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Social Media Usage by Municipal Elected Officials for Open Government Community Engagement

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SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE BY MUNICIPAL ELECTED OFFICIALS FOR OPEN GOVERNMENT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

by

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ABSTRACT

As public administration has evolved with the technological advances in today's society, it can be challenging to ensure the demands of the public are being met in terms of efficiency, effectiveness, and engagement. Nonetheless, a focus on community remains at the forefront of public administration. When looking at technology and the community, the tool known as social media emerges. Social media has allowed people to interact in new ways and therefore, has allowed the government to interact with citizens in ways they have not been able to in the past.

In addition to attempting to modernize public administration, there has been an increased focus on building citizen trust through providing a more open government structure. The Open Government Directive issued by President Barack Obama focused on three tenets, which included transparency, participation, and collaboration. One of the ways government entities within the United States are strengthening these areas is through the implementation of various social media sites as a means to stay connected with citizens. With an increase of users utilizing social media tools for both information and connection, many government departments and agencies have incorporated social media use into their workplace as a function for their department. However, it is elected officials that are the ones who represent the citizens from their governmental role and thus, can aid in bridging the gap between citizens and government. Yet, there is little research on how elected officials, specifically in municipalities, are utilizing social media to connect with their constituents.

This study discusses social media use by municipal elected officials and how it relates to open government community engagement. Open government community engagement is defined in terms of the three tenets of the Open Government Directive: transparency, participation, and

collaboration encompassing the rungs of Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation. For this qualitative study, fifty-seven Florida municipal elected officials were interviewed regarding their social media use or lack thereof in terms of engagement with citizens. The interviews are followed-up with content analysis of social media sites. An ethnographic approach is utilized to uncover and develop common themes related to open government community engagement. The findings suggest while some municipal elected officials are utilizing social media well in terms of open government community engagement, there is a lack of clear understanding of social media use within the context of the Sunshine Law, as well as other barriers prohibiting utilizing social media for more of the participation and collaboration components. There are several reasons municipal elected officials opt to avoid social media altogether, while additional concepts related to open government limited engagement and closed government community engagement are explored. The concept of avoidance was addressed, especially as it pertained to the practical implications for both city administrators and elected officials.

Keywords: social media, open government directive, community, engagement, Arnstein, transparency, participation, collaboration, governance, local government, ethnography, elected officials, e-governance

This dissertation is dedicated to my Father- though life may throw its curveballs, You

have remained my constant.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

"Our need to connect is as fundamental as our need for food and water."

-Matthew Lieberman, Ph.D.

1.1 Background

Government has evolved in many ways in terms of communication methods and how the public remains involved. Much of the information provided by the government has become more instantaneous as a result of certain technological advances. Citizens may have quicker access to information with the implementation of websites, email, chatting options, and social media sites. With the accessibility to information seemingly more available, it may be tempting to make the assumption of a deeper connection to government or greater trust from the agency producing the information. However, according to the Pew Research Center (2010), respondents who indicated that they "trust government 'most of the time' or 'just about always' fell from 76.6 percent in 1966 to 21.5 percent in 2010" (Garen & Clark, 2015, p. 549). Therefore, it is imperative as these communication methods have changed, an assessment and reflection be conducted on how these new technological tools affect how the government chooses to respond to citizens and their corresponding relationships with citizens, or lack thereof.

Public administration is tasked with implementing government policy. According to Drljaca and Latinovic (2012), public administration is perceived by citizens around the world to be "expensive, inefficient, with insufficient expertise" (p.39). In addition, oftentimes many agencies have limited technological abilities, are full of bureaucracy, too complicated for its citizens, and too focused on their own goals while acting as if their stance on an issue is the

majority, regardless if it is or not. Garen and Clark (2015) argue that trust is an important

component of social capital. They further state that with the decline of trust in government, the

performance of government in terms of efficacy of economic and social relationships may be in

jeopardy. In an effort to improve these perceptions, many government entities are modernizing

public administration (Garen & Clark, 2015).

Part of this modernization includes what is known as e-government. Hirwade (2010)

explains e-government in terms of utilizing electronic means to disseminate government

information to the public instead of traditional approaches. These new technological methods

have allowed for a change in quality of services, transparency in the governing process,

streamlined processes, improved record keeping, and less corruption. Being able to provide

information via the Internet has potential benefits including but not limited to accessibility to a

wider audience, delivery of timely and accurate information, and a reduction of costs. These

factors can result in a shift of citizen perceptions of public administration to that of efficient,

effective, and citizen friendly (Hirwade, 2010).

The increased use of technology and the movement toward e-government has affected the

way governments and their citizens communicate. With technology allowing for instantaneous

information and communication via several outlets, there has been pressure from the public to

increase the functionality of governmental technologies beyond traditional websites. As a result,

the use of social media has gained traction and has overtaken discussion forums and blogs as a

way to gain access to information and have citizens' concerns heard (Williamson & Parolin,

2012). One of the outcomes of e-government has included an increase of governance

approaches. These approaches focus on the freedom to expand, change, and adapt policies and

procedures in an effort to make improvements for all stakeholders (Fredrickson & Smith, 2003). Communication via electronic means has not only allowed for information to be disseminated to citizens, but has also allowed for citizen feedback. This decentralization approach has permitted closer relations to the citizens (Williamson & Parolin, 2012).

1.2 Context of This Study

With social media's increasing popularity, it is important to understand its role in the political culture and governmental process and whether or not it is addressing issues related to transparency, participation, and collaboration. Leighninger (2011) introduces multiple phases related to online technologies. The first phase aided in the ability for citizens to have access to information quicker; the second phase is continually expanding as it incorporates not only the access but the potential to contribute, as well. While the first phase helped bring a wave of public engagement efforts, the second phase sees the emergence of everyday citizens becoming experts in governmental matters and opens the door for citizens to contribute regarding potential public administrative practices. Many municipal governments have realized the need to be more proactive in their approach to the public in an effort to engage a high number of citizens who are diverse through targeted, network-based recruitment. Most of these proactive efforts have been temporary and targeted to a particular issue, plan or policy. So while there are many benefits, they do not seem to produce long-term changes in the way the government operates or conducts business with the public (Leighninger, 2011).

One of the responses to the advancement of technology and the apparent opportunities the development afforded came from President Barack Obama. He saw the immense power of the Internet, including the benefits of social media during his 2008 campaign for presidency.

Following his election, in 2009, he issued the Open Government Directive, which laid the foundation for principles in transparency, participation, and collaboration as the epitome of open government. The purpose of this directive was to broaden access to government information with an emphasis on involving people. Another purpose of this initiative that was relatively new included making information and decision-making processes within the federal government accessible for citizen examination. The Open Government Directive integrates historic democratic practices with technological initiatives (Harrison et al., 2012).

One of the biggest initiatives utilized by many governments in an attempt to be part of the e-governance movement includes social media. It has been at the forefront of the Open Government Directive, as it provides the means to increase transparency, participation, and collaboration (Sinclair, Boerchers, & Peirson-Smith, 2017). As government shifts in changing its communication methods, the use of social media within local governments is gaining traction by both city staff and elected officials. Cities and elected officials are utilizing these tools as a way to engage with their citizens. This is allowing for more innovative techniques that may have formerly been outside of comfort zones. Many of the departments within the governments internationally have implemented sites such as Facebook fan pages, Twitter updates, YouTube videos, and blogs (Zavattaro & Bryer, 2016, p. 74).

While there are several different definitions for social media, one broad definition describes it as "human communication, possessing characteristics of participation, openness, conversation, community, and connectedness" (Veil, Buehner, & Palenchar, 2011, p. 110). From this definition it is evident that if used appropriately, social media could provide municipal governments an added method to communicate with their citizens (Van Dijck, 2011, p. 173).

Another definition of social media suggests that it is "forms of electronic communication (as websites for social networking and micro blogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (as videos)" (Fillmore, 2012, p.2). These forms of communication are also known as social network sites that allow citizens to create their own identity via a profile, make connections with others, and explore the relationships and connections of others (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Fillmore's definition of social media is the one utilized in this study, as it will focus specifically on social networking sites utilized by municipal elected officials.

Some examples of social media include: blogs, listservs, Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, and Instagram (Fanselow, 2008). These sites give local governments the ability to share information quickly; some examples of these include informing citizens of: a school delay or closing, an unusual traffic condition, construction warnings, emergency weather information, public safety information, a meeting cancellation, or upcoming event information. Not only do these sites allow one to give information out, they allow the user to interact with one another and municipal elected officials (Fillmore, 2012).

While some of the benefits of these social media advances may include ways to increase transparency, participation, and collaboration, social media can also be used for other purposes, potentially causing more harm than good. With any open forum, there is the possibility of misinformation being shared. Additionally, trust can be lost if questions or comments go unanswered or are even deleted. Bryer (2011) refers to some of these concerns as the "cost of democratization." He states that if participation by the public is made too difficult, governments may become inefficient and thus cause citizens to lose trust and become discouraged regarding

their ability to make a difference. In this regard, it is important for public administrators to view themselves as citizen administrators because part of their role is to serve the citizens within their jurisdiction. If this does not occur, the trust could be further lost as citizens attempt to gain clarity elsewhere.

Through the effective use of social media, successful collaborations between local governments and the citizens are possible, which can aid in fulfilling the governance core values and building of social capital. Social media tools allow participants to be both users and producers. This allows citizens to participate in ways they were not able to in the past with older technologies, such as email blasts and websites. While social media has the potential to foster new relationships and better collaborations, citizen trust in government may be in jeopardy if social media is not used in a manner consistent with citizen expectations. It is, therefore, imperative to understand and study how and why social media is currently being utilized amongst public administrators. More specifically, it is critical to ascertain whether social media is being implemented in ways that foster many of the two-way communication strategies it was designed for, especially concerning transparency, participation, and collaboration efforts (Bryer, 2011; Leighninger, 2011).

<u>1.3 Research Question</u>

The aim of this study is to bridge the gap between theory and practice and show how social media may be utilized to foster relationships between municipal government elected officials and their respective citizens. The following question will guide the research:

How does social media usage by municipal elected officials assist or detract in fostering open government community engagement*?

Sub-questions related to the main research question include:

1) *How do municipal elected officials engage with citizens?*

2) *How is inclusivity defined through practice?*

open government community engagement will be defined in terms of transparency, participation, and collaboration

<u>1.4 Study Significance</u>

There is little research on the implications of social media in municipal governments. Most of the government research focused on which social media sites are used and reasons for beginning use but little research on the effects of its use (Zhang & Xiao, 2017). Furthermore, Williamson and Parolin (2012) state that social media in municipalities is rarely monitored or analyzed by municipal elected officials. Following their recommendation, this study analyzes social media usage in municipalities. Since elected officials represent the people, acting as government liaisons, this study specifically examines how municipal elected officials are utilizing social media to aid in the promotion of values consistent with the Open Government Directive (Williamson & Parolin, 2012). There were several news articles on social media use by elected officials ("For Officials, Social Media is Fine Line," 2015; Allen, 2017; Olivarez-Giles, 2017; "Public Officials Can Get Bitten by Social Media," 2013; "Counties Asked to Create Distinct Social Media Brands," 2014; "Huber Heights Candidates Speak Out About Facebook Fights," 2017; "City's Top Leaders Take to Social Media to Increase Transparency," 2012; Nagourney, 2014; "Gov. Hogan, Stop Deleting Facebook Posts You Don't Like," 2017) but little research regarding this specific area, especially in the United States (Zhang & Xiao, 2017; Brundidge, et al., 2013; Omar, Stockdale, & Scheepers, 2014).

