excel. The number of officers working for more than half of the positions reflect steadiness by allowing officers to work for a considerable time for continuity of policies.

The data showed that all of the government organizations are reaching their publics through social media. Evidently, more than half of the government departments have completed e- transition and are available online to the citizens. Only one fifth of the departments are yet to reach that point as can be seen in the figure 1.

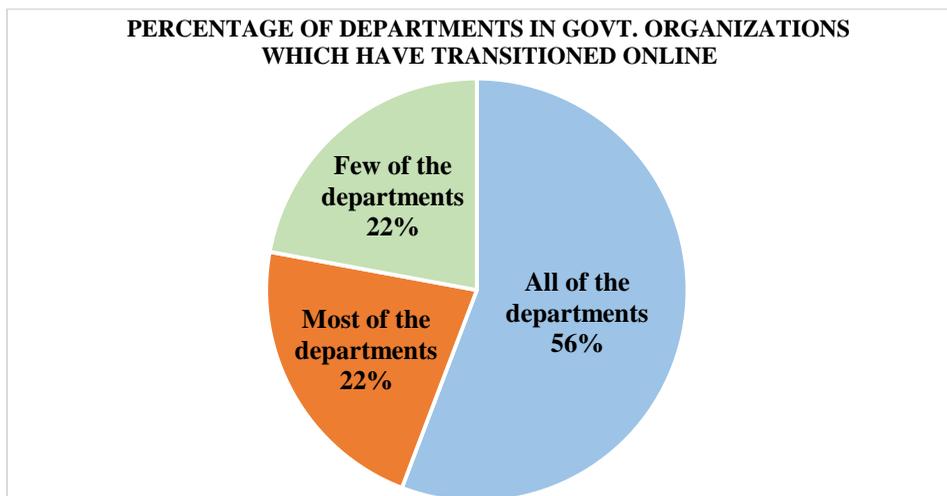


Figure 1: Percentage Graph of the Departments in Government Organizations which have Transitioned Online

The social media tools used most by the government organizations include Facebook, their own websites and WhatsApp in respective order. They also use photo and video sharing to communicate with citizens. Twitter is used comparatively less by them. The detail of the social media tools used by government is displayed in Figure 2.

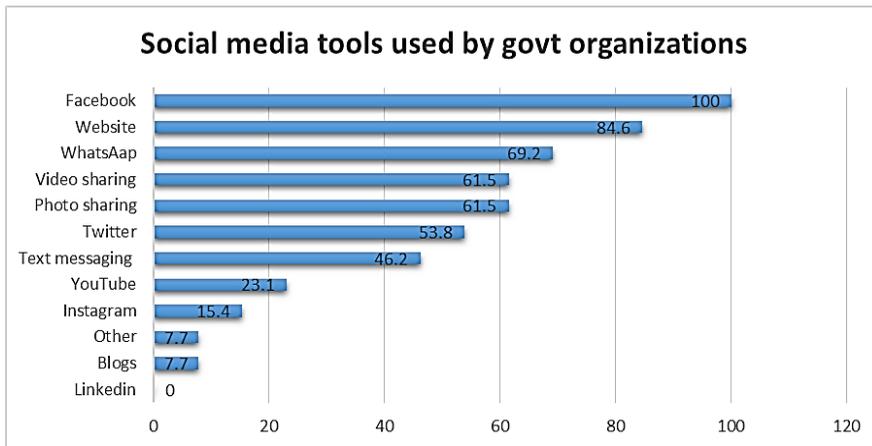


Figure 2: Percentage Graph of the Social Media Tools Used by the Government Organizations

