gov2.0: a selective literature review on social media and government agencies

compiled by:
Hamideh Molaei
Greg Masters
Nexus Management Consulting
3006/148 Elizabeth St Sydney 2000
ABN 44 076 308 006

www.nexusmc.com
INTRODUCTION

This literature review has been prepared for participants in the Public Sector Management Program (PSMP). It provides some useful resources and case studies, Australian and International, on the use of social media by government agencies and is particularly useful for unit 2, Managing Out.

The paper is structured as follows:

- **Section 1** defines social media
- **Section 2** discusses the concepts of ‘e-democracy’ and e-government
- **Section 3** discusses the use of the new technologies in information provision and service delivery
- **Section 4** provides a number of case studies
- **Section 5** lists some examples of government policies on the use of social media.
1. DEFINITIONS

Since their appearance, social media have changed different aspects of people’s lives. Social media that were emerged by the rise of Web 2.0 technologies are characterised by several significant features such as user-generated content, online identity creation and relational networking (Margo, 2012). According to Smith (2010):

“Social media sites are virtual platforms for interactivity and information exchange ... where issues are debated and defined ... Social media users collaborate in content creation ..., are proactive in searching information ..., and value control in social media participation (p. 330).

Social media are also defined as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content" (Kaplan & Heanlein, 2010, p. 61). These participatory media have facilitated social interactions. They are vastly used for developing and diffusing information through society (Kavanaugh et al., 2012). Social media have four particular potential capacities including collaboration, participation, empowerment, and time (Margo, 2012). In terms of collaboration and participation, they have provided users with the ability to connect to each other and create communities to socialize and to share information and common interests. They have also empowered users to create and edit their own content immediately in near real-time (Margo, 2012). Different types of social media include blogs, social networking sites, wikis and other text-based collaboration formats, virtual world content and podcasting (Kaplan & Heanlein, 2010; Vickery & Wunsch-Vincent, 2007). Social networking sites that are "applications that enable users to connect by creating personal information profiles, inviting friends and colleagues to have access to those profiles, and sending e-mails and instant messages between each other" (Kaplan & Heanlein, 2010, p. 63) are the most popular type of social media. According to American scientists, Boyd and Ellison (2007), social networking sites are:

Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (p. 211).
The most popular social networking sites include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, MySpace, Google Plus, LiveJournal, Tagged, Orkut, CafeMom, Ning and Meetup.

Another important type of social media is blog. "Blogs, which represent the earliest form of Social Media, are special types of websites that usually display date-stamped entries in reverse chronological order (Kaplan & Heanlein, 2010, p. 63). "They are the Social Media equivalent of personal web pages and can come in a multitude of different variations, from personal diaries describing the author's life to summaries of all relevant information in one specific content area" (Kaplan & Heanlein, 2010, p. 63)

Different types of social media have been widely used by users for different purposes such as education, business and marketing, health and medicine, entertainment and politics. In terms of politics, different types of political activities such as election campaigns, social and political movements, and discussion and deliberation among citizens have facilitated through social media. In the digital media era, government and government agencies have also adopted social media facilities for their purposes. E-democracy and e-government terms are used for the utilisation of the Internet and social media by governments.
2. E-DEMOCRACY AND E-GOVERNMENT

E-democracy generally refers to “the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in democratic political and governance processes” (Parvez & Ahmed, 2006, p.612). This notion has been defined in different ways. According to Macintosh (2004) “e-democracy is concerned with the use of information and communication technologies to engage citizens, support the democratic decision making processes and strengthen representative democracy”. It has two main dimensions including e-voting and citizens’ e-participation in democratic decision making (Macintosh, 2004; Yigit & Çolak, 2010).

A high level of authentic citizens’ participation as well as unrestricted flow of information between citizens and government, are two crucial requirements of an effective democracy (Watson & Mundy, 2001). To this end, governments have attempted to facilitate the citizens’ engagement through e-government projects. The main purpose of the e-government project is to improve public services as well as democratic processes to strengthen support to public policies by the use of ICT in public (Dias & Rafael, 2007). E-government has some advantages such as democratization (Rose, 2004), empowerment participation, transparency, availability of services, accountability, responsiveness and integrity (Nour et al., 2008).

