

Can Social Media Enhance Service Delivery? Lessons and Best Practices

Flavia Kyeyago Ouma

Uganda Bureau of Statistics

Abstract

Governments are increasingly leveraging social media to deliver better services to the public. These networks are useful for government organizations since they have many interactive and innovative features which aid communication and interaction among citizens and enable them to interact and collaborate with government in the delivery of public services. This exploratory study examines the use of social media and its potential in enhancing public service delivery. The paper discusses the drivers to the use of social media in government, the benefits and lessons learned, and the best practices of managing social media for service delivery. It focuses on the use of social media in two case studies: the UK Metropolitan Police and Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS). We find that social media has enabled citizen participation, increased transparency, collaboration and improved accountability in service delivery.

Keywords: **Social Media, Government, Drivers, Benefits, Service Delivery; Face book**

Introduction

New social networking and social media technologies are widely believed to offer business and government organizations a powerful means to improve their communications, processes and, ultimately, performance. According to the UN E-government Survey Report (UN, 2012) there has been a drastic rise of social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Micro Blog etc.), which continues to grow rapidly, including through the use of mobile technology. The use of social media globally has grown, with over 975 million users of Facebook, of who Africa accounts for over 50 million (Internet World Stats, 2012). In Africa, Egypt has the largest number of Facebook users (13 million), while in East Africa, Kenya has the largest number of users (1.8 million) (Facebook, 2014). Increasingly in Uganda today, many youths and the working age group are involved in using the social media, and statistics records have 584,000 monthly users (MTN, 2013). A number of government organizations in Uganda are now using social media to deliver their services to the public. The most prominent corporate users include Uganda Revenue Authority (URA), Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), Kampala City Authority (KCCA), Ministry of Information and Guidance (MIG), National Information Technology Authority (NITA-U). All these have Facebook accounts through which they are reaching out to the public with their different services (Facebook, 2014).

Problem statement

Globally, governments are turning attention and resources to using the social media for improving public service delivery. As a result, government services are revolutionizing the way they relate with the public. In this new age, good government is accessible government which correlates to immediate access to pertinent information (Capek & Ritschelova, 2006). Social media has been highlighted as a good example of open government, which builds on

principles of citizen centrality and information transparency (UN, 2012). The use of social media has caused changes in the way organizations communicate with their employees, customers, stockholders, communities, governments and other stakeholders (Wright & Hinson, 2008). This means that social media could have an impact on the delivery of services by organizations. Government organizations are all trying to interact with the public through several social media tools seeking for support and opinions about various government initiatives with an aim of improving service delivery. The effective use of social media seems to show promise to improve the delivery of public services. However, it is still not clear how the social media can be used to improve the delivery of the services the organizations offer to the public. There is limited research done which focuses on how social media enhances service delivery. The importance of the use of social media in government agencies is emphasized by the Obama administration that strongly encourages governments to use social media to provide information, communicate with members of the public, and distribute services (Jaeger, Paquette & Simmons, 2010).

This paper explores the impact of social media on service delivery in government while examining the driving factors for using social media; the benefits and lessons learnt; and shares best practices of using social media to enhance service delivery. Section two presents the problem statement and objectives of the study, section three presents related literature and conceptualization, section four presents methodology, while section five presents the analysis. Section six presents the discussions on contributions of social media to service delivery in the government sector and limitations of the research methodology and section seven presents the conclusions and recommendations.

The objectives of the study were:

- i. To examine the drivers for using social media to enhance service delivery.
- ii. To establish the benefits for using social media for service delivery.
- iii. To establish the lessons and best practices in social media use to enhance service delivery.

To realize these objectives, the following research questions guided the study:

- i. What are the drivers for using social media to enhance service delivery?
- ii. What are the benefits of using social media for service delivery?
- iii. What are the lessons and best practices for using social media to enhance service delivery?

Literature Review

In this section of the paper, I review literature on social media, relevant theories about social media, social media and service delivery, Social media use in government on a global context, drivers, benefits, and the conceptual framework.

According to Serrat (2010), social media refers to online technologies and practices that users (including citizens) leverage to share concepts, experiences, insights, opinions as perspectives in social interface. Social media has a particularly appealing potential for e-participation. Bertot, Jaeger, Munson and Glaisyer, (2010) state that social media has four major potential strengths, i.e.: collaboration, participation, empowerment and

time. Social media is collaborative and participatory by its very nature as it is defined by social interaction. It allows anyone with access to internet the ability to inexpensively publish or broadcast information, effectively democratizing media. Social media consist of any online platform or channel for user-generated content and these are called social technologies like YouTube, Facebook and Twitter. This paper focuses on Facebook and Twitter. These have been experimented in government service delivery processes.