The media have discussed the opportunities and challenges elected officials face as social media use increases. Some elected officials are still trying to navigate whether or not to maintain multiple accounts for both public and private use. These decisions are coupled with the added dilemma of deciding what should be shared and how often one should post ("For Officials, Social Media is Fine Line," 2015). In addition to the development of pages and initial posts, elected officials are also faced with whether or not to engage in debates that may occur on their social media sites, as well as censorship issues. Once a page is opened up for political discussion, it can be argued that it has become a public forum for speech and debate, and thus granting users First Amendment rights. In addition to the potential issue of allowing comments an elected official may not necessarily agree with, blocking users may prove to be an additional issue. Whereas a citizen may have the luxury of blocking any users they want, blocking users from an elected official's page may be the equivalent of denying citizens' access to their representatives (Allen, 2017; "Gov. Hogan, Stop Deleting Facebook Posts You Don't Like," 2017). These are just some of the issues that may play a role in the extent of social media use by municipal elected officials.

In the council-manager form of government, city administrators typically inform elected officials of facts and allow them to be the decision makers when it comes to certain policies. The city managers contribute to the policy process by creating the agenda, executing policy, and providing leadership and direction to the council members. Administration usually conveys unbiased information and works to inform council members of all relevant information regarding the implementation practices and legality concerns. It is the elected official's role to engage with the citizens and address any apprehensions or feedback citizens express. Elected officials are

responsible to the people and must balance representing the citizens within their jurisdiction with municipal staff recommendations. The city manager advises but has no formal authority of law making. The council directs administration and oversees the policy implementation process and the manager is responsible for carrying out the council's wishes (Demir & Reddick, 2012; Svara, 1999).

While the city administrator and municipal staff work more behind the scenes, it is the elected officials who are held responsible by the public. These council members help to bring legitimacy and accountability to government processes. It is therefore then, the elected officials role and duty to remain in touch with their constituents. They serve as the moderators and vessel between citizens and administration. This added layer creates pressure to inform and explain actions enacted by the City to the public. Svara (1999) states that some elected officials view their roles as electoral activists and seek to represent their constituents by acting as their spokesperson. However, these proactive engagement levels do vary amongst elected officials (Demir & Reddick, 2012; Svara, 1999).

Mitchell (2017) mentions how the city manager used to be viewed as the one who takes direction from the elected officials and how this dynamic has morphed into more of a continuum, rather than a dichotomy over time (Demir & Reddick, 2012). However, Svara (2001) argues that elected officials still do the politicking, while city managers manage. It is within the politicking role that elected officials contribute by clarifying goals expectations to administrators (Mitchell, 2017) that are derived from citizen expectations as they bridge the gap from citizens to city managers. In this capacity, the efforts to represent the citizens' needs to be adequately monitored in order to ensure the needs of the public are met. This is where the analysis of social media

efforts by municipal elected officials can fill the gap of the limited research available regarding social media use by municipal elected officials.

After conducting an extensive literature review, the best place to add to the literature is concerning the municipal elected officials and their social media practices. This lack of attention in the academic community is not effectively meeting the practical needs regarding this growing phenomenon. This study fills in this gap by finding common themes related to municipal elected officials' use of social media discussion with their constituents. It builds on the limited research regarding the Open Government Directive and social media use within municipalities. It utilizes an ethnographic study focusing on interviews with municipal elected officials regarding their social media practices. The goal of this study is to provide a deeper understanding of social media's role in the municipal capacity, specifically in terms of the municipal elected official. This research attempts to link theory behind the Open Government Directive to practice for both practitioners and academics to build upon the common themes found. As public administrators are able to understand the phenomena behind social media as it pertains to the core democratic concepts related to transparency, participation, and collaboration, new and existing theories can be formulated, developed, and adapted. With a greater and broader understanding, policies can be advanced in order to improve current practices.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter two opens with a discussion of the Open Government Directive and draws upon literature and multiple theories relating to technological advances and concepts encompassing transparency, participation, and collaboration. Governance theory and the emergence of e-governance are examined through the Open Government Directive lens. The role of social media is outlined, addressing the concepts discussed. A discussion of Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation is analyzed and incorporated into the conceptual framework presented. The chapter concludes with propositions of the study.

Social media practices by differing governments are identified and discussed. From analyzing the literature, there does not appear to be consistent direction, some type of benchmark, or a standard for social media practices within municipalities. The Open Government Directive provided agencies specific information regarding the development of Open Government Plans, but did not provide clear guidance on assessment measurements for their respective plans (Measurement of Open Government, 2012). While governance theories and the Open Government Directive stress the need for more openness and collaboration, many agencies have no clear assessment metrics, specifically when it comes to social media practices.

After exploring the literature, the goal of the study was to find common themes related to the current practices of social media use by municipal elected officials and offer insight on the social media aspect of the Open Government Directive initiatives. This study bridges the gap between social media practices and the Open Government Directive by displaying their relationship with one another and offer findings of common themes that may be tested for future studies.

There seems to be an overarching theme in the literature of varying relationships between open government, e-governance, digital democracy, transparency, participation, collaboration, accountability, and trust (Marjanovic & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2017; Kassen, 2017; Gabriel, 2017; Ingrams, 2017; Araujo, 2016; Darwish, 2017; Valle-Cruza, Sandaoval-Almazan, & Gil-Garcia, 2016), with transparency, trust, and equity viewed as vital components of good governance (Piotrowski, 2017; Wu, Ma, Yu, 2017; Araujo, 2016). This background provides the foundation for the Memorandum on Transparency and Open Government President Barack Obama signed on his first day in office in 2009. Later that year, the Obama administration issued the Open Government Directive (OGD), which required federal agencies to work toward achieving transparency, participation, and collaboration milestones. President Obama initiated the OGD as a way to show his commitment to the openness of government (Piotrowski, 2017). The directive and researchers have defined these tenets, as multiple agencies have attempted to focus on these concepts more. The OGD encompasses components related to varying values found within governance literature as it pertains to public administrators. The following table shows varying definitions for transparency, participation, and collaboration. Harrison (2012) provides definitions for the terms and Mergel (2013) offers enhanced definitions as it pertains to social media.

Table 1. Definitions of Transparency, Participation, & Collaboration

	Open Government Directive	**Harrison (2012)**	**Mergel (2013)**
Transparency	Provides information for citizens about what their Government is doing	Public availability and flow of timely, comprehensive, relevant, high quality and reliable information concerning government activities	Broadcasting of government information via social media sites
Participation	Increased opportunities to participate in policymaking and to provide their Government with the benefits of their collective expertise and information	The process by which public concerns, needs, and values are incorporated into governmental and corporate decision making	Citizens can engage in preparing policy-making decisions by providing their feedback through social media channels
Collaboration	New forms to solicit public feedback to assess and improve their level of collaboration and to identify new opportunities for cooperation	Form of democratic participation that brings individuals with expertise together with decision makers in government to brainstorm solutions that could potentially be implemented	Increase exchanges with citizens or collaboratively work with government stakeholders on innovative ideas to fulfill the mission of government

The intentional efforts toward a more open government around the world have been seen as efforts to ensure that government practices are transparent and allow the citizens to be involved. Following the OGD from the Obama administration, the Open Government Partnership was launched in 2011 from the U.S. State Department. This was seen as an international effort to collaborate with governments around the globe to work on areas stemming from the OGD. Part of this partnership involves a legal precedent for citizens to be able to access information, as well as a commitment to promote the tenets surrounding the OGD. Over 60

countries have either already created their plans or started the process of joining the Partnership (Harrison and Djoko Sigit, 2014).

These open government practices have the ability to influence citizen confidence in government decisions (Wu, Ma, & Yu, 2017). Piotrowski (2017) suggests that more research needs to be conducted to evaluate implementation issues related to the open government tenets. However, a proper understanding of the definitions related to the OGD is critical to being able to effectively conceptualize their impacts and effects.

While the OGD provided insight on government's attempt to be more open, providing insight on measuring this openness proved to be a little more difficult. Metrics for how agencies should measure efficiency, effectiveness, and the impact of their open government efforts were not clearly defined. Successful open government and who defines success were not clearly outlined. Lastly, best practices of open government processes, programs, and implementation were not addressed (Measurement of Open Government (2012).

The OGD is still being implemented by the United States as the tenets of transparency, participation, and collaboration are still evolving as they relate to policies and practices in the political and technological climate (Piotrowski, 2017). Currently, there is very little research on the effects of the OGD, as well as the effects at the local level. Part of this has to do with the fact that there was no clear measurement model. This was partly due to the fact of wanting to allow different agencies to interpret the OGD as they saw fit. By allowing agencies the flexibility to define the term, there was a hope for a sense of ownership and more intentional practices. It was intended to aid in encouraging both innovation and buy-in from the different departments. For example, certain agencies may view openness and the OGD tenets very differently, such as

NASA and the DOJ, and therefore need different outcomes to meet the goals of the OGD. Since there were no clear outcome levels written, there consequently was no measurement framework offered for program evaluation either. Therefore, it is difficult to assess the overall impact of certain methods utilized (Measurement of Open Government (2012).

As a result of this ambiguity, some agencies have steered away from the OGD specifically and sought to develop their own measures and standards for transparency efforts. Others have looked at utilizing technological tools to enhance their collaborative efforts through social media and open data initiatives. Furthermore, there are movements toward collaborating with other countries in terms of policy and platform analysis, perhaps setting a standard for international openness. The Measurement of Open Government (2012) concluded their study by stating that while the OGD did not provide guidance on assessment of open government initiatives, metrics may be possible but need to be further refined.

The Open Government Maturity Model was developed by Lee and Kwak (2012) in an effort to measure the level of openness governments have with their utilization of social media. Lee and Kwak acknowledged the push toward a more open government but found there were no clear guidelines regarding assessment. While the model does not address any current findings, it does provide a framework for measurement efforts and further validates Mergel's definitions regarding transparency, participation, and collaboration in the social media context. The maturity levels of open government begin with initial conditions (Level 1), data transparency (Level 2), open participation (Level 3), open collaboration (Level 4), and ubiquitous engagement (Level 5). Each of the levels gradually becomes more open and comfortable with social media usage and efforts.