In the past few years, e-government has been a topic of much interest among those excited about the advent of Web 2.0 technologies (Magro, 2012, p. 148). According to Chang and Kannan (2008) Web 2.0 technology has promoted the efficiency of e government programs:

The Web 2.0 platform renders the online environment individual-user-centric. ... this means institutions will have to engage citizens and customers at sites where they are (in social network sites and online communities) rather than create portals and all purpose websites and expect citizens and customers to approach them. This has implications for how service provision and uses of Web 2.0 are designed—pointing to the need to move away from portals to citizen-centric Web 2.0 applications such as “mashups” to deliver products and services to users’ devices. Reaching citizens where they are—in their communities—will also enable governments to harness the collective intelligence of citizens, such as feedback on services, ways to improve the design of content and services, and ways to distribute content and services efficiently to various citizen groups. In addition, such an engagement with citizens in their own settings
will enhance the trust citizens have in their government and help government to build citizen loyalty (p.18).

Accordingly, governments are truly keen and determined to identify and apply opportunities for engagement with citizens via social media (Macnamara et al., 2012). Generally, governments utilise social media platforms for three main purposes: (i) information provision and service delivery; (ii) deliberation and consultation; and, (iii) collaboration and engagement.
3. INFORMATION PROVISION AND SERVICE DELIVERY

One of the most significant duties of the government and government agencies and organisations is to provide citizens with up to date news and information about their activities. Social media such as Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, YouTube, and other services with user-generated content have made a staggering amount of information available online (Kavanaugh et al., 2012). Government agencies use these resources to improve services and communication with citizens, in particular with part of the population that previously were difficult to reach and underrepresented (Kavanaugh et al., 2012). Governments offer news and information via social media in both normal and critical situations. Here are some of the most noticeable examples of the information provision function of social media, used by governments in normal and routine situations.
4. CASE STUDIES

1: The Australian Government

The Australian Government now uses social media to engage in conversations with a wider number of citizens and businesses than ever before. “The Government 2.0 Taskforce made a recommendation that the Australian Government encourage public servants to engage online, which the Government’s response to the Taskforce agreed to in full. The Declaration of Open Government states that the Australia Government ‘is committed to open government based on a culture of engagement’ and that ‘Citizen collaboration in policy and service delivery design will enhance the processes of government and improve the outcomes sought. Collaboration with citizens is to be enabled and encouraged. Agencies are to reduce barriers to online engagement, undertake social networking, crowd sourcing and online collaboration projects and support online engagement by employees, in accordance with the Australian Public Service Commission Guidelines’. These outcomes can be achieved through the use of social media” (Australian Government Web Guide, 2012).

In terms of information provision, the Australian Government has provided numerous links to social media accounts. Some examples of these accounts include:

- Australian Government blogs such as Prime Minister of Australia’s blog, Australian Job Search - Employer blog, Migration Blog and so many other blogs that basically aims to provide citizens with up-to date information.

- Australian Government Twitter sites such as Julia Gillard’s twitter account, Australia’s human rights watchdog, Australian Army and many other examples.

- Australian Government Facebook pages such as Julia Gillard’s Facebook page, The Australian Communications and Media Authority page, and many other official Facebook pages.

- Australian Government YouTube channels.

- Australian Government Flickr photostreams.

- Australian Government apps.

- Australian Government podcasts.

One of the most noticeable cases of social media use relates to New South Wales Police Force. They use social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and
Twitter to communicate with the Australian community. “These platforms have allowed the police to share public warnings, major event information, crime reports and arrest updates. Last year, NSW Police added Project Eyewatch to their social media strategy. Under the project, police work together with their local communities to find solutions to local issues. It was a successful project and was recognised at the Social Media Law Enforcement Conference in the United States. NSW Police picked up the inaugural ConnectedCOPS Excellence at a Large Agency award” (ABC news, 2012). The official Facebook page of the New South Wales Police Force is liked by more than 170,000 users.

2: The Department of Justice, Victoria

The Victoria Department of Justice offers latest news and updates by providing a list of business areas within the Department portfolio that are currently using social media tools to communicate with citizens. People can visit website, like Facebook pages, follow them on Twitter or subscribe to a RSS feed to receive the latest news and updates.