Relevant theories related to Social media

This section reviews some theoretical frameworks that may be applicable to the study and understanding of social media. These two explained here below might contribute to our understanding of the nature of social media, why people contribute or use social media, how they form relationships, and how one can discover the opinion leaders and valuable social media content.

Social Exchange Theory

Social media is dependent on users providing content this may give an understanding in the motives of why individuals participate in the social media exchanges. The Social exchange theory from sociology explores exchange between individuals or small groups (Emerson, 1976). The theory mainly uses cost-benefit analysis and comparison of alternatives to explain how human beings communicate with each other, and how communities are formed through communication exchanges (Homans, 1958). The theory explains that individuals engage in behaviors they find rewarding and avoid behaviors that have too high a cost. In other words, all social behavior is based on ones assessment of the cost-benefit of contributing to a social exchange. In the public service context, the citizen communicates about a government service at a low cost expecting feedback in the shortest time in anticipation for improved service delivery hoping their voices will be heard.

Social Media Integration theory model

The Social Media integration theory (Isra, 2010) explains that social media is an interactive process that enables same-level information exchange among the audience and the brand, creating a long-lasting feedback communication process and giving to the brand a total engagement approach. The theory was tested for media channels that included social media like Facebook and twitter. The findings by Isra (2010) revealed that exposure, feedback, engagement (connecting) and exchange (sharing) through Social Media platforms are some of the factors that drive organizations into social media participation. The theory further clarifies that all content is an active eco-system that allows social media interaction such as Twitter or Facebook. This content is then shared and spread virally through the connections made from interaction on the social media eco-system. This social media platform allows the interaction and the ability for the model to flow and become organic. Then, the social networking platforms enable the connection with the public through the engagement approach caused by the “two-way street” interaction process, linked to the social bookmarking sharing perspective. At the same time, while the driving forces of one side are acting and creating communication, the driving forces of the other side, such as social recommendation/reviews, measure the impact

of the information and turn it into a valuable feedback experience that can deliver the most effective exposure impact (giving feedback, engaging and sharing information all at once). This theory provides some feelers that can help measure the impact of social media on service delivery.

Literature review on social media does not provide much on models that have been constructed before. This paper therefore constructs a conceptual model that embraces, driving factors of social media in government and benefits of social media translated into aspects of service delivery that include engagement, accountability, transparency, collaboration and participation. The framework (Figure 1) encompasses some of the factors believed to contribute to improved service delivery. Driving factors are those that push organizations to use social media and these include innovation, feedback, leverage technology, visibility, fast turnaround time leading to quicker feedback and increased open government.

