Social Media Usage in E-Government:
Mediating Role of Government Participation

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ABSTRACT

When citizens are actively engaged in e-government processes as co-creators it leads to e-government development. Citizen participation in e-government is a recent phenomenon where government is seeking more involvement of citizens through different platforms. Whether citizens' participation through social media platforms leads to e-government development has been a debate in literature. In this research study, the authors investigate whether social media usage influences government's role in e-government development. Power distance between government and citizen also plays a role in deciding the extent of e-participation in e-government. In this study, the authors examine the relationship between social media, power distance, citizen engagement and e-government development. Using customer focus theory and agency theory, this study establishes that e-participation initiative by government acts as a mediator in the relation between social media usage by citizen as well as power distance to e-government development.

KEYWORDS

Cross-Country, E-Government Development, E-Participation, Mediation, Power Distance, Social Media

INTRODUCTION

Electronic-government (e-government) development is a comprehensive phenomenon that measures the performance of technology, policy and national strategy of a country (Grant & Chau, 2005; Siau & Long, 2006). E-government focuses on "how governments are using websites and web portals to deliver public services and expand opportunities for citizen to participate in decision making" (United Nations, 2010). Through this initiative the government seeks to establish direct conversation, exchange information and provide services to its citizens.

Social media can play an important role of connecting government with citizen as it has redefined the way Internet users communicate with one another (Kuzma, 2010). The government is increasingly adopting social media for two-way interactions with citizens to engage and collaborate with them (Zavattaro & Samantelli, 2014). Many countries are using different social media tools, such as instant messaging, wiki etc., to interact with their citizens (United Nations, 2014). Social media provides a platform to governments to gain customers' focus on their activities and processes. Social media finds several definitions in literature. It has been defined as "creating, organizing, editing, combining, sharing, commenting and rating web content as well as forming a social network by interacting and linking to each other" (Chun et al., 2010 p. 2). Social media facilitates citizen partnership in a structured way for improving relationships, establishing new connections and facilitating better decision making (Ballejos & Montagna, 2010). Interactions on social media are mostly open with little censorship, thus increasing democracy and participation (Azad et al., 2010; Bertot et al., 2010). It is low cost,

reaches a heterogeneous audience quickly, as well as generates knowledge and ideas for various uses (Chatfeild et al.; 2013; Karantzeni & Gouscous, 2013; Charalabidis & Loukis, 2014).

Electronic participation (e-participation) or citizen engagement refers to the initiatives taken by the government of a country to involve citizens in decision making (United Nations, 2010).

Engagement of citizens in e-government development involves four technology task couplings where social media can be used - information dissemination, feedback on service quality, participation and internal work collaboration (Oliveira & Welch, 2013; Lohan, 2013). This being said, even though there is presence of government on social media, the two-way communication between citizen and government is essentially missing (Abdelsalam et al., 2013; Sáez-Martín et al., 2014) and it just remains one-way communication from the government to disseminate information to citizens.

Very few studies have been conducted on the cultural values, social norms, legal and political systems of a country in the context of e-government and social media (Zhao, 2011; Zhao et al., 2014). In the domain of cultural values, it is found that mostly power related to decision making is distributed unequally between different members of the society. One of the important cultural dimensions known as 'power distance' measures inequalities in the power allocated among different hierarchical orders of a society (Hofstede, 2010). The study by Zhao et al. (2011) shows those countries with high power distance are less citizen-centric signifying an unequal distribution of power.

Previously, various antecedents of e-government development have been examined and can be broadly classified into technology, organization and environment, (Krishnan et al., 2012 a). In this context, we investigate whether the government's presence on a social media platform leads to increased e-government development. Secondly, we examine the role of power distance, an important cultural dimension, in the participation initiatives taken by the government to involve its citizens. Results of the quantitative study show the mediation effect of e-participation on the relationship between social media usage and power distance to e-government development.

The article is organized as follows: first, we undertake literature review on social media usage in e-government. Then we present the theoretical framework followed by hypotheses development. After analyzing global data of various countries, we discuss our findings; thereafter, we highlight limitations of our study and scope for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media usage in e-government has been a major concern for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers. Researchers have focused on various subjects related to social media usage in e-government including citizen participation in the social media, and the digital divide, among others (Magro, 2012). Further, it has been observed that this stream of research is at a nascent stage (Gandia et al., 2016). To gain insights into specific research areas in this field, we conducted a systematic literature review using keywords related to social media (Category A: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, social media, and social networking) and e-government (Category B: eGovernment and government) (Table 1). We searched in digital libraries of IEEE (269), ScienceDirect (465) and Wiley InterScience (206) to find relevant conference papers and journal articles. All research articles are categorized into different themes as shown in Table 2.

In our study, we reviewed the literature on social media usage in e-government for the period 2012-2016 in continuation to the review conducted by Magro (2012). The dominant themes identified were challenges and success, strategy and policy, participation and adoption, disaster management and terrorist attacks, innovation, transparency and trust, measurement and crowd sourcing (Table 2). At the country level, Zheng (2013) investigated challenges like user adoption and digital divide in China; on the other hand, Hong (2013) studied similar challenges in the context of America. Studies related to strategy and policies have explored openness and accountability while themes related to disaster management and terrorism have examined the role of warnings on social media by the government (Chatfield et al., 2013). Further, there are a few studies on innovation, crowd sourcing

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