Local Government and the Use of Social Media in Citizen Engagement: An Analysis of Maiduguri Metropolitan Council

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Abstract

As governments all over increase the adoption e governance, various researches have looked into how government can improve its interaction with the citizen, one area in which these researches have gained prominence is in the area of government and social media. It is as a result of this that the paper looked into how local government could use social media as a means of engaging with citizens particularly in MMC. The research is a conceptual paper that analyze data qualitatively, using the unified theory of acceptance and use of technology as a theoretical guide. It was found that despite the plethora of benefits social media can bring to local governments MMC has no official presence online on twitter, facebook and instagram. It was recommended that MMC should adopt an appropriate social media strategy and further research need to be carried out to investigate the social media platforms used by majority of the citizens so that the government can utilize such platforms for engagement.

Keywords: *E-Governement, Local Governement, social media, MMC*

Introduction

Ground breaking researches on information and communication technology (ICT) has led to its wide innovation and applicability of ICT, and this has pave way for ICT to be almost indispensible to various organization be it public or private, certainly researches in the field of communication technology and information processing have affected the world (Sani, 2010).

In relation to government and governance, Manda and Mkhai (2016), argued that information and communication technology will improve governance which will bring about efficiency and effectiveness and also increase the level of democracy and transparency. On a larger scale this has come to be recognized as e-governance or e-government depending on the purpose and how ICT is used. The nexus between both terms "e-governance and e government" is e-governance is a broader concept than e-governance and they both use various ICT tools to enhance the functions and responsibilities of the state be it political or administrative. This is to show that the use of ICT by government is not only for enhancing public administration but to also improve democracy and democratic process through better way of engaging citizens (Bonson, Royo & Ratkai, 2014). These tools include computers,

internet, social media, and other information and communication technological devices and platforms.

Ellison and Hardey (2014) rightly opined that in order to make people involved in all aspect of governance they should be engaged on social media, this is highly attributed to the fact that social media offers new way that will increase citizen engagement, transparency and accountability (Guillamon et al 2016). This is because it gives the government avenue to get useful feedback from the citizens that can be helpful towards addressing general problems within the society (Ferro et al, 2013).

As a result of the aforementioned, governments in most countries have shifted from solely using of social media to inform the public, to also as a means to engage them online, this can give government wider perspectives when creating certain policies, Hand and Ching (2011) supported this claim through expressing that social media has improved the process of informing the public and also hearing their opinion on certain matters. This has been made possible through the use of web 2.0 which is seen by Wilson et al (2011) as the "second generation of the web, wherein interoperable, user-centered web applications and services promote social connectedness, media and information sharing, user-created content, and collaboration among individuals and organizations" Web 2.0 includes social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Whatsapp among others which give opportunity for interaction and engagement between the government and its citizens and also discuss between citizens (Mossberger et al 2013). These engagements may be seen in three forms depending from the originator, it could be from government to citizen, from citizen to government or from citizen to another citizen.

Statement of the Problem

Past and present government regimes have come to see the importance of social media, as this tends to be very paramount in informing the general public about government activities. This is evident in the use of social media by various countries globally at the federal, state and local government level, including ministries, departments and agencies. To buttress this argument, Berthon et al (2012) expressed that as government adopt e-governance the acceptance of social media as a tool for communicating and assessing public aspirations increases. It is against the above background that this paper attempt to assess how Maiduguri Metropolitan Council has adopted social media in engagement of its citizens.

Objectives of the Study

    i) Examine the use of social media by local government in citizen engagement
    ii) Establish the extent of use of social media by MMC in citizen engagement
    iii) Examine the prospects of local governments using social media for governance

Research Questions

    i) How does local governments use social media for citizen engagement?
    ii) To what extent does MMC uses social media for citizen engagement?
    iii) What are the prospects of local governments using social media for governance?

Literature Review

Local Government and Use of Social Media

A lot of scholars have expressed that the government use of social media for passing information and engaging with its citizens can bring about good democratic values which will encourage good governance Rosario et al (2018), with a large number of governments, their ministries, departments and agencies have come to institutionalize social media thereby making it part and parcel of the government. The institutionalization of social media promotes transparency, advance public services as well as promote public goals this could be attributed to the reality that social media maybe used to disseminate information externally, get feedback on service quality, enable internal collaboration on work tasks, enable or facilitate participation by citizens or external stakeholders (Olivera & Welch, 2013).

