Title: Open government and social media strategies: a new management technique or a real contribution to strengthening democracy?

Panel: Transparency and open government

Abstract:

On January 2009, President Obama signed the Memorandum on Transparency and Open Government. The memorandum declares the new administration's commitment to creating an unprecedented level of openness in government and establishing a system linking three principles: transparency, public participation and collaboration.

In the academic literature, openness has been approached from two different perspectives: (Meijer et al., 2012): transparency and participation. It is the first one which frames this exploratory study. The literature on transparency revolves around terms such as freedom of information, Internet, active dissemination of information, access to documents and usability of websites (Curtin & Mendes, 2011). The core question tackled by these works is: what is being made visible/transparent? Literature discusses, among other issues, the nature and scope of transparency, the usefulness of information, and the timing of the release of documents. The premise underlying these studies is that transparency yields to accountability. At the same time, a more accountable government is a more legitimate one (Sandóval-Almazán, 2011). Finally, legitimacy strengthens public trust in the government (Hood, 2011; Hazell & Worthy, 2010, Jaeger & Bertot, 2010).

Although the idea of openness in public administrations and organizations is not new, the current spreading use of information systems and technological advances in modern societies has attained new information demands and claims (Sandóval-Almazán, 2011). In particular, social media is used as public information tools. It radically reduces the cost of information diffusion and makes sharing with the citizenry feasible and useful.

Given this context, this paper presents the first results of the project “Social media, transparency, and open government in Catalonia”, aimed at assessing the social media strategy of Catalan public administrations in their attempt to be more transparent and accountable and, therefore, to enhance their legitimacy.

Methodologically, the study uses a mixed-method approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods, where open questions are combined with near-survey data. This enables the researchers to provide both qualitative analyses as well as statistical testing of the influence of critical success factors.

References:


