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The use of YouTube in western European municipalities

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1. Introduction

The rapid evolution of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has forced public administration authorities to adapt quickly and consider the most effective ways of communication, which has led to reforms in communication strategies, as they are accountable to citizens and the society at large. E-government and open government are the results of this adaptation. While E-government refers to the use of ICTs to improve government processes, connect citizens and build external interactions (egov4dev, 2008), open government is about opening up government data, documents, proceedings and processes for public involvement and scrutiny (OECD, 2016).

Among the implications of E-government and open government is that of e-participation, that is seen as a tool for engagement and strengthened collaboration between governments and citizens (DPADM, 2015). The increase in technological readiness of population and rapid evolution of social media also contributes to foster it.

Social media platforms offer numerous opportunities to interact with a wide range of different stakeholder groups (DiStaso, McCorkindale, & Wright, 2011) and are ranked third among the preferred communication tools by citizens, administration and politicians, after E-mails and municipalities' websites (Johannessen, Flak, & Sæbø, 2012).

Although a number of studies have been conducted on the SM usage by governments (Abdelsalam, Reddick, Gamal, & Al-Shaar, 2013; Bonsón, Bednárová, & Escobar-Rodríguez, 2014; Ellison & Hardey, 2014; Graham & Avery, 2013; Hofmann, Beverungen, Rackers, & Becker, 2013; Oliveira & Welch, 2013; Panagiotopoulos, Bigdeli, & Sams, 2014) just a few address the use of YouTube on the municipality level (Brainard & Edlins, 2015; Chatfield & Brajawidagda, 2013). Thus, we examine the determinants of YouTube communication, given that it is a popular, potentially influential platform for government communication and according to Pina and Torres (2001), municipalities play an important role in the society as they directly affect the everyday lives of citizens regarding administration and service delivery. Therefore, the way they communicate with and engage citizens is crucial.

YouTube seems to be an interesting platform for citizen engagement since it deals with social video. According to Bonsón and Bednárová (2014), from a psychological point of view, video is a powerful medium

because of its combination of sight, sound, motion, and emotion, reaching our senses and psyche. Considering the added layer of richness the medium of video provides in comparison to other communication tools, it can be more engaging than are other media types such as text or photo (Bonsón & Bednárová, 2014), making its use for E-participation an interesting field for research. Thus, scholars have studied its adoption, factors influencing the activity and citizen engagement as well as user-generated content.

Burgess and Green (2009) analysed co-creative relationships and participatory culture within the context of YouTube's social network. Gulati and Williams (2010) explored the use of YouTube as a campaign tool. Their study revealed that the factors influencing its adoption were the level of election competitiveness and budget, and that the level of education as a characteristic of the main audience was a determining factor of the YouTube channel activity. Chatfield and Brajawidagda (2013) analysed government-generated YouTube videos in local governments in Jakarta claiming that the transformational political leadership and the strategic use of YouTube are the key factors in advancing local government transparency and facilitating citizen engagement. On the other hand, user-generated content of YouTube and other social media was found extremely useful for managing routine but also critical crisis situations such earthquakes and floods (Kavanaugh et al., 2012).

This paper aims to provide a general overview of YouTube usage by Western European municipalities. Although our research is mostly focused on the supply side (municipality's YouTube activity measured by video uploads, and content type) we partially covered the responsiveness of citizens as well by collecting the number of video views and the number of subscribers. Both, the video views and the number of subscribers might be seen as a first step towards citizens' engagement, however, citizens' engagement itself is a broader topic to be researched more in depth. In terms of cultural influence, empirical research suggests that e-participation adoption by local governments is influenced by institutional characteristics of the country (Bonsón, Royo, & Ratkai, 2015; Panagiotopoulos, Moody, & Elliman, 2012; Royo, Yetano, & Acerete, 2014). Thus, Public Administration Style which is defined by an administrative culture and institutional differences among countries has resulted to be a crucial factor for explaining the evolution of public sector reforms, which nowadays include the developments in

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transparency, accountability, and e-participation (Pina, Lourdes, & Royo, 2007; Royo et al., 2014). For the purposes of our study we applied Torres's (2004) classification of Western Europe administration styles where Anglo-Saxon public managerial approach keeps on efficiency, effectiveness and value for money, and together with Nordic countries is known for their public sector reforms, high transparency and citizen engagement, while Germanic and Southern European approaches are rather bureaucratic and hierarchical.

Our findings show that particular content types, such as cultural activities, and promotion of the city, are the most widely used by Western European local governments. Additionally, it has also been found that these contents, together with videos about citizens' protection, seem to receive the highest degree of attention from users. Moreover, a strong correlation of public administration style was found with the following: prevalent video content type, the number of video uploads, video views, and subscribers of the YouTube channel. Besides, the municipality uploads, audience, and number of subscribers seem to be related with the municipality characteristics, such as the number of inhabitants, overall level of development of the local government website (E-gov_offer), and the level of adoption of Web 2.0 and SM tools by the local government (E-gov_2.0).