3: Department of Human Services, Australian Government

The Department of Human Services offers several official accounts on YouTube, Facebook and Twitter:

- Department of Human Services on YouTube and Twitter.
- Department of Human Services General Manager and Spokesperson, Hank Jongen on Facebook and Twitter.
- Student Update — Department of Human Services support for youth and students on Facebook and Twitter.
• Centrelink on Twitter.
• Family Update — Department of Human Services support for families on Twitter and Facebook.
• Department of Human Services National Graduate Program on Twitter and Facebook.
• In addition, the Department of Human Services has an online forum—speechbubble— that allows stakeholders, staff and customers to discuss and provide feedback on the Department services.

There are some additional examples from international cases that use social media as one part of their strategy for news and information dissemination.

4: The White House Town Hall Twitter
One interesting case is The White House Town Hall Twitter (http://askobama.twitter.com/) through that Obama received and answered questions through Twitter and pledged to start tweeting from his own official account.

Some other examples that use Twitter or Facebook include:

5: The United States Marine Corps (the most popular federal agency on Facebook).
6: NASA Twitter account (the most popular federal agency on Twitter).
7: NASA Facebook account.
8: New York City Mayor’s Office on Twitter.
9: City of New York on Twitter.
10: Mike Bloomberg, Mayor of New York on Twitter.

All the above examples propose government services regarding general information provision in natural situations. In addition to the natural situations, the governments or government agencies utilise social media during crisis and natural disasters e.g. earthquakes and floods.

11: Use of social media by Queensland Police
One of the most significant examples of use of social media during flood was the case of Queensland police. “A series of floods hit Australia, beginning in December
2010, primarily in the state of Queensland including its capital city, Brisbane. The floods forced the evacuation of thousands of people from towns and cities. At least 70 towns and over 200,000 people were affected” (2010–2011 Queensland floods, 2012). “On January 10, 2011 a flash flood described as an instant inland tsunami struck Toowoomba and the Lockyer Valley. Just days later, significant floods hit Ipswich and Brisbane. By the second week of January, 200,000 Queenslanders were flood affected and three-quarters of the state was disaster declared”. During that time, QPS used social media to inform public about important safety points. “

Basic services provided by Police media during this time were:

• Acting as a centralised clearing house for disaster-related information through Facebook and Twitter as soon as it became available, including details on behalf of other departments and authorities
• Live video streaming of the Brisbane-based disaster-related media conferences on the QPS Facebook page with the video subsequently posted on the QPS YouTube channel
• Live Tweeting key points as they were made in briefings and in these media conferences
• Uploading dot point summaries of the media conferences to the QPS Facebook page shortly after their conclusion
• Uploading at least daily audio updates to Facebook from local disaster coordinators around the state
• “mythbusting” of misinformation and rumours in the media and community
• Tweeting most QPS Facebook posts generally using the #qldfloods, #TCYasi or #mythbusters hashtags
• Providing 24/7 moderation of the QPS social media accounts, responding to inquiries from the public where possible
• Coordinating Auslan sign language interpreters to assist with most media conferences
• Coordinating the translation of media conference summaries into other languages for affected tourists and relatives based internationally.

Use of social media by Queensland police had several benefits:

• It was immediate and allowed Police Media to proactively push out large volumes of information to large numbers of people ensuring there was no vacuum of official information
The QPS Facebook page became the trusted, authoritative hub for the dissemination of information and facts for the community and media.

Large amounts of specific information could be directed straight to communities without them having to rely on mainstream media coverage to access relevant details.

The QPS quickly killed rumour and misreporting before it became “fact” in the mainstream media, mainly through the #mythbuster hashtag.

It provides access to immediate feedback and information from the public at scenes.

The mainstream media embraced it and found it to be a valuable and immediate source of information.

It provided situational awareness for QPS members in disaster-affected locations who otherwise had no means of communications” (Queensland Police Service, n.d.)

**ONLINE DELIBERATION AND CONSULTATION**

In recent years, “deliberation has become the byword of many political theorists, most of whom identify deliberation with reasoned conversation” (Remer, 2008, p. 182). Deliberative democracy is a “critical response to traditional model of democracy” (deliberative democracy, 2009) which “argues that democracy should be organised in such a way as to promote reasoned debate among citizens” (deliberative democracy, 2002). “Deliberative democracy refers to a specific form of participation: informed discussion between individuals about issues which concern them, leading to some form of consensus and collective decision” (Wright & Street, 2007: 850). “The ideal of deliberative democracy is an inclusive process of dialogue that facilitates mutual understanding and informed agreement in which participants are free from coercion, manipulation, bargaining and bribery and are free to express their genuine views such that only the forceless force of the better argument prevails” (Johnson, 2008, p. 79).