Johannessen et al (2012) expressed that after email and official website, actors in the public sector particularly politicians and administrators ranked social media as the third most preferred mode of communication. Hearing of the public ideas and also disseminating to a knowledgeable public that are willing to be more active in the affairs and policies of government which affects their everyday life is now been properly done through social media, this will help in strengthening democracy (Bonson et al, 2014). This will come in very helpful since local government is the first connection or interaction the citizens have with the government; therefore, it can be used as a medium to pass local information.

Some local governments have used social media in passing information to its citizens due to social media ability to reach a large number of citizens, some local governments also have come to use this internet-based means in terms of emergency or crisis where passing of vital information to a large group of people for the purpose of educating them has become necessary.

According to Padeiro et al (2021) social media was instrumental towards passing of information by local government in terms of disaster and health crisis such as earthquakes, tsunami and corona virus. Studies on the relationship between social media and local government have found out that it encourages e participation as there are growing number of citizens on social media. This will allow for the government to be more responsive online and publish more information on social media. It has also been concluded that a high number of citizens online will allow more use of social media by the local government as this will reduce cost (Guillamon et al 2016).

Graham (2014) supported this line of thinking by arguing that using social media by local government promote democracy, by being transparent and interactive with its citizens. This is partly brought as a result of the features in some social media which allow citizens to be involved in dialogue with the local government as well as ask questions and even online polls on certain topics. More so, use of social media by local government have been said to also have various impact for instance it is use to encourage government to citizen relationship, likewise laying foundation for other aspect of e-governance. Sadly, in some instances social media has not been able to promote later stages of e-governance (Silva et al, 2019).

The fast-growing online presence of people have made researchers such as Ma (2013) opine that due to the number of people on social media, local governments ought to connect with its

populace via the social media for them to be more accountable and transparent. This helps in strengthening democracy as the idea is that web 2.0 is technology of the user, by the user and for the user (Bonson et al, 2014). Local government use of social media is necessary in the current technological driven dispensation as the world itself can be seen an 'e village' with online users been interconnected through electronic means and the internet on social media platforms, Karakiza (2015) as cited in Accenture (2012) align to this assertion by expressing that citizens in this era are digital citizens located on social media and in order to engagement with these citizens the government must also go digital.

Reddick and Norris (2013) showed that size of the local government is an essential factor that determine the adoption of social media and e-governance at large. Others include information technology infrastructure, past experience with information technology, educational composition of the inhabitant of the local government and also their household income. In contrary, factors of educational composition and size as an enabler for the adoption of social media by local government, Asamoah (2019) expressed that officials of some local governments having large youth population with high literacy rate opined that social media are not the preferable means of disseminating information from the local government and receiving feedback from its inhabitants as they prefer traditional means such as physical letters.

Despite the aforementioned, local government using social media to engage and interact with its inhabitants comes with certain shortfalls which Graham (2014) expressed as inadequate budget, time and staff where social media often charge some amount for certain services or packages. For instance, some social media require certain subscription to allow some content reach a large audience. These downsides can be attributed to the reasons why some local government and its inhabitants prefer traditional means of interaction, although this could be solved when interesting contents are created by the local government online and also looking into the social media that are used often by the people. Nica et al, (2014) argued for the above holding that local governments should link their social media accounts to their website and also look into what the citizens find interesting to serve for them as a motivation for using social media, this is because when the citizens find social media content interesting the more they will tend to move from traditional to a modern means of interaction i.e social media.

Dominant Social Media Platforms Used by Local Governments

The common type of social media that might be used by government can be linked directly to the social media used by the citizens. This may vary from to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or Pinterest, as social media that are friendlier to use with easy navigation alongside friendly user interface can draw more users than those that are perceived to be complex.

A study carried out by Ellison and Hardey, (2013) using 352 English local authorities as a base realized that about 120 councils, do not make the most of social media, others have an account with either one or more of the following social media such as Twitter, Facebook, Youtube and Flickr. They further expressed that Twitter was the most used social media by councils, as it is used by eighty nine percent of council. Facebook is used closely at seventy percent by local authorities.