At the first level, there are little or no online interactive capabilities. The public does not frequent government websites and the citizens take on more of a passive role. With the data transparency level number two, experimentation of social for public participation occurs. There is an increased public awareness of government data and the public is engaged by this data. The third level of open participation focuses on popular social media websites, such as, Facebook and Twitter and the public is engaged through conversation. The fourth level of open collaboration utilizes more collaborative social media tools, such as Google Docs and Wiki and the public is engaged through projects. The last level of ubiquitous engagement has a more integrated governance structure for public engagement and the public is engaged through multiple social media channels (Lee & Kwak, 2012). The following table provides a brief overview of the five stages and is adapted from Lee and Kwak's (2012) table, highlighting main ideas. Components of this model serve as part of the theoretical foundation for this study. The first two levels of initial conditions and data transparency are intertwined with the transparency component of the OGD. The third level of open participation is intertwined with the participation element of the OGD. Lastly, open collaboration is intertwined with the collaboration component of the OGD. This study couples the transparency, participation, and collaboration tenets from the OGD within the context of Lee and Kwak's model and provides part of the theoretical basis for this study. These concepts are explored further within this chapter.

Table 2. Adapted from Lee & Kwak's Open Government Maturity Model

Level	Focuses	Data	Participation/Collaboration	Outcomes
Initial Conditions	Information Broadcasting	Limited data is made available online	One-way, static communication	Little or no public engagement
Data Transparency	Transparency of government processes and performance	High-value, high-impact government data is published online	Limited use of social media for keeping the public informed and engaged	Increased government accountability; increased public awareness
Open Participation	Feedback, Conversation, and interactive communications	Unstructured government data is widely shared online	Pervasive use of social media for interaction, feedback, and communications; timely and consistent responses	Real-time, instant, diverse feedback from the public
Open Collaboration	Interagency collaboration with the public	Data analytics for obtaining new insights and improving decision-making	Open collaboration for policy changes, rule making, and problem solving	New policies and rules are made through open collaboration
Ubiquitous engagement	Integrated public engagement through increased transparency, participation, and collaboration	Expansion of the scope and depth of data transparency and information easily accessible	Expansion of the scope and depth of open participation and open collaboration	Openness becomes a norm for government culture

The following sections will analyze the three components of the OGD (transparency, participation, and collaboration) in more detail. Before an attempt can be made on the assessment of these concepts, they must be defined theoretically and conceptually. A proper understanding of these terms will aid in measuring transparency, participation, and collaboration efforts from a municipal elected official standpoint, through the social media lens.

<u>2.2 Transparency</u>

Unfortunately many democratic societies fail to meet the needs of their citizens, thus giving rise to the requests for transparency (Harrison & Djoko Sigit, 2014). Public administration transparency has increased across the globe since the 1990's, however most of the literature on transparency focuses on central government, rather than at the municipal level (Araujo & Tejedo-Romero, 2016). It is an intrinsic value in democratic societies (Ruijer, 2017; Piotrowski, 2017) and initiatives related to transparency have been extensively promoted in the last several years in order to hold government more accountable. The intrinsic value focuses on the "right to know" values that are apparent in public records laws. The Freedom of Information Act is crucial when it relates to transparency, as it negotiates between what citizens need to know and privacy. Concerns can arise while trying to determine and define what citizens need to know, what information citizens may not be able to understand, and whether citizens are able to accurately interpret the information. However, legitimacy and trust between government and citizens can increase and be fostered with the additional information. These two perspectives make finding an appropriate balance between releasing and withholding information imperative (Harrison et al., 2012). In Florida, the Public Records Act allows citizens the right to access state and local

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government records. Citizens are allowed to personally inspect and copy the records (Adams, 2016).

Government transparency yields multiple definitions throughout the literature. Many of the definitions include sharing of information, promoting citizen involvement, and being held accountable by the citizens. Kassen (2017) defines transparency of government in terms of encouraging and promoting the openness of government and its willingness to share information. Wu, Ma, and Yu (2017) define transparency in terms of proactive disclosure of government information and citizens' ability to access desired information. They further state that it entails the invitation for citizens to participate in the decision making process and how accountable the government is held in terms of public scrutiny. Araujo and Tejedo-Romero (2016) further reiterate these definitions by stressing the importance of citizens and external actors having the ability to monitor and assess government performance. This includes both active and passive transparency, in terms of proactively disclosing and responding to requests, respectively, in addition to clarifying information in understandable terms. Ruijer (2017) adds the additional components of how the information is shared and to whom it is communicated. Piotrowski (2017) finds Albert Meijer's (2013) definition of transparency as the most intuitive, "the availability of information about an actor that allows other actors to monitor the workings or performance of the first actor" (p. 430). Table One highlights various definitions and for the purposes of this study, Mergel's (2013) definition will be utilized since it includes social media elements of broadcasting information via social media channels, while still keeping in mind some of the aforementioned components.

In addition to definitions for transparency in certain settings, there are other elements of transparency Heald (2006) introduces. There are four directions of transparency, which include: upward, downward, outward, and inward. Upward transparency refers to a superior having access to and observing behavior of a subordinate. The transparency flows upward. Downward is the reverse of this notion and refers to the subordinates being able to observe the conduct of their superior. This relates to democratic theory, where government power falls in the hands of the citizens, and is under the umbrella of accountability. Transparency outward refers to a hierarchical subordinate observing the behavior of outside the organization. This allows for transparency of one's peers or competitors. The transparency flows from the outside in. Transparency inward is the reverse of this and allows those on the outside to observe the behavior of what is happening in your own organization. Piotrowski (2017) offers one more direction of transparency: transparency laterally. This refers to multiple parts of an organization observing and sharing information with one another. Within these contexts of directions, transparency of elected officials may be viewed as transparency downward where the citizens can observe the behavior of those they elected.

As scholars continue to study and analyze transparency within the information and communication technologies (ICT) domain, some studies struggle with the notion that more transparency is better and thus concepts related to e-transparency need to be more clearly defined and noted (Harrison & Djoko Sigit, 2014). There has been much debate over information that aids in effective transparency versus simple disclosure of information that may confuse citizens rather than offer clarity (Harrison & Djoko Sigit, 2014). Transparency is important, but does need to be executed appropriately so there is not an abundance of information than could

potentially lead to confusion and chaos (Harrison et al., 2012; Harrison & Djoko Sigit, 2014). Furthermore, transparency may hurt government's legitimacy if there is a high level of controversy around the item in question (Piotrowski, 2017; Rohr, 1998). However, if too much information is withheld from citizens, it can become more challenging to ensure government accountability (Harrison et al., 2012).

In democracies where citizens delegate authority in the decision-making process, transparency and accountability often work together as information is disseminated, validation and assessment of the information is provided by citizens, as well as allows for continued consent from the citizens. However, it is not enough to simply disclose information; as mentioned above, factors concerning what information to disclose and under what conditions is important to determine. Harrison and Djoko Sigit (2014) mention the concept of "targeting transparency" which proposes that information shared through transparency policy be defined clearly within a certain context and align with policies of specific kinds of disclosure. Heald (2006) defines different types of transparency in order to expand on the notion of more versus less transparency. Some of these include event-orientated transparency, process transparency, transparency in retrospect, real-time transparency, nominal transparency, and effective transparency. These concepts of transparency focus on disclosing information at certain points in time relating to what are externally visible, changes in process, continual surveillance, and reporting information after the fact. Heald (2006) prefers transparency in retrospect as it allows for more intentional and purposive disclosure of information.

The instrumental values of transparency include legitimacy, participation, trust, and potential change (Piotrowski, 2017). However, conceptual models of the success of transparency

efforts have not been clearly defined. The goals of transparency for improved efficiency and accountability sound admirable but practical implications may prove to be more challenging. Citizens oftentimes view elected officials as withholding information, not encouraging the public to participate in the decision making process, and communicating information that is unclear (Ingrams, 2017). Additionally, concerns of corruption, fraud, and abuse of power have further forced governments to become more transparent (Araujo & Tejedo-Romero, 2016). Piotrowski (2017) and Harrison and Djoko Sigit (2014) argue that transparency efforts may alleviate some of these concerns by improving public scrutiny, ensuring accountability, reducing corruption, improving legitimacy, restoring trust, and encouraging participation.

Some of the benefits of government transparency include the public having a clearer picture of government practices and dealings. With this knowledge, citizens are then able to evaluate the performance of government, hold them accountable, and measure fairness. Previous studies found that transparency was positively related to the perceptions of citizens on government performance. By increasing transparency, social equity perceptions by citizens may improve, as well (Wu, Ma, & Yu, 2017).

Accountability is closely related to transparency and is viewed as a complement to policy effectiveness. Transparency helps with accountability by informing citizens of government practices and performance. This transparency may strengthen democracy, promote trust, and establish criteria for accountability, fairness, and justice (Wu, Ma, Yu, 2017). According to Gabriel (2017), politicians and administrators need to commit and invest in the relationship between the two, accountability and transparency, as social equity could be compromised without it (Wu, Ma, Yu, 2017). The study conducted by Wu, Ma, and Yu (2017) surveyed 36

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cities in China and found that government transparency was positively related to perceived social equity.

Additionally, citizen trust was another factor that played a role in the perceived social equity. Social equity is one of the pillars for public administration and focuses on equality in government services, emphasizing justice and fairness. It centers on the idea that every person is equal and has certain rights. Through fair services and predictable decision making processes, trust may be increased through the dedication to transparency. If citizens do not have access to accurate information in a timely fashion, nor a sense of fairness and justice, confidence in government practices may become compromised. Legitimacy is based on trust from citizens that elected officials will implement the citizens' needs. Trust can be derived from components related to information, transparency, accountability, and participation. Democracies must have information in order to function and in essence good information is a necessary prerequisite for good democracy (Harrison & Djoko Sigit, 2014). However, there have been few studies on the impacts of the transparency factor as it relates to social equity (Wu, Ma, Yu, 2017; Gabriel, 2017).

Transparency plays a vital role in the amount of trust citizens have in government. This trust further influences online citizen satisfaction. Information and communication technologies allow for not only transparency to occur, but allows for citizen participation, as well. Some of the other benefits include increased citizen engagement, better service delivery, more transparency and efficiency in administration, better relationships with other government entities, and the execution of policies (Valle-Cruza, Sandoval-Almazan, & Gil-Garcia, 2016). Transparency relating to fiscal matters is an important display of a government's commitment to allowing

citizens to take part in decision-making processes. Through fiscal transparency, information about budgets, audits, and related financial policies, citizens are able to hold governments accountable and monitor and evaluate the process and decisions that are made (Harrison and Djoko Sigit, 2014).

Scholars are becoming more interested in studying the effects of technology tools and social media, claiming the tools increase transparency, encourage citizen participation in government practices, and help citizens' perception of government's legitimacy. Some scholars further state that efficiency and transparency are simultaneously improved through Web 2.0 technologies, which can be defined as greater collaboration among Internet users than traditional Web 1.0 technologies, such as websites and emails. Transparency that is supported by these technologies may be able to reduce government bureaucracy and corruption, increase trust, and increase social capital. However, actions and strategies for implementation practices remain vague and not adequately executed (Valle-Cruza, Sandoval-Almazan, & Gil-Garcia, 2016). Open government data coupled with government transparency may be used to describe what is known as transparency 2.0. This relationship can be defined further through disclosure of public data in a fully open setting in order to increase transparency and accountability from the government. Furthermore, this allows for quicker access to information, as well as the potential for more citizen participation and empowerment (The Influence of the Transparency Agenda, 2016).

Open Government is a rather young concept and promotes the tenets of transparency, participation, and collaboration. The Open Government initiative is closely related to e-government in terms of the way digital technologies are used to promote these values. E-government combines innovative policies and differing digital platforms that are used primarily

in public administration to deliver information and services (Gable, 2015), improve citizen participation, and improve effective decision-making (Gunadi, 2015). It centers on the idea of digital democracy, which encourages the use of new methodologies to promote participation and civic involvement in the public sector (Kassen, 2017). From a citizen perspective, e-government can be defined as a system that allows citizens, organizations, and government agencies to access services through the internet, mobile phones, fax, mail, telephone, or in person (Khan & Park, 2013). The e-government websites allow for disclosure of information and the ability for citizens to communicate with government through transactions. The websites have the potential to foster meetings, discussions, and collaboration through various documents. However, the government websites may be limited in terms of connectivity, which is where social media tools may complement these sites (Gunadi, 2015).

Due to the e-government movement and rise of social media technologies, several benefits can be achieved. These include increase in access of public records, corruption reduction, and easier access for whistle blowing. These capabilities are allowing certain plans and policies to be executed, such as Sunlight Foundation's 2013 "transparency agenda." This initiative focuses on transparency concerns related to real time online disclosure of lobbying, tax expenditures, contracts, and budgets. The Internet has opened up doors that allow for cheaper and effective ways for the government to be more transparent with its citizens (Harrison & Djoko Sigit, 2014).

One of the ways citizens are able to feel more empowered and participate in discussions is through the use of social media platforms. These sites allow users to have quick access to information and allow agencies to improve transparency initiatives. However, the maturity level

of social media usage has not flourished to its fullest potential in terms of stakeholders' participation and involvement. Additionally, the effectiveness between individuals and varying entities utilizing social media sites show there are significant gaps in practices and performance. Overall, many people and organizations do not utilize the social media tools to their full capacity in their communication strategies (Darwish, 2017).

Social media applications are an extension of digitization practices and provide a way to fit into the e-government culture of both one-way and two-way communications. Social media has the ability to allow users to interact with one another in a variety of ways. Rather than replacing existing offline or other e-government services, social media has offered another avenue to for individuals to converse. By allowing additional means of communication, the view of government may be enhanced by citizens (Darwish, 2017).

While social media may be viewed as an asset to local governments and elected officials, it may not be enough to simply offer certain platforms for communication. Darwish (2017) states that in order for communication to be effective, it is important to be intentional, purposeful, and to plan how you will communicate with your audience. Additionally, it is imperative that an evaluation of how citizens perceive that communication be conducted. He argues that part of the lack of trust in government and its poor government communication may be a result of traditional one-way, mass communication methods. These practices do not generally facilitate public feedback, which can prohibit productive dialogue between government and their citizens. However, when used deliberately and as intended, government's performance can strengthen in terms of understanding citizens' feelings and opinions on certain issues by adding additional ways for citizens to respond to matters. While communicating through social media does not

guarantee successful communication, citizen feedback may assist governments in more effective decision-making processes.

Darwish (2017) further states that governments have begun to utilize social media for a variety of reasons, which could be classified in the following ways. The informational category focuses on the accessibility of information about the government utilizing the public's preferred communication channel. The promotional category centers on utilizing social media to promote media the government wishes to highlight. This could be done through text, picture, and video and is used to increase media richness. The transparency category focuses on releasing information that the stakeholders desire and allowing citizens to know what is happening within government dealings. Transparency is also tied closely to the progression toward e-government. The participation category allows citizens to voice their opinions, as well as share content with one another. Lastly, the collaborative category seeks to reach those who were not previously involved in the policy making process. It is a big dimension of open government and allows citizens to contribute their own content.

The research on government communication utilizing social media in general is rather limited. The previous categories help to shed light on varying ways social media helps aid governments in reaching citizens. However, while the social media platforms allow for transactional and collaborative interactions, most of the content has been found to be informational. Therefore, while new communication channels have emerged, traditional communication interactions have continued without necessarily maximizing the advantages of the new social media tools (Darwish, 2017).

As transparency efforts have shifted through the technological advances in society, most of the literature has centered on national or state government efforts as opposed to researching on the municipal level. However, the value placed on transparency remains evident through the e-government and Open Government movement. Citizens are able to access information themselves through the use of their own social media networks; however, the credibility of the information sources remain uncertain and questionable. Public administrators are then tasked with providing adequate information unless they wish to run the risk of false information being spread among these social media networks. The question of how much information to disclose from a governmental standpoint remains in order to ensure the needs of citizens are met while still trying to avoid potential confusion. This is where different levels and types of transparency attempt to clarify and categorize transparency efforts but there is little guidance when it comes to how to do this effectively, especially for municipal elected officials who wish to keep their constituents informed. Depending on varying social media transparency strategies, trust, accountability, and legitimacy may all be improved or hindered based upon how the social media sites are used.

2.3 Participation

While transparency centers mainly on the availability of information to citizens, participation is more concerned with citizens being able to give feedback on what is happening and the opportunity for their voices to be heard and receive interaction (Harrison et al., 2012). The audience is an essential component of both transparency and participation, as a skilled audience that is able to discern the information is needed for both effective transparency and participation (Harrison & Djoko Sigit, 2014). Piotrowski and Liao (2012) linked transparency

and participation, arguing that usability of information released as a result of transparency is essential for citizen participation levels. Therefore suggesting that higher transparency rates lend themselves to higher e-participation offerings, with e-participation identified as participation via the Internet. The reverse is argued to be true as well, where the amount of e-participation offerings aid in increasing transparency and openness of government operations (Medaglia, 2011). The participation component of the OGD helps to supplement transparency efforts as participation elements view citizens as the consumer of information, with this information being essential for citizen participation (Harrison and Djoko Sigit, 2014).

There are a variety of definitions for participation but it can generally be defined as the act of involving and connecting citizens in matters of agenda setting, decision-making, and policy formation with those responsible for policy decisions (Mawela, 2017). Harrison et al. (2012) further defines participation as "the process by which public concerns, needs, and values are incorporated into governmental and corporate decision making" (p.87). The participation component of the OGD focuses on key actions including: citizens' ability to produce their own content, the sharing of information with others, interaction with others, and participation in discussion in the digital environment (Cortes-Selva, Perez-Escolar, 2016).

The participation portion is an essential element of the open government initiative as the Web 2.0 technologies have shifted the way the government and citizens interact. The OGD has allowed for use and awareness of participation tools for citizen engagement, focusing on the use of technologies to influence and control actions of decision makers (Cortes-Selva, Perez-Escolar, 2016). Participation has been studied in various disciplines related to health services, public administration, environmental arenas, planning development, and city planning. Citizen

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participation has continued to be an ongoing issue when it comes to policy implementation. Citizens have trust concerns when it comes to the process for policy implementation, which has caused citizens to want to be more involved. If citizens feel they are left out of the process, their view of government can be impacted negatively. Therefore, participation becomes critical (Mawela, 2017) and is viewed as a critical component of e-government (Gable, 2015).

If governments wish to truly meet the needs of their citizens, it is important to allow citizens to participate in decision-making processes. Citizen feedback allows government the ability to get a clearer picture of citizens' expectations and desires (Crow & Stevens, 2012; Roberts, 2008). Therefore, it is argued that better policy outcomes are the result of policies that are informed by the citizens who will be impacted by them. Thus, making the connection that greater e-participation may relate to better public services (Yeuping, Lauer Schachter, & Holzer, 2014).

Participative efforts allow the potential for diverse citizens to be represented and thus possibly altering policies that aid all citizens, especially those in disadvantageous circumstances (Harrison et al., 2012). While there are many advantages to increasing participation levels, some limitations include: participation varies according to who actually participates, struggles with participant exchange of information and decisions, and the determinacy of a link between public participation and decision making. Additionally, it is important to note that increased participation may not always prove beneficial. The characteristics of the policy process, the related goals, the potential contribution and potential adverse consequences should be taken into consideration (Harrison et al., 2012).

One of the benefits of ICTs is the ability to open up dialogue for participation. This allows the ability for diverse citizens to be involved as policies are designed to help overcome disadvantageous positions. A core objective of public administration is social equity and a focus on participation is one way to address social equity concerns. Participation further legitimizes public policy in its attempt to attain this goal. However, as mentioned previously, there are still limitations that need to be addressed. Greater participation is not always advantageous as it is dependent upon the characteristics of the policy process and its related goals. Participation levels should depend on the potential contribution and potential adverse consequences that may ensue (Harrison et al., 2012).

As mentioned previously, ICTs have been increasing in use by public organizations and have allowed the interaction between government and citizens to be more open through new opportunities for participation with potentially less expense. This interaction includes dimensions of the OGD tenets through transparency in public information, participation in the decision-making process, and varying collaborative activities (Harrison & Djoko Sigit, 2014). Schmidthuber et al. (2017) make the connection of these new means with what is known as citizen sourcing. Citizen sourcing refers to public administration making an open call to citizens to engage in the decision making process in order to aid in solving current issues. This includes citizens providing information to the government, executing certain tasks, and helping to monitor certain needs and issues. These practices allow governments to improve efficiency by utilizing citizen input for positive change in a responsive and effective manner. However, this requires motivated citizens who interact online with government officials. By knowing citizens

motivation for their involvement, governments may be able to use that information to increase future participation levels (Schmidthuber et al., 2017).

Facilitation of credible political participation leads to perceived openness by governmental officials. This perceived openness then may lead to trust (Heiss & Matthes, 2016). Sorensen (2016) states that trust in society and government is an important indicator of participation levels. When trust is absent, citizens may not be willing to respond to elected officials, even when they are offering well-intended thoughts and discussion. Therefore, trust may be needed in order to allow for full participation between citizens and the government; however, this trust may only be built as participation opportunities become available to citizens (Heiss & Matthes, 2016).