The difficulty of holding large-scale political discussions that was a barrier to deliberative democracy; has been partially solved by the Internet. The Internet “is seen as a tool by which the theory of deliberative democracy can be made practical through asynchronous discussion forums” (Wright & Street, 2007: 850). In particular social media have provided more dynamic sphere for discussion and deliberation. There are several national and international cases of online deliberation projects.
12: Queensland Government ‘get involved’ project
In this project, the Queenslanders are invited to participate by giving their consultations about different issues to the government.

One of the interesting examples of this case, relates to the ‘Queensland’s water futures’ project through that, the Queensland Government seek people’s ideas and views, through the discussion paper, to help shape their water future and influence the development of the strategy.

13: Parks Victoria

Parks Victoria is a statutory authority, created by the Parks Victoria Act 1998 and reporting to the Minister for Environment and Climate Change. It aims to protect and improve Victoria’s parks and waterways for people forever. It also aims to conserve park and waterway ecosystems; to protect cultural heritage in parks; to deliver better opportunities for people to use their parks and waterways; and to prepare for, respond to and recover from fire and other emergencies. As a part of their project, they have Community consultation and planning. Its community involvement is a vital part of planning and managing parks and reserves in Victoria. Commenting on draft park management plans, strategies and other reports is one way of engaging with park planning and improving the outcomes for parks and reserves. Parks Victoria invites all members of the community whether as individuals or members of organisations to comment.

14: The President’s SAVE Award

The White House has for recent years held an annual crowdsourcing competition called the SAVE Award, which lets federal employees submit ideas on how the
government can save money and also allows them to vote on those ideas. After the effort is over, the administration doles out annual awards for the best ideas.

http://www.whitehouse.gov/save-award

**COLLABORATION AND ENGAGEMENT**

Participation and engagement are the primary goals of most e-government social media projects (Magro, 2012). Governments worldwide are increasingly attempting to use the internet to engage citizens. (Macnamara et al., 2012). Government 2.0’ and e-democracy have turned attention to the use of interactive Web 2.0-based ‘social media’ to engage citizens in participation to redress a concerning ‘democratic deficit’ and reinvigorate the public sphere. (Macnamara et al., 2012)

Some examples of citizens’ engagement through social media include:

**15: Future Melbourne**

The City of Melbourne is the Capital City hub of the wider Metropolitan Melbourne. It is a complex mosaic of communities of business, cultural, educational, residential and a major visitor destination. Future Melbourne is a plan by, and for these communities. It is a community plan for the future of Melbourne that aims to:

- Engage citizens in creating a vision for the future, setting priorities and contributing to decision-making.
- Value and utilize local networks.
- Focus on people and place that requires a more flexible and joined-up approach to policy and service delivery.
- Connect the top-down and bottom-up policy processes that influence resource allocation.

There are four main ways to get involved in Future Melbourne:

1. Reading: reading and reviewing the plan to become familiar with the content.
2. Editing: improving the plan by directly editing the document.
3. Discussion: commenting & discussing the plan on the Discussion pages located throughout the site.
4. Future Scenarios: people can tell about their future scenarios and Contribute to a series of short stories about Future Melbourne written by author, Steve Bright.
16: **Open City Hall, Salt Lake City**

Open City Hall is an online forum for civic engagement. People can express their opinions and ideas about different topics about the City. Then, City officials will read the statements and incorporate them into their decision process.

17: **Youth.gov.hk** is an online forum, using public social networks and new mobile computing capabilities to better engage with Hong Kong’s young people.

18: **@Shanghaicity** constructs a platform to carry out public participation in a brand new communication way for Shanghai Municipal Party Committee and the municipal government. @Shanghaicity is leading the current trend of government-operated platform by motivating democratic, transparent and scientific decision making and public relations (Liu, et al, 2013).
19: **State Department CO.NX**

The State Department's CO.NX effort is part of the agency's larger "digital diplomacy" initiative. It connects people around the world with the State Department officials and others via live interactive web-chats and video chats and provides a space for the interactive exchange of ideas.