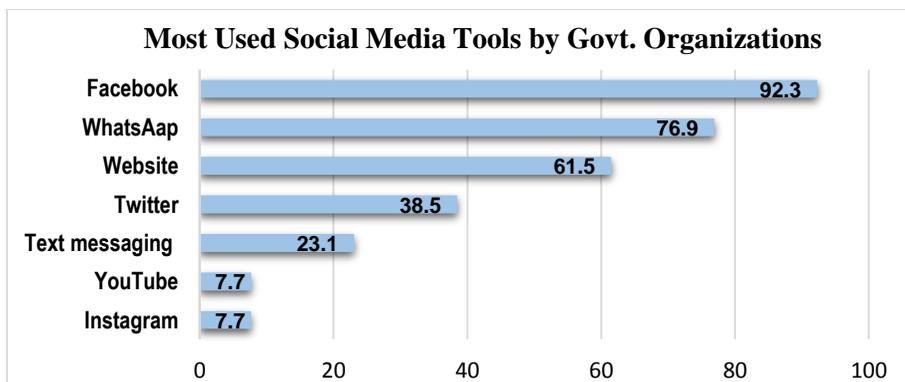


Figure 3: Percentage of the Social Media Tools Most Used by the Government Organizations

STAGES OF CONTENT CREATION, RESPONSE AND MONITORING

The officials were asked to identify how each of the stages of content creation, response, and monitoring was conducted. Who is responsible for each stage functioning. It was found that content creation is the job of IT team in most of the departments. Four of the respondents replied IT department. The remaining came up with different sections or departments ranging from public relation department to secretariat, planning section, department heads, and EME department and administration wing. For responding and monitoring the responses were even more diverse. No two departments were able to identify the same section for responding and monitoring.

Responding to the question inquiring the main purpose of social media use the majority response was to develop dialogue with community (see Figure 4).

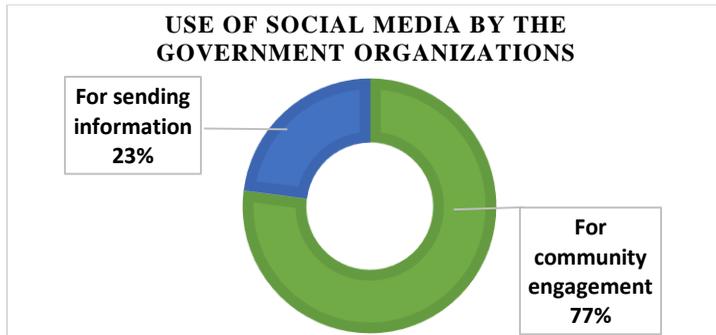


Figure 4: Percentage Chart of the Use of Social Media by the Government Organizations

LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT

Low engagement refers to the interaction with community predominantly about one way messaging. The department communicate citizens, information, provide updates and notices and not inviting or interested in their queries and feedbacks. Medium engagement refers to two way communication between government and citizen. They inform them and also allow them to give feedback. High engagement is the most desirable form of government citizen engagement in which citizens are allowed to make queries, give feedback on performance and also to give their inputs on improving working and policy making. They are encouraged to become co-producer of content and involved in decision making process. It was found that most of the departments think that they have achieved high level of engagement with citizens (Figure 5).

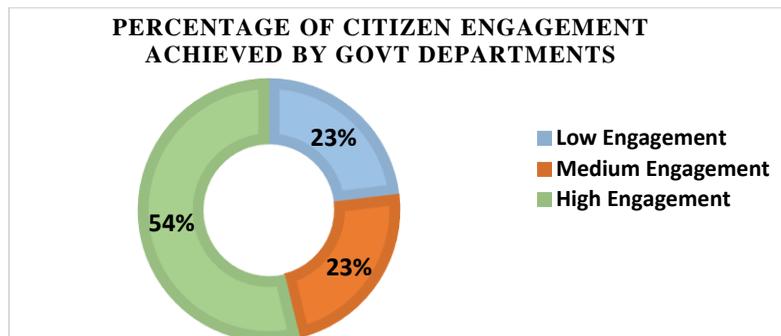


Figure 5: Percentage of the Degree of Citizens' Engagement Achieved by the Government Organizations

CITIZENS ENGAGEMENT

Telephone call is the popular mean citizens use to reach the government departments (Figure 6). Next most used way is go in person and have face-to-face interaction with the representative of the concerned department. Social media is also a preferred mean to more than a large majority of citizens. However, emails and letters turns out to be the least preferred mode to communicate with a government department.