E-government maturity can be defined as the extent of an online presence by a government entity (Krishnan, Teo, & Lymm (2017). It has the ability to potentially change how the government interacts with its citizens (Mawela, 2017). Part of this maturity encompasses e-participation, which falls under the e-government umbrella (Ezema, Ezeah, & Ishiwu, 2015; Khan & Park, 2013) and focuses on how ICTs can be implemented by governments for citizen involvement in decision-making processes. It is an essential component of ICT enabled governance, strengthening the government to citizens (G2C) relationship. E-participation uses ICTs in order to enhance citizen participation in government activities (Ezema, Ezeah, & Ishiwu, 2015). While service delivery remains the primary focus of government website design, some governments are utilizing ICTs to involve citizens in the policy process. This focus on citizen involvement may blend with definitions related to e-participation, e-democracy, e-governance, and e-government (Mawela, 2017; Yueping, Lauer Schachter, & Holzer, 2014). The public

sector recognizes the significance of e-participation globally as it has the ability to keep citizens informed, gather support, utilize feedback in the decision making process, and understand the needs of citizens. At the heart of e-participation should be transparency elements of citizen access to information and services. As information is made available to citizens, their feedback on issues should aid in the decision making process to benefit society as a whole (Mawela, 2017).

E-participation is still growing in terms of research, definitions, frameworks, and models. Mawela (2017) found the Kalampokis et al. (2008) model to be most beneficial in terms of incorporating several aspects of e-participation from the body of literature. There are several components of the model; the model incorporates three subdomains, types of stakeholders, participation activities, and three ICT tool categories. The components are explained in more detail below within the three subdomain categories:

1. Public participation processes can happen at any stage of the process and may include agenda setting, policy analysis, policy creation, policy implementation, policy monitoring, collaborative settings, consulting, campaigning, and voting.

2. Information and communication technology tools that enable participation processes can be labeled into three categories known as: core e-participation tools, tools used widely in e-participation but not exclusively, and basic tools that support e-participation.

3. Stakeholders that are part of the participation process include elected representatives, government agencies, political parties, varying organizations, citizens, industries, media, and academia.

Three themes within e-government include efficiency, citizen participation, and quality. Efficiency and participation have sometimes been at odds in public administration literature, as citizen participation may come at the expense of efficiency (Gable, 2015). Efforts from the White House in the past have focused heavily on efficiency. Even with openness becoming more of a focus, many agencies within the government still focus heavily on efficiency. This may have to do with varying views between elected officials and practitioners on e-government (Gable, 2015) as e-government lends itself to many benefits including, but not limited to, cost-reduction, efficiency, improved quality of service, transparency, reduction of corruption, accountability, and improved democratic processes (Krishnan, Teo, & Lymm (2017).

Krishnan, Teo, and Lymm (2017) conducted a study based on archival data from 183 countries and found that while ICTs and human capital were positively related to government's willingness to implement e-government, governance components of including citizens as part of the process was not significantly associated with them. So while certain governments may be willing to implement certain technologies or even social media platforms, good governance cannot be assumed. However, social networking sites do provide citizens with e-participation opportunities (Ezema, Ezeah, & Ishiwu, 2015).

Kumar and Natarajan (2016), found that social media has a positive effect on citizens' participation. The younger (ages 18-29) citizens are participating in government affairs at higher rates than they were in recent years. The rate in 2013 was 60% and it jumped to 74% in 2015 (Pew Research Center, 2015). Defining participation as it relates to social media and elected officials means sharing an opinion or a post, commenting an opinion, signing a petition, or working for a campaign (Heiss & Matthes, 2016). Even though many young people are exposed

to political content, active engagement is scarce. According to Heiss and Matthes (2016) only 18% of them actually engage. This could be attributed to several different factors, such as simply not wanting to engage or a perception of posts not being engaging enough. Posts that encouraged feedback or a response were found to have higher participation and engagement than merely informational posts. Furthermore, exposure to participatory posts may lead to empowerment, care, and hope more than simply sharing information (Heiss & Matthes, 2016).

Participation has various forms and types, as it can be political, social, active, passive, voluntary, or coerced. Political participation focuses on taking part in the process of the formulation and implementation of policies, while social participation focuses more on involving the community and social sectors. The overarching goal of citizen participation is to ensure there is active participation from the citizens in the policies and programs offered by the government. Ezema, Ezeah, and Ishiwu (2015) mention seven purposes of participation including providing information to citizens, receiving information from citizens, improving the decision making process, enhancing the public acceptance of government programs, changing the political power and allocation of resources, protecting the rights of individuals, and delaying or avoiding difficult policy decisions.

The Web 2.0 movement has removed barriers and allowed for connections to be made through online chats and online businesses utilizing various social media platforms. The social media tools have not only allowed real life connections to continue engagement through another platform but has allowed for new connections to be formed through similar interests. The users create their own profiles and depict themselves as they wish (Ezema, Ezeah, & Ishiwu, 2015). Other users are then allowed to access information about each other including statuses,

comments, photos, hobbies, events, and contacts. Communications via social networks sites are able to be public or private, depending on the users' personal preferences (Valenzuela et al., 2016).

Part of the Web 2.0 shift centers on the concept of the users generating and shaping the content and discussions. The social networking sites helped to shift the Internet from being a top-down information provider to allowing the users to be more heavily involved in the direction and movement of discussion. While several research studies related to social networking sites have been conducted through both the theoretical and practical lens, these studies have been limited and have focused primarily on the purposes and abilities of the sites rather than on tangible, specific outcomes (Ezema, Ezeah, & Ishiwu, 2015).

However, e-government research specifically concerned with the use of social media has grown (Mawela, 2017). The combination of interactive avenues and politics has led itself to new citizen participation methods. The social media platforms have allowed for the facilitation of interaction and more horizontal and open dialogue (Cortes-Selva, Perez-Escolar, 2016). Some of the benefits of social media in the government context include transparency, trust in government, communication, better citizen engagement, allowance of citizens to become co-producers, citizen empowerment, citizen aiding in problem solving, and improved service (Mawela, 2017).

Social media may be linked to greater participation in civic and political affairs. Some of the social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, allow information to reach a variety of people through mass communication. Due to the wider audience, feedback may be received through a variety of channels. This participation component may aid in fostering trust among the participants (Valenzuela et al., 2016). Social media is different than other mass media tools in the

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fact that it allows for two-way communication, which could encourage interaction between the government and citizens. While social media does allow for e-participation components of transparency and closeness between the government and citizens, research remains inconclusive on whether these sites enhance that relationship (Ezema, Ezeah, & Ishiwu, 2015).

There are several important contextual factors that may influence the e-participation level within governments. These may include municipal size, form of government, transparency fiscal resources, and e-services offered. Research varies in terms of municipal size where some research suggests that larger cities may have greater participation rates (Ebdon & Franklin 2006; Medaglia, 2007). If larger cities encouraged citizen interest and created several smaller networks, then participation could indeed increase with population size. However, if the greater populated municipalities stimulated more alienation and created barriers for participation, then participation should decline with increased population size (Oliver, 2000). Medaglia (2007) found that municipalities with greater financial resources tended to offer and adopt more e-participation activities. However, simply having the technology available and even a great website, does not guarantee e-participation opportunities. The willingness of governments to involve the citizens is more important oftentimes than the technological capabilities. The political culture, therefore, plays a vital role of e-participation offerings and implementation (Yeuping, Lauer Schachter, & Holzer, 2014).

Mawela's (2017) study of South African municipalities found that there was a discrepancy in the adoption of social media platforms. While citizens were willing to engage with government officials through the use of social media applications, the responses from the government were sporadic. Public administration and political science scholars have struggled

with deciding how best to involve citizens in the decision-making processes. However, there has been a variety of research regarding factors that influence participation opportunities offered to citizens, such as demographics of citizens, citizen preferences and willingness, and tools utilized to elicit citizen participation (Yeuping, Lauer Schachter, & Holzer, 2014). Some of these factors may be categorized into four groups labeled as form of government, types of participants, participation tools utilized, and the process itself (Franklin and Ebdon, 2005).

The rise of municipal websites has developed incrementally as new technologies that allow for e-participation continue to be developed. The main actors within the governmental organizations are then left deciding which tools to implement and utilize. These decisions can have significant impacts on the roles citizens can play in the decision-making processes. Yeuping, Lauer Schachter, and Holzer (2014) conducted a study researching e-participation and municipal forms of government since there have been no clear findings regarding the relationship of structural influence on citizen participation, especially e-participation. Most of the research limits itself to voting concerns, where the mayor-council forms of government are superior. Furthermore, there has been no consensus on underlying theoretical assumptions to support research in this area. The current research is very diverse and has found that municipal websites and their functions vary widely between different jurisdictions. These variances, that exist both locally and nationally, have more to do with the person in charge of development of participation activities, as they are the ones tasked with developing and implementing them.

The results of their study indicated that the mayor-council form of government was more likely to have higher levels of e-participation offerings, as well. They argue that the role of the elected decision maker in this form of government aids in facilitation of an increase of

opportunities for citizen engagement. In this form of government, citizens elect both the chief executive (commonly referred to as the mayor) and the legislators; both roles are then politicized. Alternatively, in the council-manager form of government, citizens only elect the legislators, who then appoint a chief executive. While there has been no scholarly consensus on the impact of structure on traditional participation opportunities (Yeuping, Lauer Schachter, & Holzer, 2014), Yang and Callahan (2007) found the council-manager form of government to negatively impact the way in which governments utilize citizen input in the decision making process.

Furthermore, studies conducted by Colombo (2010) and Medaglia (2007) found that cities led by center-left parties tended to adopt and offer more participatory experiences than those that were led by more center-right right parties. Some countries may not value citizen participation as an important component of government. Sobaci (2010) found the content on the Turkey's Grand National Assembly website did not allow citizens to contact them by email or offer online polls or surveys asking for citizen input.

Though theory suggests the broad socio-cultural, political, and economic conditions are related to fiscal transparency, there is limited research on whether they relate to fiscal participation. Harrison and Djoko Sigit (2014) suggest that e-participation efforts and governments that pursue membership in the Open Government Partnership may be associated with fiscally related transparency and participation. In the fiscal domain, transparency is conceptually bound to participation. However, while transparency is a pre-requisite for participation, it does not necessarily mean that participation will follow transparency. Transparency is easier to achieve than participation and the link between the two is often weak

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and incomplete. Harrison and Djoko Sigit (2014) further suggest that it is important to assess whether factors related to transparency are also related to participation and if there are separate factors that need to be taken into consideration.

One of the core elements of good governance is the aspect of citizen engagement in policy formation and implementation, including budget construction. While having access to information is necessary for citizen engagement, there are two aspects of engagement and the differences should be addressed. One involves consultation, where citizens are asked about issues the government has already defined. The second aspect involves more active participation, in which citizens actually aid in setting the agenda, proposing policy, and shaping the conversation. This is important because actions and decisions made through public engagement have the potential to prove more effective and enhance perceptions related to accountability and fairness. Additionally, when related to fiscal accountability through public participation, a reduction in corruption and an understanding of processes may ultimately help improve trust in the government (Harrison & Djoko Sigit, 2014; Yeuping, Lauer Schachter, & Holzer, 2014).