![State Department CO.NX](image)

20: **Engage Plano**, an online town hall meeting for civic engagement, relates to the City of Plano in Texas. To engage people in the city projects, a community or organization turns on a project site and determine challenges. Then, community leaders establish topics and ask for ideas. After that community members add ideas, upload photos, add comments and support ideas.

21: **Peer-to-Patent**

Peer-to-Patent is an initiative launched by the New York Law School (Prof. Beth Noveck), and endorsed by the US Patent Office. It aims to improve the process for reviewing patents, which is made slower and less effective by the high number of patents to be processed and the technical knowledge required. Peer-to-Patent opens up the first phase of the patent review process (reviewing the prior art) to voluntary contributions by participants. These are assessed and rated by the participants themselves. The most relevant references are then submitted to the US Patent Office for the official review, which is made simpler by the contributions, selection and comments made by the participants (Osimo, 2008).
22: **City of Palo Alto open town hall**

City of Palo Alto is located 35 miles south of San Francisco and 14 miles north of San Jose, Palo Alto is a community of approximately 61,200 residents. Part of the San Francisco Metropolitan Bay Area and the Silicon Valley, Palo Alto is located within Santa Clara County and borders San Mateo County. The City of Palo Alto is more than 100 years old, and is named after a majestic 1000 (not 250) year old coastal redwood tree along San Francisquito Creek, where early Spanish explorers settled. Open City Hall is an online forum for civic engagement. People are invited to read what others are saying about important Palo Alto topics, then, they can post their own statement. The comments will be available to City officials making decisions on these topics.

23: **City of Middletown open town hall** provides citizens with the opportunity to participate in issues relating to their city. It has also provided different online services such as citizen request, council meetings online, crash reports online, pay taxes online and so many other services.
24: Get involved in Lake Oswego is an online Community for encouraging people to get involved in activities related to the Lake Oswego.

Some other examples of online communities for civic engagement include:

25: Norfolk Open City Hall
26: City of Germantown Open City Hall
27: Decatur (Georgia, USA) Open City Hall
28: City of Ashland Open City Hall
29: Open Washoe County
30: Alpharetta Open City Hall
31: Arlington Public Schools
32: City of Santa Clara
33: Open Arlington
34: Open Saint Paul
35: Tempe Forum
36: The City of Aspen Open City Hall
37: The City of South Salt Lake town Hall
38: Open Wellington
39: Salt Lake County Public Forum
40: Town of Yucca Valley town Hall
41: Engage and Connect with the White House

42: Patient Opinion is a service that was launched by a General Practitioner in order to improve the National Health Service. It aims to foster a dialogue between patients and health providers. Patients can comment, review and rate the services they have received at healthcare facilities and can see the reviews of other patients (Osimo, 2008).
Virtual You be the Judge\(^1\) is an interesting participatory project with pedagogy functions. Visitors to Virtual You be the Judge can take part in various aspects of a sentencing hearing, receiving information from victims, offenders, prosecutors, defence lawyers and the judge. They learn as they move through the experience about all of the factors involved in the sentencing process. Then they will be able to sentence each offender themselves and compare their sentence with that of the actual judge. Virtual You be the Judge includes four cases. Follow Richard, convicted of culpable driving causing death; Dane, convicted of causing injury; Terri, convicted of trafficking in a drug of dependence; and Peter, convicted of burglary by the Magistrates’ Court.

\(^1\) - A Flash player plug-in is required to view Virtual You be the Judge.
5. POLICIES ON THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

“While there are many high profile examples of government agencies engaging social media tools, for the vast majority of governments, these tools are still fairly new and relatively unexplored. The process of adopting new tools and managing the related changes in work processes and policies is not easy for any type of organization. But governments at all levels are starting to put more and more effort into figuring out social media tools that involves exploring new ways of working and shifting communication patterns. It also involves the creation of new policies and guidelines to encourage proper use and to mitigate the risks of social media tools. Developing a social media policy can be an important first step for those government agencies considering using social media and can ultimately serve as a key enabler for responsibly and effectively leveraging social media tools. Yet, many governments are struggling with what such a policy should encompass and convey” (Hrdinová, et al, 2010, p.2).

Some departments in Australian Government have articulated social media policies:

1. Social Media Policy, Department of Justice
2. Social Media Policy, Department of Human Services
3. Social Media Policy, Department of Defence
REFERENCES