Similarly, Mossberger et al, (2013) in their survey found out that among the seventy-five largest cities in the United States the use of Twitter rose from twenty five percent in 2009 to

eighty seven percent in 2011, likewise the use of Facebook also increased from thirteen percent in 2009 to eighty seven percent in 2011.

In another survey by Graham et al, (2015) it was realized that officials of local governments used Facebook more in times of crisis followed by Twitter blogs, YouTube and Google Plus. Furthermore, urban local governments are considered to integrate social media as a form of passing information compared to rural local governments. The social media amongst the vast majority used are Facebook and Twitter (Purser, 2012).

Interestingly, the high increase in to total number of people using social media is at its all time high and this present an opportunity for local governments in Nigeria to utilize online means of engagement, according to Olojo and Allen (2021) the use of social media in Nigeria has increased with about forty-four million people out of its more than two hundred million population. It is also projected that within the frame of six years i.e 2019 – 2025 social media use in Nigeria will be beyond eighty percent. Data online from data reportal shows that as of early 2022 Facebook was the most used social media, additionally, Facebook in 2022 had over thirty-six million users keeping it ahead of other famous social medias like Youtube and Instagram. The total users of social media in Nigeria are expected to be about ninety million in 2025 (Kemp,2022).

Prospects of Local Governments Using Social Media

The gains that social media bring to local governments is enormous given how it has been implemented in other countries and findings from other related researches, hence when properly implemented for use it is perceived that this benefits can also be enjoyed by Maiduguri Metropolitan Council and also other local governments in Nigeria at large, some of these prospects drawn from researches are:

Cost Effective: Social media is a relatively cheaper way to engage with the communities than traditional means of communications, as the cost of internet and other necessary infrastructures once set up can be cheaper compared to that of radio, prints and also television adverts (Purse (2012). Also, it can be utilized to reach a larger audience as Nigerians on social media in 2022 were approximately thirty-three million online (Kemp, 2022). This is an opportunity that can be taken advantage of by MMC to engage with members within its community online (Kemp, 2022).

Source for Feedback/Input for Public Policy: The use of social media by local government can help in getting feedback from the public. This can highly serve as an important input for public policy and also knowing the growing demands from members of the community Roengtam (2020). It is important to express that other than comments from the users on social media, social media are now advanced to having poll options which can greatly be important for knowing the opinion of people through votes. This feature makes gaining opinion simple and easy with just a click, given that it is online the response rate is expected to be higher as people online can take part in the poll at their convenience irrespective of time or place. On the side of the user social media allows for inhabitant of a local government to create and share personal political content which allows them to express their opinion for or against certain decision that might have been made by the local government (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012).

Better Informed Citizens: Mergel, (2016) opined that social media have been used by governments to positively influence people's opinion about the government. This can be achieved by continuous and timely release of information and constant engagement with online users so as to educate them on the benefits of governments policies. This process results in to a better- and well-informed citizenry. Based on this one can say a citizen that is online is more informed than a citizen that isn't when local governments take advantage of social media. As information shared online are more instant and reaches the citizen compared to when adverts are to be made on radio, television or other print media.

Emergency: Government use of social media for informing people about emergencies is one aspect of government using social media that was paramount during the global corona virus epidemic in 2020. Social media became one of the major sources of information about the virus and also movement restrictions was obtained from verified and credible accounts/ profile on social media. This supports what was observed by Hamidullah (2016) when he expressed that local governments in addition to using social media for sharing and informing the public regarding emergencies it can also be used to give early warnings.

E-Governement: The use of social media by local government can be seen as an element that will facilitate a better e government, both social media and e government are built on web 2.0 hence the former will give additional benefits to the latter (Mishaal & Abu-Shanab, 2015).

Challenges of Local Governements Using Social Media

The use of social media by local government to engage its inhabitants notwithstanding its prospects is not without challenges, Silva et al (2019)identified some challenges faced by local government use of social media as lack of meaningful Information on government social media accounts, the use of social media by local government creates digital divide between those that are digital literate and those that are not, users of social media are afraid to provide sensitive information online this might negatively affect how people interact with local government on social media which might lead to the challenge of low number of people using and interacting with government on social media.