While several studies focus on the impact of varying political factors of e-participation offerings, few analyze whether the form of government plays a role in providing access or opportunities for citizens to participate and engage (Yeuping, Lauer Schachter, & Holzer, 2014). Furthermore, few studies have addressed how social media relates to gaps in political behavior, such as participation. It remains unclear which groups of people are mobilized by the use of social media. Lastly, there is little research on whether or not social media usage has the ability to motivate those citizens who do not often participate to start engaging or whether those that are already inclined to participate become more involved (Valenzuela et al., 2016).

Participation builds upon the precepts found within the transparency elements, as it remains difficult for participation to occur without access to proper information needed in order to participate effectively. As transparency becomes a high priority, the opportunity for participation naturally arises with this increased access to information. Furthermore, with the advancement of Web 2.0 technologies, participation has become more necessary as the ability to allow citizens to participate has increased. There is a delicate balance between trust and participation and how both have an effect on one another. Municipal elected officials are charged with meeting the needs of the public and that becomes challenging when those needs are not known. This is where participation efforts become a valuable avenue for understanding the needs of the community. While social media may prove to be an effective means for allowing participation to happen, it is challenged with efficiency efforts and time constraints. While participation initiatives may occur, other factors such as response times and quality of engagement still remains in question.

<div align="center">2.4 Collaboration</div>

In order to realize the benefits offered from e-government initiatives, collaboration is essential (Juell-Skielse, Lonn, Paivarinta, 2017) and critical for a competitive advantage as access to information has increased and the ability to form collaborations are already available (Chen, Yan, & Bajwa, 2017). Research on collaborative governance has grown in recent years as collaborative governance has expanded. However, knowledge of local government collaborations is still limited in terms of scholarly research. Most of the studies have focused on theories to explain the growth of collaborative governance through case studies on specific policy sectors, assuming that a broad range of public, private, and nonprofits participate in

collaborations. However, empirical studies that analyze the relationships between factors driving collaborations at the local government level are rare. This may be due to the fact that dynamics of collaboration may vary depending on the entities involved and therefore, hard to measure when there are no clear guidelines to follow (Hoornbeek, Beechey, & Pascarella, 2016).

According to Cheng, Yan, and Bajwa (2017), collaboration is crucial for planning, problem solving, decision-making, learning, and sharing of knowledge as it helps individuals and groups go beyond their own personal insight. Collaboration is rooted in traditional democratic governing structures where the elected officials represent the citizens. These structures include multiple ways for citizens to access elected officials to share their input and ideas (Hoornbeek, Beechey, & Pascarella, 2016).

Collaboration can be defined as one of the many forms of citizen engagement where there is interaction between at least two individuals in order to accomplish a common goal (Callahan, 2007; Cheng, Yan, & Bajwa, 2017). Some of this interaction may involve activities related to service delivery, financial assistance, responding to events, planning, or establishing more forms of partnership. While organizing collaborative efforts may prove to be challenging in terms of communication and accountability, it is typically accepted as a positive element of public management, as seen with the tenets of the OGD. Technological advances have helped with these challenges by facilitating different forms of communication. However, most of the research findings suggest that the interactions are still mostly informational rather than collaborative in nature (Panagiotopoulos, Bigdeli, & Sams, 2014) with some of the collaboration technologies improving collaborative efforts in various global regions (Cheng, Yan, & Bajwa, 2017).

Networks and collaborations have emerged in an effort to solve complex issues that would benefit from multiple people and groups involved in the process. The concept of collaborative public management can be defined as a way for multiple organizations to collaborate and work together on certain problems that would be difficult to accomplish alone. Collaborative public management focuses more on organizations and groups, while collaborative governance focuses more on involving the citizen (Agranoff & McGuire, 2003). These networks of collaboration focus on how multiple stakeholders can collaborate in order to meet the demands of the public. Some of the benefits of networks include multiple perspectives and varying levels of expertise, resources, money, and time all working together to solve complex issues (Agranoff & McGuire, 2001). Cooper, Bryer, and Meek (2006) referred to the collaboration with citizens and allowing them in the decision-making process as citizen-centered collaborative public management. Oftentimes the role of the citizens has not been valued within collaborative networks, thus the focus on the "citizen-centered" component of the term is an important aspect of the collaborative effort.

Most of the collaboration has been in the context of top-down relationships where the government invites others to participate in the decision making process. However, social media tools have offered new types of interactions that may result in more horizontal relationships and collaborations. This collaboration is one of the perceived benefits of social media according to the U.S. federal government (Panagiotopoulos, Bigdeli, & Sams, 2014). Linders (2012) proposes three models of collaboration: citizen sourcing, government as a platform, and do it yourself government. The concept of citizen sourcing was mentioned previously in terms of the participation element of the OGD. Participation and collaboration are closely related in this

regard as citizen sourcing invites the public to participate in order to help the government be more responsive, such as with citizen reporting websites. Government as a platform invites citizens to propose and make improvements, such as crime mapping and open data initiatives. Lastly, do it yourself government allows for citizens to organize for the achievement of a goal, while the government plays a more passive role. The aspect of social media in these different models allows the boundaries between the government and citizens to almost disappear. Despite progress toward collaborative governance, research regarding the relationship between social media and collaborative efforts amongst citizens and governments is lacking (Panagiotopoulos, Bigdeli, & Sams, 2014).

Administrative institutions have been shaped by five boundaries in the United States: mission, resources, capacity, responsibility, and accountability. In response to organizational boundaries and bureaucratic structures, collaborative governance has emerged. Collaborative governance focuses outward to different actors, such as private and non-profit organizations, state and local governments, federal agencies, and citizens. Networks, markets, and hierarchies are all theories related to collaboration, with interdependence, formality, and instruments being key values of collaboration to determine effectiveness (Putansu, 2015).

Despite the significance of networks in supporting collaborative planning in tourism, further understanding of the interrelationship between networks and both policy and regulatory frameworks is required because the former are always constrained by the institutional (and legal) framework. The collaboration process allows stakeholders to participate and add value through various means including questionnaires, online forums, focus groups, and meetings. These methods have the potential to allow negotiation and decisions made that may lead to consensus

building. However, this may be difficult due to differing values, representation concerns, power imbalances, and various knowledge levels (Lin & Simmons, 2017).

Collaborative governance offers many benefits over the traditional bureaucratic structure. Some of these include innovation, specialization, efficiency, effectiveness, and service quality (Putansu, 2015; Juell-Skielse, Lonn, & Paivarinta, 2017). However, benefits of networks empirically can be uneven and may lend themselves to favor those that are already involved (Putansu, 2015; Kruikemeier et al., 2014). While there are several benefits to e-government collaboration, it can be challenging and sometimes the initiatives often fail. Additionally, any perceived benefits have remained abstract. While the types of collaboration vary and expectations from citizens are different, sometimes the costs of coordinating collaboration may outweigh the benefits (Juell-Skielse, Lonn, Paivarinta, 2017).

While many organizations and agencies remain independent, their interdependence may encourage more accountability. The accountability is strengthened when there are shared goals and commitment among those in the network. Innovation may also be a by-product of networks regarding methods for providing services. Accountability cannot be guaranteed, however. Challenges that put a strain on the accountability aspect include differing goals, contorted oversight, lack of communication, sporadic coordination, bad benchmarks, capacity shortages, and a lack of strong relationships. Furthermore, accountability may be difficult to achieve because it's unclear who should be held accountable since no single group or person is clearly defined as in charge (Putansu, 2015).

In order to help mitigate some of the challenges related to collaborative governance, some of the collaboration factors may fall into two categories related to the structure of

collaborative governance and the stakeholder interaction. Three types of horizontal networks consist of policy/strategy making, resource exchange, and project based. Policy/strategy making agencies often involve assisting in policy creation, making and forming formal relationships, and consolidated efforts. Resource exchange networks focus on acquiring financial resources and the creation of joint financial incentives. Lastly, project based networks help to create partnerships and look for technical assistance. According to Putansu (2015), all three of the previous network types are premised on a theory of collaboration amongst the organizations. However, some networks may resemble more a principal-agent model, where there is a dominant actor leading the collaborative group. When the power is not necessarily shared with other members of the network, a reduction in the presence of interactions among other members in the network can occur (Putansu, 2015).

In addition to Linders (2012) models of collaboration, Putansu (2015) offers four models of collaborative management. These include top-down, donor-recipient, jurisdiction-based, and network. The first two models reflect more of the traditional principal-agent relationship, with one person representing the other. The jurisdiction-based model considers the actors in a more horizontal relationship, allowing for more discussion and compromise. Lastly, the network model allows for multiple principals and multiple agents, while fostering collaboration amongst them. It is apparent through the various models and approaches that the amount of leadership and freedom within collaborations must vary depending on the setting in order for them to be successful. The one-size-fits-all mentality may not work with all the different levels of collaborative efforts. Putansu (2015) speaks of two concepts that are related to collaborations: activation and deactivation. Activation includes identifying stakeholders who would be part of

the network and utilizing their skills, resources, knowledge, and capital. Deactivation involves changing or removing the actors, if necessary. Activation and deactivation need to be clearly monitored and managed as too much disagreement on goals in collaboration could result in conflicting approaches on how to solve policy concerns (Putansu, 2015).

Collaboration builds upon the precepts of participation, but takes it a step further. Not only are the citizens providing feedback and participating, but they also are able to contribute and provide their own unique ideas that may have not been expressed or conceived before. The collaboration component moves beyond simply agreeing or disagreeing with an idea, to actually proposing new ideas for potential policy changes. This collaboration makes it possible to work across organizational boundaries, to think holistically, and to involve the public in handling complex problems, which in turn can enhance the effectiveness of organizations. Some drawbacks of these collaborations, however, include a reliance on third party actors, which could cause officials and administrators to become distant from the services that they deliver. Additionally, holding the players who are assigned different responsibilities and tasks within the collaboration accountable can be challenging. The collaboration can prove beneficial if it leads to a more effective way to solve a problem; it is also good for building relationships of trust that might help long-term, not necessarily in the immediate future (Harrison et al., 2012).

When it comes to engaging citizens, certain triggers could lead to more or less participation. These participation levels further lead to the impact on collaboration. Lyons and Veenstra (2016) found that strong party affiliations responded more negatively to personalization. Thus personalization could potentially weaken support, especially when users do not necessarily identify with the same party affiliation as the elected official. While the

personalization may not be beneficial in terms of support of an individual, it could be viewed as participation even though the words are not necessarily presented in a respectful manner.

While controversial topics may produce a variety of responses and perspectives, conversational cues are likely to be viewed positively overall (Lyons & Veenstra, 2016). Citizens feel that their voice has the potential to impact a decision and be part of the process, rather than simply being a passive citizen. Sorensen (2016) found that there was not a big difference when it came to either males or females engaging as an elected official. However, it was stated that females tend to be more deeply involved in conversations than males. Furthermore, these conversational posts can actually lead to conversations amongst citizens, thus maximizing the collaboration potential.

