



The use of twitter by mayors in Turkey: Tweets for better public services?



Mehmet Zahid Sobaci^{a,*}, Naci Karkin^{b,c,1}

^a Uludağ University, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Department of Public Administration, Gorukle Campus, 16059 Nilüfer, Bursa, Turkey

^b Pamukkale University, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Kinikli Kampus, Denizli, Turkey

^c Delft University of Technology, The Netherlands

ARTICLE INFO

Available online 15 November 2013

Keywords:

Twitter
Social media
Turkish mayors
Municipality
Better public service

ABSTRACT

This article aims to provide an overall picture of the use of Twitter as a significant social media tool by mayors in Turkey and to investigate, using content analysis and tweet categorization, whether Twitter is used by mayors in Turkey to offer better public services. Thus, this study focuses on the impact of Twitter in Turkey on transparent, participatory and citizen-oriented local public services. Our analysis has revealed that mayors in Turkey use Twitter especially to share information, send personal messages and share their location and activities. The use of Twitter for transparent, participatory and citizen-oriented public service delivery is not common among mayors. Twitter is adopted and used by mayors mostly for the purposes of self-promotion and political marketing in Turkey.

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1. Introduction

The use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) by politicians is not a new phenomenon. However, today, ICTs, especially the internet, are more intensively used by politicians (national as well as local politicians). The increased use of ICTs by elected for various purposes is synchronous with advancements in ICTs. Elected officials have never been indifferent to developments in ICTs, as innovations in the field of ICTs have led to changes in the functioning of politics or have triggered demand for change. Today, the use of ICTs by elected officials has become all the more important because of the potential of ICT-based innovative tools to transform the relationship between elected and citizens.

The internet has the potential to contribute to the delivery of better public services, to render the relationship between citizens and political and administrative institutions more interactive, and to revitalize democracy and encourage participation. In this context, together with the transition from the web to the web 2.0 today, the purposes of the ICT use of the elected have differentiated and diversified. As far as the current states of affairs are concerned, the elected have noticed the web-based social media tools in terms of direct interaction with citizens. The social media tools (such as blogs, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube) have increasingly become major channels to disseminate information, to establish direct contact with the public and to provide services.

Many institutions have begun to share videos via YouTube, be available in the Facebook and other social networks and offer information through blogs and microblogs such as Twitter (Bertot, Jaeger, & Hansen, 2012; Jaeger, Bertot, & Shilton, 2012; Kavanaugh et al., 2012). Generally speaking, it is expected that the social media tools are to boost transparency and accountability in the public sector; to enhance the delivery of public services; to improve policy-making by enabling the public to take part in decision-making processes; to encourage the cross-agency cooperation and co-production among the partners, and to contribute to knowledge management (Bertot, Jaeger, Munson, & Glaisyer, 2010; Bonsón, Torres, Royo, & Flores, 2012; Chun, Shulman, Sandoval-Almazan, & Hovy, 2010; Mergel, 2013; Picazo-Vela, Gutiérrez-Martínez, & Luna-Reyes, 2012; Snead, 2013).

However, there is a need for empirical research that investigates to what extent the new technological tools satisfy the expectations mentioned above and to what extent these tools realize their potential of improving public services, enhancing transparency and accountability, boosting participation and strengthening democracy. In fact, Sandoval-Almazan and Gil-Garcia (2012) demonstrated that local government portals that are the predecessors of social media tools paced slowly in some countries in terms of citizen engagement; therefore, e-government was still rhetoric rather than reality. Sandoval-Almazan, Gil-Garcia, Luna-Reyes, Luna-Reyes, and Díaz-Murillo (2011), in another study which focused on the use of Web 2.0 on websites of Mexican State, found that even though the usage of Web 2.0 tools and applications has increased on most of the websites analyzed, the adoption of Web 2.0 on websites of Mexican local governments is still in the initial stages. Similarly, Lee and Kwak (2012) showed that federal agencies have started many social media-based public engagement initiatives in response to Open Government Directive but such efforts did not yield satisfactory outcomes.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: zsobaci@uludag.edu.tr (M.Z. Sobaci), nkarkin@pau.edu.tr (N. Karkin).

¹ Faculty of Technology, Policy and Management, Jaffalaan 5, NL-2628 BX Delft, The Netherlands, n.karkin@tudelft.nl, Supported by The Council of Higher Education in Turkey (YÖK).

Recently, Twitter has become one of the social media tools that is relied on to boost hopes in terms of transparency, public service improvement, participation and democracy. Even though literature on the use of social media tools by elected has expanded, there is still a lack of studies on the use of social media tools, in general, and Twitter, specifically, by local governments and local senior elected, such as mayors. As such, this study aims to provide an overall picture of the use of Twitter as a significant social media tool by mayors in Turkey and to investigate, using content analysis and tweet categorization, whether Twitter is used by mayors in Turkey to offer better public services. In accordance with the main theme of this special issue; our study, in the context of co-production and citizen participation in the public sector through social media, analyzes whether twitter as a social media tool is used by mayors in Turkey to achieve participatory and citizen-oriented public service. Thus, this study focuses on the impact of Twitter in Turkey on transparent, participatory and citizen-oriented local public services. Moreover, this study also determines the purposes of the Twitter use by mayors in Turkey. The studies on the use of social media tools in general and specifically twitter for political purposes focus on the use of such tools by national politicians during election periods. In this context, the main contribution of this article is the analysis of twitter's role in the improvement of local public services.