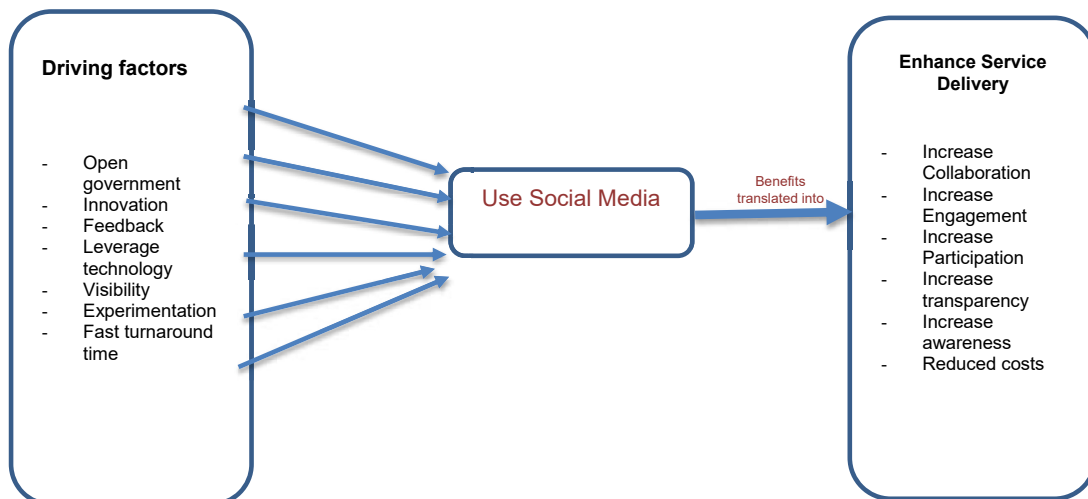


Figure 1: Conceptual Model: Drivers for using Social Media this study

Social media and Service delivery

Public agencies are slowly moving from simple online integration of their services to expanding communication with residents via Internet. Academics have described this shift as a move from e-Government to Government 2.0 (Mergel, 2012). E-Government is defined as government activities that take place over electronic communications including: acquiring and providing products and services, placing and receiving orders, providing and obtaining information, and completing financial transactions (Fang, 2002). The shift from e-Government to Government 2.0 correlates with the Obama Administration's Open Government Initiative, which is guided by the three principles of transparency, participation, and collaboration (Orszag, 2009). These three correlate with service delivery and improving government use of technology in general. This initiative has challenged government agencies to use social media as appropriate. The shift to e-government has expanded communication methods and the groups that communicate through the usage of new social technologies. The use of social media is increasing and it is

argued by some authors that it is a new step in the development of increasing use of Internet for improving service delivery (Constantinides & Fountain, 2008). Hence, social media will become a more interesting subject for the improvement of service delivery.

Service delivery is defined as a continuous cyclic process for developing and delivering user-focused services (WMO, 2014). In an OECD, Report 1987) it is suggested that the key components of responsive service delivery are transparency; participation; satisfying user requirements; and accessibility. In another OECD (1996) report, the importance of openness and accountability on behalf of the service providers is articulated as an important feature. Therefore, measurement of service delivery can be determined using the quality of program service delivery, level of participation and engagement, level of transparency, participation and collaboration (Orszag, 2009). These aspects are some of the ways through which the extent of service delivery can be measured in e-government. This paper combines both e-government and service delivery aspects that focus on participation, engagement, collaboration and transparency.

Social media use in government on a global context

There are a number of governments using social media in their organizations. In Australia a cross-agency collaboration platform called GovDex was developed in 2006 and reached 20,000 users in 2011 (GovDex, 2010). The initiative was designed to facilitate business process collaboration across policy portfolios, administrative jurisdictions and agencies. The service is designed to promote effective and efficient information sharing, providing governance, tools, methods and re-usable technical components across Australian government cross-agency. United Kingdom uses a social media platform called Yammer which is open source for internal sharing of info and collaboration between employees and external stakeholders. In addition, they have realized more gains via the social media as it has unleashed productive gains in public procurement of IT services through the Github an open source collaboration platform (Yammer, 2015). In Africa, Zimbabwe is already using twitter through their @263 chat created in 2012 to generate dialogue about issues concerning their country and this has provided the citizens with an opportunity to interact with government (263 Chat, 2015). In South Africa, through the city Tshwane, a page was created to engage the citizens as agents of change to report on service interruption such as water and power outages and announcing new developments, information on events, traffic and emergency-related information, and receiving and escalating customer complaints (Tshwane, 2015).

Drivers for using Social media in government

Social media is becoming the primary source of news for many governments. Various scholars have discussed various reasons for using social media. These vary based on the objectives of each government institution and the different services each public institution provides (Martinez, 2009; Evans & McKee, 2010; Bertot et al., 2012). These scholars have argued that social media puts the consumer in charge, giving every user the opportunity to voice their opinions and views. This means that organizations can no longer control consumers by sending them a one-way message. Government institutions are advocating for the use of social media so that citizens can openly discuss services provided by the government (Evans & McKee,

2010). It is important that government organizations encourage their customers (public) to leave review messages on their online social media tools as this would provide an opportunity for open governance where the citizen can openly contribute about the implementation of a particular service.

Governments are using social media because it is ubiquitous, it allows for widespread blogging, social networks, video sharing sites, and opportunities to comment on and rate online content helping governments spread information very fast (Martinez, 2009). The use of social media is seen as relevant for government to share timely information with people who need it and allow for fast response time and faster feedback (Fang, 2002; Martinez, 2009). It has also been the power of personal connections as this is a way people are more compelled to act on information that is transmitted through personal ties. Scholars have eminently discussed that social media tools are used so as to engage citizens to improve government and service delivery. Social media allows people to engage, to provide input for improving government services, and be part of the democratic process. Using social media to leverage technologies for better and quicker services is common amongst most government entities as it allows them to own competitive ideas and inventions to harness, thus encouraging innovation (Martine, 2009; Fang, 2002; Mergel, 2013).