Social media efforts not only allow citizens to seek information but they also allow them to interact with others and express themselves and their opinions. These social media sites have the ability to allow elected officials to encourage their network to do the same, through sharing posts and developing their own posts about original content (Kumar & Natarajan, 2016). Individuals are able to collaborate in a more flexible and cost-efficient way in order to accomplish the various goals (Cheng, Yan, & Bajwa, 2017).

While social media allows for collaborative opportunities between governments and their citizens, it remains an evolving issue in theory and practice. Some of the social media tools that have been increasing in use by governments include Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Motives behind social media adoption in governments are still emerging, but the collaborative elements social media allows help to promote active citizen engagement, information sharing, and enhance government responsiveness. Social media is essentially an extension of ICTs in order to increase

citizen engagement. Several of the former online tools such as petitions, consultations, and forums have been enhanced or replaced through these social media tools (Panagiotopoulos, Bigdeli, & Sams, 2014).

The increase of social media use in governments requires the need to assess the way government and citizens interact. Mergel's (2013) study of the U.S. federal government revealed varying representation, engagement, and networking strategies that are shaping the social media agenda. Linders (2012) suggests that new forms of government-to-citizen and citizen-to-government interactions are emerging due to social media efforts. Panagiotopoulos, Bigdeli, and Sams (2014) studied the citizen-government interactions held via social media sites in the context of the 2011 riots in England. This particular study analyzed 1746 posts by 81 local government Twitter accounts that show how collaboration aided in anti-riot actions. The riots included violence, looting, public disorder, and even death. Citizens, media, and public authorities actively utilized social media during the riots. However, their study focused on how local government authorities across the country used Twitter during and following the riots. While Twitter may be limited in collaboration efforts, it is able to provide a way to disseminate immediate, short messages. It provides a way for the public sector to reach new audiences and build relationships with their citizens. The information Twitter is able to disseminate has the potential to produce clear calls for action. The conversational features have evolved to aid in more interaction between individuals or groups, thus allowing for more collaborative efforts. These features allowed citizens during the riots to be mobilized by local authorities, as well as local authorities promoting actions initiated by citizens, such as street cleanings or identifying suspects. The riots in England showed how social media may assist in collaborative efforts

where governments initiate calls to action regarding a specific event or become a key player in networks citizens initiate on their own (Panagiotopoulos, Bigdeli, & Sams, 2014). Some of these collaborative structures can be further improved through the use of mobile devices to utilize these social media technologies for quicker access (Cheng, Yan, & Bajwa, 2017).

Measuring collaborative governance and performance may prove to be a little difficult. Some of the literature on collaborative governance helps to clarify intended goals and outcomes, activities, and certain challenges. Collaborative governance has the potential to influence decisions that would not have been made otherwise, or conversely, be used to attempt to validate decisions that were already decided upon. This is where several factors related to context, culture and politics, and different collaborative approaches can affect the performance of collaborative governance initiatives (Putansu, 2015).

Governments across the globe have applied ICTs in order to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the governmental services they offer. E-government has since developed into its own research discipline and has received attention from varying research communities. Due to the rise in interest into e-government, researchers have attempted to better understand the e-government domain. These studies have focused on region specific analyses, outlet specific analyses, different components of e-government, such as e-participation, the digital divide, and information sharing components, with many focusing on technology issues and limited studies on the citizen and business needs side. While studies have incrementally increased through time with the advancement of social media tools, there still remains a lot of areas that have yet to be explored fully as the gap between actual and potential e-government research still exists to a certain degree (Khan & Park, 2013).

In terms of collaboration, few studies have committed to how the different forms of collaboration might relate to e-government initiatives. There continues to be a need for more research on collaborative efforts and the value it adds to governments and citizens as a whole. The rise of these technological advances and tools calls for better policies to be made and more coordination regarding efficiency and effectiveness in internal and external collaboration. As boundaries are pushed and expanded in collaborative efforts between governments, the private sector, and citizens, the outcomes of the different forms of collaboration need to be researched further as this area remains under researched (Juell-Skielse, Lonn, Paivarinta, 2017).

According to Lee and Hannah-Spurlock (2015), literature on local governments suggests further research in the area of outcomes of successful collaborative initiatives needs to be conducted. Most studies have primarily focused on government programs, lessons learned from policies, or socio-cultural issues related to e-government research through literature reviews. Studies have produced an overview of e-government and certain themes but are limited in terms of hidden structures and properties related to e-government, such as key players, patterns, and characteristics of collaboration networks, especially at the local level (Cheng, Yan, & Bajwa, 2017; Khan & Park, 2013). Furthermore, there is not much research on collaborations concerning governments and the citizens but rather more so research blended with participation (Juell-Skielse, Lonn, Paivarinta, 2017).

The term collaboration infers several different types of networks involving different people, groups, agencies, and organizations. While some of the literature focuses on intergovernmental collaborations, other scholars suggest the importance of involving the public as part of the collaboration. This aspect is explored more in the following section and serves as

the type of collaboration utilized when analyzing the dynamics of the municipal elected official and citizen relationship for this study. The advancement in technology and the advances made with social media have allowed for citizens to participate more as a partner, rather than a subordinate, allowing the opportunity for citizens to not only be a part of the process, but also initiate change. However, while the ability to collaborate is there, much of social media is still being utilized for transparency components solely. Furthermore, attempting to measure collaborative governance has proven difficult. While municipal elected officials may utilize social media, it is unclear what collaborative efforts are taking place and whether or not those efforts have resulted in change or made a difference.

2.5 Governance

Governance can be defined as the "regimes of laws, administrative rules, judicial rulings, and practices that constrain, prescribe, and enable government activity, where such activity is broadly defined as the production and delivery of publicly supported goods and services" (Fredrickson & Smith, 2003, p. 210). According to this definition, governance can be deemed as a very broad concept, aimed to help with varying issues that arise in the public sector and then following through to provide a solution. The key component dictating the concept of governance is how the public sector can be organized and managed to fulfill the demands and needs of the public (Fredrickson & Smith, 2003). President Barack Obama sought to meet the needs of the public through his Open Government Directive. The governance theory stresses the importance of allowing new processes in order to improve government procedures and interactions for all stakeholders. Social media is one of those tools that could be utilized to help local governments achieve their goals for public management as it relates to the components of the OGD.

Governance entails more than simple matters of organization, management, and coordination found in traditional government roles; it also focuses on different techniques, tools and procedures. Daly (2003) further states it is hard to descriptively define governance because trying to connect the distribution of power to different roles can prove to be quite difficult.

Governance yields a new kind of political, decision-making, and forward-thinking model to follow. The interactive management styles and the need to find solutions to problems involving numerous stakeholders have resulted in governance concepts. While this sounds like an effective method, one of the challenges of this concept is in its principles being too idealistic. Another challenge of this method is the complexity of coordination and integration. Governance at a superficial level may be a helpful descriptive theory, but implementing its goals can prove challenging. This is where social media and new forms of technology can aid providing effective means for this type of collaboration (Sehested, 2003).

Salamon (2002) refers to the shift to the governance paradigm as "the revolution that no one noticed." This shift has been uneven across the local, state, and federal government in the United States. The term governance is used most often to refer to the changing nature of governments and the distribution of power and control in society. Governance is concerned with the relationship between the government and the governed. In particular, it focuses on how social and other public policies are conceptualized and addressed. From this perspective, if used effectively, social media can be used successfully to enhance the relationship between the governed and the government, while aiding in the three tenets of the OGD (Reddel, 2002).

In Stillman's (2010) book *Public Administration: Concepts and Cases,* he describes the nature and substance of public administration. One of the strengths of public administration is its

ability to adapt and address the needs of society at the time, which is at the heart of governance. As technology advances, the needs of the citizens change. It therefore becomes imperative for the government to adapt to these new technological needs. Newbold states that "[the people's] confidence in and obedience to a government will commonly be proportioned to the goodness or badness of its administration" (p. 539). Because of this, government needs to ensure transparency through healthy, honest engagement with its citizens.

As interactive communication has increased with various online platforms, the emergence of e-governance has occurred. E-governance is a concept that shares the values of governance theory and e-government tenets, with the utilization of technology in order to achieve desired outcomes and goals. E-governance can be defined as the application of ICTs to "government functioning in order to create simple, moral, accountable, responsive and transparent governance" (Hirwade, 2010, p.154). It encompasses the ideas behind governance from a technological viewpoint. Citizen expectation for implementation and utilization of quality information technology puts pressure on governments to deliver these services effectively. Citizen desires for these capabilities, coupled with the use of ICT, are the foundation for e-governance initiatives. "The use of Information Communication Technologies (ICT) in the public administration and services is specified as electronic governance (E-gov), which contains organizational changes and new skills for the improvement of public services and democratic processes" (Delopoulos, 2010, P. 623).

Movement from government to e-governance shows the capacity to adapt to evolving environments and their constant changes. E-governance requires a change in the mindset of everyone involved to be effective. Hirwade (2010) suggests, "With the support of the Internet,

government processes can be made efficient, effective, and citizen friendly" (p. 163). The broad range of topics and perspectives on e-government research shows the energy of the field but also reflects a relative lack of consensus on any unifying theoretical framework. The literature on e-government seems to be at a stage where it is currently abstract and still evolving. Whether e-government is in a state of methodological confusion (Keeks & Bailus, 2007) or simply a stage of early growth remains to be seen (Gable, 2015).

The ideals behind the collaborative precepts have aligned with the progression toward e-governance. The initiatives related to e-governance and social media have yielded both benefits and challenges. The goal of e-governance is to bridge the gap between government and citizens. However, some issues arise with this concept; though it seeks to be advantageous and not deleterious, environmental, financial, and economic limitations cause inconvenience in certain settings (Kumar et al., 2010). E-governance can be labeled into three types of systems based on the participating groups in the electronic interactions. These include G2G (Government to Government), G2B (Government to Business and its reverse), and G2C (Government to Citizens and its reverse) (Koneru, 2007). Hirwade (2010) believes that most of the services within local governments fall into the G2C category. G2C allows citizens to pay taxes, receive payments, and documents, and interact with government. Additionally it allows governments to back-up information and store information. Furthermore, there has even been discussion on online voting. However, one of the drawbacks of e-governance includes problems arising in highly populated areas, which make it difficult to meet the demands of all the citizens. Another potential downfall includes the poverty levels where some citizens struggle to afford food or a home, much less the Internet. Lastly, illiteracy to access tools online, corruption, telecom problems, broadband, lack

of financial resources, lack of human touch, lack of trust, and lack of online support are additional challenges facing the e-governance culture (Kumar et al., 2010).

In an evolving global community that is increasingly wired, the European Union (EU) is modernizing their public service through the utilization of ICTs. To remain relevant to its EU counterparts, The Republic of Srpska took strides in the implementation of online public services to improve and facilitate citizen- government interaction. The implementation of e-government and e-governance is one of the main strategic commitments with an aim toward more quality, efficient, and public services (Drljaca & Latinovic, 2012).

