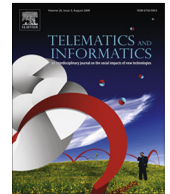




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# Trust in government's social media service and citizen's patronage behavior



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## ABSTRACT

As governments across the world have decreased in perceived reliability and trust, they now need more stable and continuous tools to communicate with their citizens. In this context, many government agencies are attempting to use social media tools to communicate with the public and promote citizen's trust. But, few studies have investigated the critical factors and antecedents of trust in government under social media context. Thus, this study empirically analyzes the antecedents and formation of citizen trust and expansion in actual citizen patronage behavior deploying structural equation model. The survey data was obtained from Korean population who used government's social media service. The results indicate that the formation of citizen trust in the government can be expanded into patronage intention toward social media and actual behavior. This study also demonstrates that factors related institutional-based trust, characteristic-based trust, and process based trust contribute to improving trust through government social media services. This study provides contribution as research that discovers the antecedents of trust in government social media use and it employs integrated perspective for the structural components of trust simultaneously.

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## 1. Introduction

Social media is increasingly being regarded as an effective tool to activate citizen participation in policy making processes because social media's properties that enable information sharing and non-discriminative participation facilitate communication and online relationships between government agencies and citizens (Aharony, 2012; Khan et al., 2012). It is also expected that social media can be a media to increase the possibility of direct democracy under contemporary representative political systems (Bonson et al., 2012). This argument is formed and developed with the citizen's trust that social media have fundamental properties of openness, speed, and bilateralism (Shi, 2013), which can enable a 'cyber space' that is equal for all.

Meanwhile, as governments across the world have decreased in perceived reliability and trust since the 1960s (Morgeson et al., 2011; Welch et al., 2005), they now need more stable and continuous tools to communicate with their citizens. In this context, many government agencies are attempting to use social media tools to communicate with the public. However, in spite of diversity benefits, a lack of understanding and readiness in government to completely introduce and embrace social media harms them (e.g. cyber-cascade, cyber-balkanization, etc), and thus the government overall, rather than restoring citizen's trust toward government. Accordingly, governments should not only consider the benefits of social media as tools to

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promote citizen's trust toward government but also understand the mechanism and antecedents of trust in government's social media. Studies that have demonstrated the role of social media for the purpose of securing government trust confirmed that citizen trust toward the government can increase if the government understands the characteristics of social media and utilizes them appropriately (Kim et al., 2013). Citizen trust toward government agencies can be simultaneously a factor facilitating citizen participation in the social media provided by the government agency and an outcome resulting from the social media (Hong, 2013). In marketing, previous studies have found positive effects of trust on the likelihood of continuing a relationship and consumer intent to make a purchase (Doney and Cannon, 1997). Understanding whether and how trust in online websites affects user intentions to continue their membership and to recommend these sites to others is important for marketing researchers and practitioners (Nielsen, 2009). Given the previous findings of the positive role of brand trust in brand relationship continuation and the increased importance of trust in the social media context, we need to investigate that trust towards a government's social media is an important determinant of citizen patronage (continuance and recommendation) intentions toward social media.

Thus, this study empirically analyzed the antecedents and formation of citizen trust and expansion in actual citizen patronage behavior based on Zucker (1986)'s trust theory. This study provides contribution as research that discovers the antecedents of trust in government social media use and it employs Zucker's integrated perspective for the structural components of trust simultaneously (Institutional-based, process-based, and characteristic-based). In Section 2, previous relevant studies on the antecedents of trust in government and social media use in government are presented, and Section 3 introduces the research model and related hypotheses. The proposed model and hypotheses are verified through a survey in Section 4. The implications and considerations of the survey results on the policies of government-to-citizen (G2C) social media communication adopted by the Korean government are described in Section 5. Finally, the results of this study are summarized in Section 6 and the limitation and future research directions are presented in Section 7.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Social media use in government

The use of social media by a government can be justified by their collaborative and participative nature (Bertot et al., 2010), and this use may have various forms (Khan et al., 2012; Kim et al., 2013). Previous studies have suggested that due to their collaborative and participatory nature, social media can be instrumental in promoting open governance through providing citizens with a voice (Bertot et al., 2010). The public sector has increasingly used social media for various purposes such as facilitating G2C relationships and interactions, exploiting various social media tools for government information and services, and providing new channels for political participation and deliberation (Kim and Park, 2012; Steenkamp and Hyde-clarke, 2014).

According to Mergel (2010), governments generally have a threefold social media strategy: push, pull, and networking. The first two strategies consider social media to be one of many media channels and thus incorporate them into the existing channels. The push strategy employs social media as representatives, and the pull strategy uses them as advertising tools for directing audiences to other online media such as websites or blogs. The push and pull strategies have important advantages in the information sharing domains of public administration and services that require immediate delivery of information, such as public safety and crisis management (Jaeger and Bertot, 2010). In contrast, the networking strategy exhibits a distinct pattern of social media use: it uses social media as a tool for directly connecting with audiences and therefore enables active involvement of the audience in the communication or information sharing process, such as crowd-sourcing policies (Bonson et al., 2012; Cho and Park, 2012; Golbeck et al., 2010). Regarding the networking strategy, previous studies have noted that social media use in municipal governments can be effective in communicating with citizens and in inducing their involvement in government policies and actions.

### 2.2. Trust theory

Trust in the government is important for the legitimacy and stability of the political system because it encourages compliance with laws and regulations (Tolbert and Mossberger, 2006). One method of enhancing citizen trust in the government is to enhance their faith in the performance of the core institutions of the government (Welch et al., 2005). This causes more open and transparent government systems and more efficient service delivery, which could help restore trust (Norris, 2003; Tolbert and Mossberger, 2006). Many scholars have referred to the importance of information technologies and improved channels of communication, which would reduce information gaps and improve citizen trust in the government as it increases communication between the government and its citizens (Chadwick and May, 2003; Rho and Kim, 2007). Trust is also created through an interrelationship between citizens and the government, and it can be built through citizen credibility in the information they exchange in communications (Corritore et al., 2003). The full information should be provided so that citizens can build credibility from the information that they know. A government provides information to its citizens in order to establish government-to-citizen trust and the public information is expected to have several characteristics of full information such as completeness, timeliness, and trustworthiness (Gelders, 2005). The government's provision of information is also related to citizen access to the required information, i.e. the timing of the provision and the access to the

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