From the literature above, it is observed that there are gaps on what specific drivers push government agencies to use social media to improve service delivery. Literature does not discuss much on open government as a major driver yet it is the major contributor to improvement of service delivery.

Benefits for using Social media for Service Delivery

Public sector organizations can benefit from social media for many reasons. However, measurement of these benefits is perceived differently by each sector. Social media have been used to reach wide areas globally and at a low cost. In comparison to the traditional advertising, public sector organizations need to invest in promotion through social media channels which only requires time to keep a site running (Masterson & Tribby, 2008). Mergel (2013) explains that social media allow organizations to expand their reach and connect with the public who do not use traditional forms of communication as often, but spend a significant amount of their time online. Therefore it is logical for governments to expand their online presence. In effect, the use of social media to communicate and advertise at low costs will lead to reduced administrative costs.

Transparency and accountability are benefits that the social media provides because the setting offers government an avenue to share important information with individuals (Mergel, 2010). The Kublai initiative in Italy has shown success in allowing creative young citizens to participate online in economic development projects to improve their communities. In so doing the site promotes openness and transparency, while providing coaching and mentoring to its participants (Biachi & Cottica, 2010).

One of social media's biggest breakthroughs is that it has provided governments the opportunities to inform, consult, involve, collaborate with and empower residents. This whole procedure has been defined as Participation 2.0 by Mergel (2012). Through public sector social

media public comments, opinions and polling, results can be obtained and shared. Scholars Newsom and Dicky (2013) believe that with further innovation, government IT professionals could use technology to connect to citizens for consensus building. It is important to realize that much as technology offers public organizations the ability to advance many of these initiatives, they are still limited to using social media for information sharing (Ouma, 2013).

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) argue that social media offer organizations a great opportunity to reach out and talk to their current and potential customers who increasingly expect to find their brands online (O'Connor, 2010). Additionally, Aggarwal (2010) discusses that participating in several social media channels can help organizations increase their visibility while increasing awareness of the public services they provide or about to be implemented for decision making.

Literature summary shows that there are different approaches to making social media very effective in public sector organizations. However, the literature used is still scanty with no concrete evidence to explain more on the use of social media and how it can enhance service delivery in the government sector. This has been confirmed by Hardy (2006) that the web has evolved considerably from a read-only technology to an interactive and participatory platform that allows users to create and share information. This study is to find out the usefulness of linking social media to improving service delivery.

Methodology

To test the research model for this study, a case study research design was used. This qualitative multiple case study is a research approach that facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources. A case study-based research approach was conducted using the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) in the UK and UBOS (Uganda) experience as representative case studies (Yin, 1994). Data was collected from the MPS and UBOS to explore the use of social media through literature review. A comparative analysis of both case studies was done using literature review to look at the driving factors for using social media, benefits, lessons and best practices. The case studies helped the author to have a true picture of social media in both the local and international context where it has been very successful.

Analysis

Case Study I - UK's Metropolitan Police

The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) is the UK's largest and most influential police force, which covers a population of 7.2 million. In 2011, rioting broke out in London lasting four days and costing £200m in clean-up and policing. Lack of community engagement and social media were found to be contributing to the spread of information among rioters. In 2012 the MPS oversaw three events (London Olympics and Paralympics Games, The Diamond Jubilee and Notting Hill Carnival) which required an unprecedented level of policing. To do this, the Police needed to identify and engage with new, community influencers and have more of a proactive approach in order to filter social media channels. The organization engaged HP, a long-term IT infrastructure supplier, to create a three-months' (July – September 2012) trial to help understand and utilize better social media analysis (SMA) for community engagement with lessons shared across the entire city. The solution covered a vast range of social media,

(YouTube, Flickr, LinkedIn and Facebook). The trial helped MPS formulate a long-term strategy to social media and provided insight as to how social media could be used to advance community engagement, intelligence gathering and crime investigation (MPS, 2015). The main driving force for MPS to use social media was to innovate ways through which they would use the various social media channels they had to achieve enhanced business and operational outcomes.