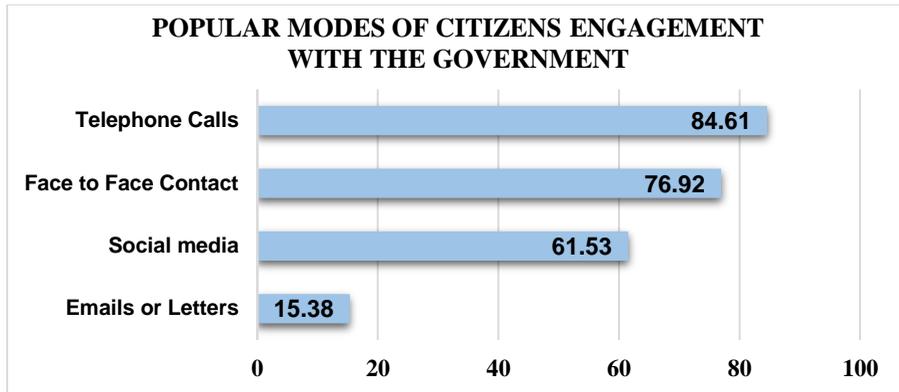


Figure 6: Percentage Chart of the Use of Social Media by the Government Organizations

The citizens contact government departments through their websites or social media mostly to file a complaint, ask a question, or to access a form. Signing up for an event is approximately done by not more than a quarter. The instances of giving an input on a project or for resolving a conflict are the least observed among the citizens, respectively as shown in Figure 7.

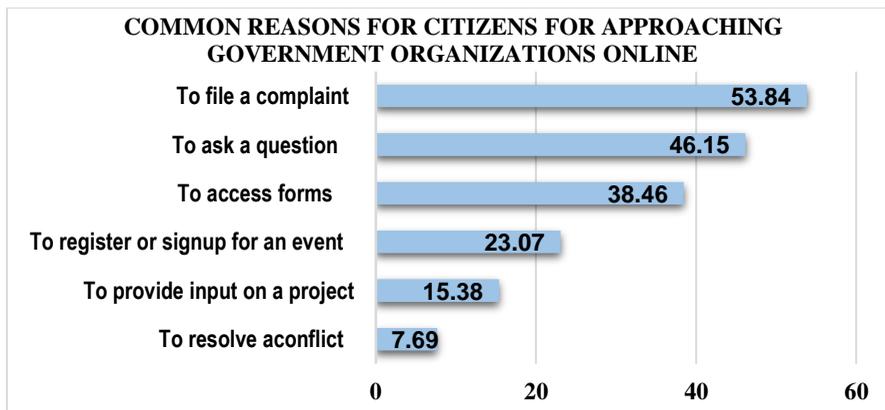


Figure 7: Percentage of the Common Reasons for Citizens Approaching Online to the Government Organizations

The participant officials' had similar views about the current nature of citizens' engagement. All of them seem to believe that although they have not yet achieved perfection but they are successful in creating a positive relationship with almost one third of the citizens by means of collaborative interaction as shown in Figure 8.