Theoretical Framwork

Various theories exist in the field of information system that can be used to explain how social media can improve government and citizen engagement, some of them are Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), (TAM2) Diffusion of Innovation Theory (DOI), Motivation Model (MM), Combined TAM and TPB(C-TAM-TPB), Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT). Among these handful of theories, the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) will be adopted as a theoretical guide, this is because UTAUT is a synthesis of these various theories which lies its strength and as such its suitability to the study.

Venkatesh et al (2003) proposed the UTAUT with origin in information system and social psychology. They theorize that four construct have an important role as direct determinant of user acceptance and usage behavior. These are performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence and facilitating conditions these are also affected by four key moderators of gender, age, voluntariness and experience.

Performance Expectancy; is the extent which the user believes that using a technology will help in carrying out actions better, Effort Expectancy: is the degree of ease associated with the use of the technology, Social Influence: this is seen as the degree the user perceive that others believe he should make use of the technology, Facilitating Condition: this construct is based the presence of technical infrastructures that will enable the support of the technology.

The relevance of UTAUT to the study is that its tries to give a theoretical perspective to the philosophical bases on local government use of social media for engaging citizens.

Like every other theory, UTAUT is not without limitations as such the theory does not completely look into all likely external factors that can influence the facilitating condition construct, the theory does not put into consideration of the time the intention is made to actual adoption, it also fails to look into the intention behavior gap that is behaviors that are beyond the control of the adopter (Moghavvemi et al, 2013).

Methodology

The research work is base on the review of secondary data which will be sourced from textbook, newspapers, academic journals and other online reliable sources. The method of data analysis is purely qualitative in nature. Given that the paper is a conceptual one inferences will be made on the secondary data.

Discussion of Major Findings

Maiduguri Metropolitan Council and Social Media

Maiduguri Metropolitan Council MMC have an online presence through its website address which can be accessed via "www.mmc.bornostate.gov.ng" the website can be used for interaction such as downloading document, subscribing to newsletters, other section on the website includes "about us" which gives a history about Maiduguri Metropolitan Council, "departments" which shows the number of department as six comprising of administration and general services, treasury, agriculture and natural resources, works and housing, primary health care, planning, budget, research and statistics. Also, the website lack link to the city's social media platforms, numerous searches on popular social media like Facebook and Twitter shows no official account presence of Maiduguri Metropolitan Council on such social media platforms. Notwithstanding, the city website include a mobile number which can be used to chat with a representative of the city council on Whatsapp.

From the literatures reviewed, it has been found that various local government use social media for disseminating information to the public, this comes in handy given that the world is gradually becoming an e-village through the adoption of e-governance where electronic and internet-based means of communication is ever increasing. The study also revealed that in the case of Maiduguri Metropolitan Council the online presence of MMC is low on the basis that the council has no official presence on popular social media platform such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. Although the city has a functional website which is gives relevant information, the social media links on the website which should direct users to the various social media official account of the city are not functional.

It was realized that Maiduguri Metropolitan Council can adopt any of the three social media strategies highlighted by Mergel (2010) as push, pull and networking where push refers to MMC simply provision of public and accurate information to its citizens, which can improve

transparency; pull refers to MMC interacting with citizens for acquisition of citizen information and feedback, which may be accomplished by MMC observing user behavior or directly asking for feedback; and networking or collaboration refers to MMC engaging in dialogue or direct involvement in some activity in order to improve government related activities.

Conclusion

Social media as an aspect of e-governance has become a vital tool used by local governments to pass information to the public, although it comes with certain challenges the plethora of benefits can be seen as a reason it is still been used by various governments at all levels. When MMC decides to key into social media for citizen engagement it should put into consideration the benefits as well as the challenges.

Recommendation

It is hereby recommended that Maiduguri Metropolitan Council should look critical into the adoption of social media for engaging citizens. Other research should investigate the most used social media by inhabitant of MMC as this will help give a broad idea of the social media the government will give priority in other to engage with a larger audience online, additionally, research should be carried out to identify possible solutions to the challenges of using social media for engaging citizens.

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