To our best knowledge, this is the first study providing a general overview of YouTube usage by Western European local governments by offering insights into the differences and correlations related to the public administration style, municipality characteristics, and YouTube metrics such as the video uploads, number of subscribers and the number of channel views. Therefore, we believe that our paper might have implications for both research and practice as it offers the overview of how the Western European municipalities use YouTube and what factors influence its usage and the responsiveness of citizens.

The paper is organized into five sections. The Section 1 offers a brief introduction. Section 2 reviews previous studies related to social media use in public sector. Section 3 describes the methodology applied in this research. Section 4 offers the findings on the use of YouTube by Western Europe municipalities and Section 5 discusses the main conclusions.

2. Antecedents and research questions

Social Media can be used to involve citizens in all aspects of public administration and enable their participation in democratic institutions and political processes. Panagiotopoulos, Barnett, and Brooks (2013) argue that SM might represent a significant opportunity for G2C interactions and inform policy development improvements. Bonsón, Torres, Royo, and Flores (2012) point out possible benefits of SM to the public sector, which include increased transparency and citizen participation, obtained by increased government visibility, insights into the decision-making processes, and offering the citizens that chance to become involved in collaborative processes. Similarly, Bertot, Jaeger, and Grimes (2010) stress that SM offers opportunities for accountability, transparency, crowd-sourcing solutions and real-time information disclosure.

Academics, such as Habermas (1990) and Roper (2005), argue that communication should be dialogical and symmetrical rather than monological (one-way), and stress that a cooperative open dialogue can be a powerful tool for citizens engagement. A number of studies have analysed the dialogic potential of online communication (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Kent, Taylor, & White, 2003; Park & Reber, 2008; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010; Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007). Although the main promise of SM is increased citizen participation, the majority of government communications are still one-way rather than two-way (dialogically) oriented (Haleva-Amir, 2011; Mossberger, Wu, & Crawford, 2013; Norris & Reddick, 2013). Brainard and Edlins (2015) who analysed the social media usage (Facebook, Twitter and YouTube) in the U.S. Municipal Police Departments found that despite the citizens' responsiveness there was a lack of interaction from the municipality side.

Similarly, Zavattaro and Sementelli (2014) points out that although government entities at every level are adopting SM, expected dialogic potentials with citizens might not be achieved. He took a critical examination of the way SM can increase capacity for citizens' engagement and stressed the importance of further research regarding the role that SM plays in public administration. Other studies point out the impact of individual characteristics of different SM messages on the citizen engagement suggesting that messages with the added layer of richness such as pictures and photos tend to have higher citizens response (Bonsón et al., 2015; Zavattaro, French, & Mohanty, 2015).

YouTube might be considered an effective medium for communication and citizen engagement as it has a high potential for interactivity, allowing for an open dialogue with different stakeholder groups and facilitating timely information disclosure. Hence, the use of YouTube by government can create value for both government and citizens. However, the interactivity might be impeded by disabling the option for viewers to post comments, or by failing in responding. Therefore, it is worth noting that YouTube does a great potential for interactivity, but solely having a YouTube channel does not trigger citizens' participation. Instead, it requires a strategic planning and effective management.

Hence, to shed more light on the adoption of YouTube by local governments and citizens' responsiveness we focus on YouTube metrics, content types and the influence of public administration style and municipality characteristics. Public administration styles and municipality characteristics, as described in detail in the following section, might be considered relevant factors explaining the evolution of public sector reforms and e-participation. Thus, we aim to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. : Are there any mutual relationships among YouTube metrics (video uploads, channel views and number of subscribers)?

RQ2. : Is there any relationship between YouTube metrics and municipality characteristics?

RQ3. : Is there any relationship between YouTube metrics and public administration style?

RQ4. : Is there any relationship between public administration style and the prevalent content type?

RQ5. : Is there any relationship between a specific video content type and the number of channel views?

3. Methodology

3.1. Sample and research design

Our sample consisted of 75 local municipalities across 15 Western European countries. The five largest cities in each country were analysed, as larger-sized local governments tend to be more innovative in the adoption of new technologies, such as SM, they have greater transparency needs, and they usually have more developed communication strategies (Bonsón et al., 2012). To identify whether the municipality maintains an official YouTube channel, the official website of each municipality (Appendix A) was checked in order to look for a direct link to the YouTube platform. Only 29 (39%) out of 75 municipalities in our sample had an official YouTube channel. The data collection took place in December (2014), analysing 30 videos dated from the beginning of November (2014) and going backwards for each official municipality YouTube channel.

3.1.1. Public administration style differences

Countries in our sample were divided into four groups according to the public administration style. Hence, we had two Anglo-Saxon, four Nordic, two Germanic and seven Southern European countries. A similar approach considering the public administration style differences

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