This study is structured into seven sections. The second section explains the new approaches towards the improvement of public services and evaluates the contribution of ICTs in this context. The third section reviews the literature on the use of social media tools by politicians. The fourth section reveals the data and method of the empirical study that aims to analyze the use of Twitter by mayors in Turkey. The fifth section presents the findings of the empirical study. The sixth section discusses the findings of the empirical study from the perspective of transparent, participatory and citizen-oriented public services. The study concludes with the suggestion to use Twitter as a tool to improve public services.

2. Background: ICT-based better public service

Today, public service improvement or better public service constitutes the vital part of the administrative reforms of countries. Governments have started to question the traditional conception of public service delivery. The main reason is that despite the limited financial opportunities, the governments confront the demand for increasing and diversifying social needs and better public services. Budgetary constraints and complicated social problems necessitate the public administrations to deliver more and better public services with fewer resources. Janssen and Estevez (2013) state that these contradicting requirements bring up the concept of I-government (lean government). According to Janssen and Estevez (2013), I-government is about doing more with less by streamlining organizational structures and processes, stimulating innovation and facilitating interactions with stakeholder. In this context, the search for alternative approaches to public service delivery has become a current issue.

Alternative approaches to traditional public service delivery based on command-control mechanisms have been introduced by the movement of New Public Management (NPM). Within the context of NPM's principles, market-type instruments and competition-based public service delivery have emerged. Despite the fact that these mechanisms have benefited in terms of cost reduction, they have also received some strong criticisms as they have failed to take into account how public services would be improved from the perspective of citizens. In other words, while the pressure by market forces on public service delivery provides some gains in terms of efficiency, it has failed to meet the expectations in terms of improving the citizen satisfaction, trust and participation (OECD, 2011). Therefore, the involvement of citizens into the designing and delivery of public services as an innovative approach has been adopted by countries. In the age of governance, there lies in the center of new and innovative

approaches the conception of cooperation with the citizens aimed at improving public services. As a matter of fact, under the umbrella concept of "co-production", there has been a debate of partnering with citizens in the production of public services beyond consultation (Bovaird, 2007; Brandsen & Pestoff, 2006; Cassia & Magno, 2009; OECD, 2011). It is believed that the involvement of citizens into every stage of designing and delivery of public services can help in improving the public services thanks to better understanding of their changing needs and the accumulation of information and ideas held by citizens (OECD, 2009). This new conception towards public services alters the role of the citizens and elevates them from the passive recipients of public services to the position of partner and contributor. The views, expectations and demands of the citizens are considered as a vital input in improving the public services.

Boyne (2003, p. 223) defines the public service improvement as "a closer correspondence between perceptions of actual and desired standards of public services". Nevertheless, the measurement of public service improvement is a controversial issue. All the discussion revolves around the issue of which aspect of the performance is to be measured and assessed by whom (Boyne, Entwistle, & Ashworth, 2010). However, it is evident that the new approaches towards public service delivery both as a source of input for the improvement of public services and as the most important acceptor of public services in the assessment of those services have given the citizens a central role. In this context, generally in addition to more efficient and productive public services, what better public service refers to today is a citizen-oriented and participatory public services in accordance with the expectations and demands of citizens.

ICTs, especially internet-based tools have the potential to make significant contributions in the implementation of citizen-oriented and participatory public services (Chen & Zhang, 2012; Chun, Sandoval-Almazan, & Arens, 2011; Chun et al., 2010; Criado, E-Martín, & Camacho, 2011; Gil-Garcia, 2012; Loutas, Paristeras, & Tarabanis, 2011; Nam, 2012). As a matter of fact, today, ICT-facilitated co-production has been on the top of the agenda (Linders, 2012) and e-government policies try to both provide efficiency and empower and satisfy the citizens (Karlsson, Holgersson, Söderström, & Hedström, 2012). While the use of ICTs in the delivery of public services provides cost savings and enables the access to the services 24/7, it does also offer new opportunities in terms of the relationship between the citizens and the government. In this context, thanks to the use of ICTs in the delivery of public services, citizens, on the one hand, can electronically access to the government information in relation to decisions and services, take part in the process of decision making that directly affect them, and communicate their opinions and views about the services delivered by the public institutions to the relevant officials, governments, on the other hand, by collecting the preferences, opinions and views of the citizens about policies and services, are likely to use them as an input in the process of improving policies and services. Therefore, governments strengthen their legitimacy by generating more acceptable policies and satisfactory services. Finally, this process characterizes ICT-based transparent, participatory and citizen-oriented public services.

The social media tools that reflect the latest developments in the field of internet can be used by the elected and public officials for the improvement of public services. The intensive use of social media tools by people can be converted into a golden opportunity in terms of reaching the target of better public service by the public officials. Of course, there exist some other electronic tools by which citizens can communicate their opinions and views to the public officials. On the other hand, the existence of other tools is not an obstacle for the use of social media tools for this specific purpose. Moreover, the popularity of these tools can also be considered as a significant power to be used in the improvement of public services. Therefore, in addition to e-mail, discussion forums and complaint portals, the social media tools can be made a part of the conception

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