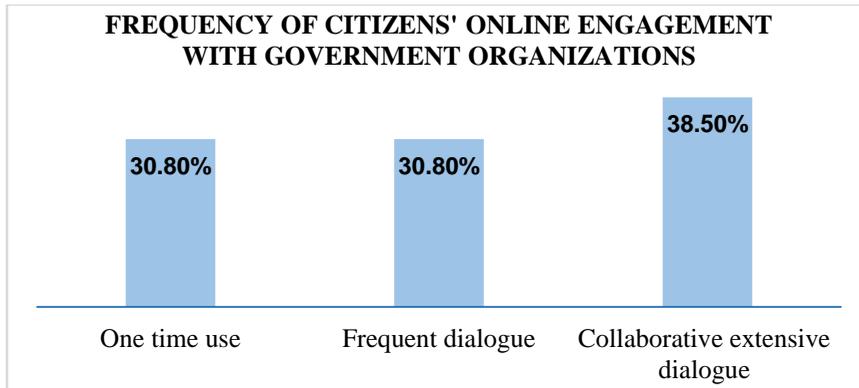


Figure 8: Percentage of the Frequency of Citizens' Engagement with the Government Organizations

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In the light of the data analysis and findings the study has been able to answer the research questions as follows.

R1: How government organizations of Pakistan are using social media to enable citizen engagement?

The relevant government officials who participated in the survey agreed that the government is using internet and social media for two way communication. 23% communication is one way or top down only to convey information in the form notices and updates. Nonetheless, majority of the communication is aimed for two way communication. The government encourages citizens to become active partners in policy making and decision making and contribute in improving services and processes of the government agencies.

The data revealed that 100 percent of the government organizations are using social media to reach their audience in varied degrees. More than half of the government organizations have completely adopted the new means of communicating with citizens in all of their departments. Others have in most of their departments. However, equal number of organizations are still have to adopt it.

The most common mode of government-citizen engagement is Facebook. Next comes WhatsApp and official websites. Text messaging is used only by one fifth of the government departments.

R2: How citizens engage with government departments?

The citizens generally access government departments to file a complaint or ask a question. Other major reason to contact online is to download forms. It is noticeable that only a very tiny percentage turn to government departments online either to give their input on the ongoing projects or to resolve a conflict. This indicates that citizens do not believe that government departments would appreciate their viewpoints and suggestions.

From the citizens' end, officials have revealed that they prefer to contact them through telephone call. After that, they prefer to visit in person. The engagement through social media is the third option among citizens. Writing letters and emails is still a far cry. One of the explanation of this order of preference could be explained as lack of education and resources. Majority of the population in Pakistan is illiterate and unable to read and write and use technology. The only way they can communicate is by talking in person or by phone. Furthermore, for majority of them even if they are literate and can use technology they do not have access to internet. The internet penetration rate in 2021 is currently 27.5% and limited to urban areas.

R3: What is the nature and level of government citizen engagement in Pakistan?

The data revealed that according the government officials assessment the citizens' level of engagement is high among more than half of the interactions. However, they also reported that one out of three engagements are limited to one time. Citizens simply access departments for a specific task. Same ratio is for the citizens who leave a comment or feedback on social media. However, surprisingly the officials seems to claim that two out of three citizens who access government through social media or on website engage in collaborative extensive dialogue. This means they actively give their viewpoints and suggestions and positively contribute in decision making process.

R4: How social media team manages citizen government engagement in various government organizations.

The data revealed that there is no uniform mechanism adopted by the government to manage the process of content creation, response, and monitoring. The three stages are rarely run by a single team. The content creation team is different from the team who respond to the citizen. Moreover, monitoring duties and their objectives are unclear. No single position or section can be named that monitors the engagements. The three stages vary in each department and likely absolves officials of responsibility at each stage to take the engagement to a satisfactory end. Moreover, it is difficult for the citizens to know whom to contact to track their queries.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The e-government operation comprise of three distinct stages of content creation, response, and monitoring are not clearly defined in terms of responsibilities. Each of the stage requires clear and standard procedures of operation practiced uniformly in every government department. It is strongly recommended that uniform standard operating procedures (SOPs) should be developed and adopted in all government departments. This would prevent confusion among citizens and increase process transparency.

LIMITATIONS

1. The survey was conducted with government officials only thus is only reflects the government's point of view.
2. The procedures of content creation, response, and monitoring were not examined as a case study which would have provided a clearer picture of the effectiveness of the social media use by the government departments for citizen engagement.

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