Benefits, lessons and best practices

The social media facility provided users with real-time understanding of what was capturing public attention, further providing MPS chance to track messages and review impact, to penetrate and identify responders. On average, there were 2,306,796 tweets a day with a peak of 3,291,998 (MPS, 2015). The social media solution resulted in more effective community engagement, earlier insight into relevant issues and more accurate analysis of social media sentiment. These insights have benefitted Police operations, including intelligence and crime investigation. Specifically, the solution helped to identify potential incidents and links much more quickly and accurately, ensuring that appropriate operational response was provided to highly-sensitive community events, and speed up understanding and operational awareness. The process enabled the team to monitor sentiment, respond to messages on a wider national scale and has led to saving of resources in terms of scanning papers, Internet and other social media feeds. Along the implementation, it was important that a team of experts on social media analytics were hired to measure the social media metrics. To further build and establish social media in the institution, the organization developed long-term social media strategies and trained staff on the use of the solution, enabling more engagement by users.

Case Study II - Uganda Bureau of Statistics

UBOS is the official statistical provider for Uganda. It is mandated to produce, coordinate and disseminate official socio-economic statistics. Recently, the Government of Uganda, through UBOS, conducted the 2014 National Population and Housing Census (NPHC, 2014). In a bid to improve communication with the public, UBOS started to experiment with the use of social media accounts -- Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn-- about June 2012. The initiative was led by the Web Team within the Directorate of Information Technology in partnership with the Communication and Public Relations Division.

Driving forces and implementation

The main driving forces to use social media was to assert our social media presence, improve client satisfaction, provide opportunity to leverage new technologies, and share knowledge more broadly so as to improve the quality, efficiency, and effectiveness of information and service delivery to the citizens. For quick and easy reference, the social media innovation was initially targeted specifically towards sensitization and advocacy of the 2012 National Population and Housing Census. The process provided an opportunity to pilot various strategies of sensitizing the citizens about the Census using both Facebook and twitter. The content uploaded mainly focused on Census activities that included live tweets of key points on census, daily updates to Facebook, myth busting of misinformation in the media and community at large, response to inquiries and calendar of events about the census. This experimentation

has led to improvements in the communications approach towards the various stakeholders (UBOS, 2015a). Measurement of interaction was done focusing on understanding how the end-user interacts with UBOS through the various social and web channels, and what the client accomplishes or achieves on a bi-weekly basis via mainly Facebook (UBOS, 2015b).

Benefits, lessons and best practices

The use of Facebook in UBOS has since led to increased engagement amongst its subscribers as seen by a greater following from 2,700 in September 2014 to 10,964 followers (UBOS, 2014b). This has also resulted in increased awareness and visibility of what UBOS does, compared to the past when UBOS was mistaken for Uganda National Bureau of Standards. The UBOS top management team has increasingly demanded for more use of social media to better engage with the public and understand their needs. Much as it is difficult to measure cost savings with the use of the social media presence, the bureau has experienced some reduction in costs of information dissemination as it has enabled a wider coverage both locally and internationally through the online consultations via the social media pages (UBOS, 2015a). Usage of social media has been seen as an effective and efficient channel for advertising and marketing the UBOS products, services and job adverts for recruitment. During the 2014 Census the social media page helped in clarifying on issues related to census activities, payments to the enumerators and recruitment procedures. The social media team broadcast the per diem rates on all the social media accounts and this aided in curbing corruption at the district level. Through the social media Census activity leaders were able to openly engage with citizens and this eased communication with the public and has since increased on the number of channels for sharing information and statistical data that are released in UBOS. During the implementation it was important to customize the use of social media to meet the needs of the organization and users

UBOS has since learned that openness and honesty are the best ways to keep satisfying social media followers and that since discussions may not be easily controlled to the confines of the organization's core business, there is need to understand that some information from the users may position the organization negatively (UBOS, 2015a). As a best practice, social media has been integrated as a work process and a standard practice at UBOS with a new social media policy. The policy defines clear roles and responsibilities, and safe procedures for engaging in social media. The bureau has taken up the use of the Facebook insights and Google analytics tool to help measure the use of social media in improving information dissemination (UBOS, 2015a; UBOS, 2015b). UBOS staff have been introduced to the different social media tools through professional seminars (Ouma, 2015) and more statistical information is being posted monthly and is generating debate and more followers.

Discussion

Driving Factors for using social media to enhance service delivery

The findings show that both case studies started the social media project with the aim of asserting their social media presence, improve their communication, and improve service delivery and leverage new technology (MPS, 2015) by innovating the best way possible to use the social media. To examine the first objective both case studies link the need for

experimentation with social media to innovation using the various platforms on how to engage the public suggesting ways of improvement in the implementation phases of both projects. By doing so there was increased feedback and more open participation (Mergel, 2012) by the citizens on how both projects had been implemented. It is true the use of social media caused fast turnaround in form of feedback from the public and this helped the implementers of the different services quickly innovate the best solutions that could make the organizations better. However both cases were not initially driven by open government much as it one of the most important factors driving use of social media in the developed e-government. (Mergel, 2012).

Benefits of using Social media

The findings reveal that both case studies obtained benefits in using the social media while implementing their different activities of crime prevention and census dissemination. To assess the second objective, both cases under study link openness and honesty to genuine satisfaction (MPS, 2015) of all the customers during online discussions and this is one way through which relationships have been fostered, thus increasing open participation and collaboration for better service delivery.

The results seem to provide answers to the best practices in implementing social media to enhance service delivery which responds to the second objective of the study. The dependent variable of enhancing service delivery is measured through the benefits of social media use in service delivery which were strongly demonstrated through the increase in the number of followers which resulted into increased engagement (Tswane, 2015; MPS, 2015) and participation (Aggarwal, 2010) of the followers with the different social media pages. There is evidence of increased sharing of information on a wider scale which indirectly contributes to reduced costs (UBOS, 2015a) in communication to various stakeholders; so social media is seen as an effective method of disseminating crucial information (UBOS, 2015a; MPS, 2015).

Increased transparency was observed as a result of broadcasting details of budget on all social media and was seen as a way of controlling corruption. On awareness and visibility, the findings reveal that, in both cases (MPS, 2015; UBOS, 2015; Aggarwal, 2010) clarification of issues was done through explanations on the social media platforms during the implementation of the projects leading to better understanding of activities done by the various organizations and leading to increased public awareness and visibility of both government organizations.

Lessons and best practices in social media use to enhance service delivery

Metrics is one way through which evaluations on the use of social media for better service delivery can be made, and using analytics has helped highlight areas for improvement (MPS, 2015). The findings further show that having champions in terms of staff and management is essential in promoting the use of social media in organizations. Additionally, having a budget (MPS, 2015) is important to cover the cost of staff who are on standby to respond to the queries on the social media for sustainability of the social media projects. Social media policies have also been seen as important mechanism that aid better integration of social media in the organizations. However, having this is not enough without proper integration of social media in the work processes, using a step-by-step strategy for better results and training for better inculcation (MPS, 2015).

Contributions

This research contributes to current research on social media use in government and how the media can be further deployed to enhance service delivery, while assisting government institutions in the development and assessment of social media services. The study also provides findings that can be used as a checklist for planning and implementation of social media innovations in government.

Policy Recommendations

As seen from the benefits gained by the case studies, future implementers of social media need to understand the different types of platforms available and how they can benefit from them to the maximum. This will enable more engagement and influence on the possible potential these media these media have to engage and the public even more. Furthermore it is important that Government organizations develop social media policies to ensure good implementation and adherence. Institutions should consider designating staff to manage the social media to ensure sustainability of the tools. It is important that government agencies should prioritize and budget for social media initiatives in form of technologies, staff and information as major inputs to social media implementation. The future success of the social media implementation is very dependent on the establishment of good policies, strategies, good leadership, trust and good tools for measuring value addition.

Conclusions

This paper has presented the experiences of two key public organizations in the UK and Uganda in applying social media for the enhancement of public participation in their core activities. From both experiences, social media can enhance service delivery by boosting the operational capacities and responsiveness of governments in ways that the traditional approaches have not been able to. The real time opportunity for participation and feedback of the social media provides government tools to pilot, experiment and redesign services before they are fully implemented. Additionally, social media provides a more efficient channel to deliver public information, goods and services and can be used to identify new ways of collaboration in the creation and delivery of public goods and services. Social media presents opportunities of transformation service delivery through the open discussions; and help to understand and anticipate user needs at various stages in service design and delivery of services. Social media are seen to be additional service delivery channels which can bridge the gap of common digital divides. The relative ease of reaching out to individual users should help public service implementers segment populations to tailor services based on their individual needs and potentially reduce costs of service delivery.

Limitations and future research

The study is limited to two study cases with differing government IT environments and infrastructure levels, so the results may not be generalized. Future research should look into deeper analysis of service delivery and how it is affected by social media application and deployment in the private sector. It would be good for researchers to look into how feedback obtained from the social media can be used to improve policy, decision making and service delivery implementation. Further more questions on what metric can be used to assess effectiveness of social media in service delivery.

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