Challenges to e-governance include the laws and legislation dealing with e-signature, e-documents, security, and protection. Additionally, lack of financial resources, broadband access, poor digital literacy, resistance to change, and lack of infrastructure networking between public institutions add to the challenges. Governmental vision of e-governance in The Republic of Srpska includes construction of network infrastructure for all citizens and businesses, construction of quality e-governance by implementation technology, implementation of services and processes that aid citizens and businesses, building e-government projects that promote growth in turn employment in turn better life for citizens and fifteen principles centered on availability, transparency, sustainability, security (Drljaca & Latinovic, 2012). Drljaca and Latinovic (2012, p. 39) further states

> The general opinion among citizens in almost each country is that the public
> administration is expensive, inefficient, with insufficient expertise and with a low
> technological level, bureaucratic, unnecessarily complicated, and too focused on itself
> and usually acting from a position of the ruling majority. As such, public administration

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is focused more on the process than on the results of work. In order to improve work of such public administration, counties are trying to modernize public administration.

With the evolving nature of e-governance and the advancement of social media sites, specifically as they relate to the OGD, this study helps to bridge the gap in several areas and add to the growing body of research.

2.6 Social Media and the Tenets of Open Government Directive

One of the tools that aids in the advancement of e-governance is social media. Since it is challenging for elected officials to meet with citizens one on one, especially in larger municipalities, social media is utilized as a way for elected officials to connect more efficiently (Kumar & Natarajan, 2016). The adoption of these social media tools, however, does not guarantee they will lead to transparency, participation, or collaboration. Full collaborative interaction is based upon levels of implementation and use by government. While Web 2.0 technologies have allowed for more interaction through social media, that interaction has the ability to be manipulated by the one controlling the page (Bryer & Zavattaro, 2011). Some elected officials may decide not to utilize social media if they have had people badger them or even threaten them or their families. One Danish study conducted by Sorensen (2016), found that their elected officials tend to post every two days with their main motives for posting centering on marketing, mobilization, and dialogue. The level of engagement on the side of the elected official varied from never responding to engaging to a great extent. The motives of citizens were to read more about the politician and their views, express their support, or the desire to discuss different political issues.

Leighninger (2011) argues there are multiple digital divides, as many citizens seem to gravitate toward several different tools related to interactive online technologies. However, when it comes to global demographics, online users typically have higher incomes and higher education. There no longer seems to be a major disparity among different race or ethnic groups or age. However, a correlation does seem to exist between cell phone usage and Internet access, with youth and people of color using cellular technology to access the Internet as opposed to a desktop or laptop computer. Also, younger people are more likely to use social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter for political communication whereas older cohorts prefer email and traditional websites.

While social media is opening up dialogue across what could be considered old boundaries of traditional methods and processes for communication, it presents a myriad of legal issues for local governments. With the emergence of e-governance, local governments are compelled to join the bandwagon with social media whether they want to or not. There are several government entities that already utilize social media in order to mass communicate critical information regarding potential risks or raise awareness (Veil, Buehner, & Palenchar, 2011). A case study conducted by Reid (2012) showcased a positive use of social media in a community.

> After arsonists destroyed a portion of the Fun Forest children's playground two years ago in Chesapeake, Va., city officials got help from a source they least expected- social media. Community members launched a Facebook campaign to repair the playground. The city jumped in to support the effort on its own websites, Facebook pages and Twitter

accounts. The results: more than 5,700 "likes," nearly $88,000 in donations, 1,800

volunteers and 21,000-plus donated hours (p.1).

This engagement aided in collaboration and positive relationships between city

government and its citizens. Many local governments are employing social media in an effort to

improve operations and services, essentially creating a virtual city hall.

Americans spend more times on Facebook than any other U.S. website (Fillmore, 2012).

As of 2014, globally 1.35 billion people have a Facebook account, 343 million have a Google+

account, and 284 million are on Twitter. As citizens increasingly engage in social media they are

essentially expecting some sort of virtual presence from their community leaders. In some

situations, a website may not be enough. There are different needs in different regions and that is

why it is critical for local governments to know their communities and citizens (Statista, 2015).

Until recently, many e-government services were not designed with the concept of demand in

mind. They were not taking into consideration what the citizens wanted. Assessment of the needs

of a particular institution is important as well as seeing how its implementation fits into the

overall culture of the institution. If the citizens do not want it, there is a possibility for distrust

and resistance from the citizens (Delopoulos, 2010).

Stefanick and LeSage (2005) found that there are three groups of people who become

connected: regulars, periphery, and lurkers, ranging from highest involvement to lowest, and

that all three are very empowering for the citizen. Leighninger (2011) argues that some

Americans do not simply want to go online for just data, but want to share their personal views

on the governmental business affairs. Some challenges for these online communities however,

include the time it takes for development and the associated relevance (ensuring they align with

citizen demands). Improvements could include developing clear guidelines with boundaries, knowing key members, ensuring the site is functional, accessible, and that it provides opportunities for communication. The shift towards e-governance is not a blanket approach, yet just another option for those wishing to utilize it. With the development of technological advancements, the research suggests that the demand for these online communities will increase (Stefanick & LeSage, 2005).

While many governments may choose to take a proactive approach with their social media efforts, there have been misconceptions or fears that the social media phenomenon may replace face-to-face interaction. This could prove frightful for those who prefer face-to-face relationships and who have experienced harsh emails and other examples of belligerence, such as bullying, online. Another fear is that public managers are utilizing the Internet and social media to push their own agenda and that they view it as another publication medium as opposed to interaction between the government and citizens. Another issue surfacing deals with local governments using the sites for information 'about' government, rather than information sharing 'with' government. Nevertheless, this is still a positive move toward transparency by making data available online (Leighninger, 2011).

While the government has made strides toward transparency efforts, it is still only one small aspect of the OGD. Furthermore, just because information is available online, it does not necessarily establish engagement. Therefore, the biggest obstacle may not be technological but more philosophical and structural. An example of a high profile case of online engagement was the 2009 "Citizen Briefing Book" from the Obama administration. This initiative engaged thousands of people in developing and prioritizing policy ideas. It received negative publicity,

with the two most voted on ideas involving the legalization of marijuana and a request for an investigation into Obama's citizenship. It is important to empower the citizens but also important that government follows through with their concerns in order to reduce the risk of losing legitimacy and trust (Leighninger, 2011).

Regardless of the drawbacks related to the rise of e-government practices, there have been many advantages. A study conducted by Alfano (2011) aimed to explain the new types of relationships between citizens and the local government that have been formulated due to the Internet. Depending on the local government, citizens have the potential to report problems using an online map to show geographically where certain problems arise. The software is interactive and gives local governments the ability to respond instantaneously with the necessary information to solve the issue. Great Britain has a program entitled "Fix my Street." Venice, Italy prides itself in its transparency, having the information open to all. The Venice 2.0 project consisted of three main highlights: building of a city fibre-optic broadband system owned by the local government, diffusion of free public Wi-Fi spots within the city, and the start of a Venice Connected online tourism site. All of these services were designed to allow citizen participation and discussion (Alfano, 2011). European Union local governments are utilizing new trends in electronic government to aid in openness, transparency, and accountability (Pina, Torres, & Royo, 2009).

Each of the primary functions of communication, whether it is to disseminate information or to elicit feedback, has its place and is valuable in its own way. Each function has various strengths and weaknesses but the challenge is in knowing and discerning which methods to employ in a given situation. Leighninger (2011) argues that a common misconception is that by

empowering citizens some citizens may view the government as superfluous. In order to successfully involve citizens, engagement tools would largely possess the following four characteristics: they assemble a large and diverse population of citizens, they are involved in structured and facilitated small group discussions and move from talk to action, they give the people involved opportunities to compare values and experiences and to consider a range of different views and policy options, and they are intended to produce tangible actions and outcomes.

Citizen engagement not only helps with democratic principles, it is also is seen as a way to shift power from policy experts and disconnected politicians to the public. Cities have been utilizing the Internet to connect with residents through websites, listservs and RSS feeds. Due to digital and internet technologies "communication costs of human interaction has decreased exponentially and thus has enabled instant connectivity despite growing populations and broader geospatial ranges between people" (Hand & Ching, 2011, p. 364). This phenomenon has allowed individuals to not only be an information consumer but also an informed producer. Because of these advances, new modes of communication have been developed that allow for increased interaction. The overarching theme of social media technologies is creating participatory cultures, which ties to the movement from government to governance.

In terms of levels of engagement, Hand and Ching found that the most common local government social media post type was public announcements. They attributed low comments to perhaps user apathy or their unwillingness to comment. Special attention was always made to those users who posted questions. Their recommendations for utilizing social media in local governments included:

1) Post content is more important than frequency

2) Active management of posts and comments is well received

3) Simply seeking a response in the form of posting questions appears to be an effective way to generate engagement in some instances.

It is apparent that these social media technologies allow for the potential to create lasting and ongoing relationships between government entities and the citizens they serve. The opportunities for effective citizen engagement where citizens feel like their voice matters could be threatened if governments do not adequately understand proper social media implementation tactics. Hand and Ching's (2011) study showed that simply having a Facebook page did not automatically create meaningful citizen engagement. For example, while Twitter does allow for discussion, with the character limits and the way you respond and share, it can easily be used as a tool for one-way broadcasting. Studies have found that elected officials tend to give out information more than they interact. However, there was little research on the reasoning behind this fact (Lyons & Veenstra, 2016).

While there are many benefits to these technological advances, some citizens may not get to experience them. Almost 40% of the world lives in low-income countries and may have limited access or abilities regarding the benefits of technology. Studies show that regardless of how many kiosks or tele-centres are installed in low socio-economic areas, the probability of Internet use is ten times higher for a person in a developed high-income country as opposed to a person in a developing country. The government could act by creating and using e-government tools that aid in e-readiness in an effort to educate so that more people can benefit from e-governance. However, lack of resources both on the government side and citizen side appears to

be the most significant cause of this digital divide. While governments can still play a role in utilizing the resources that are available, appropriate assessments are vital to ensure that they are actually effective in producing desired outcomes. This is where communication and collaboration between relevant stakeholders becomes vital in an effort to bridge the gap (Stoiciu, 2011). A study conducted in Namibia interviewed 85 varying staff employees about some of their e-government initiatives in public service. Some of the negative findings included inadequate data systems; underdeveloped legislative, institutional and human capacity including leadership; inadequate technological infrastructure; and poor records management. In short, they found "that Namibia was still at phase one of its e-government implementation strategy. This phase is characterized by 'government being on the web, providing the public and businesses with relevant information in order to promote transparency and democracy'" (Nengomasha, Mchombu & Ngulube, 2010, p.129)

There is little empirical research on whether it is beneficial to build online forums with local governments as opposed to media and community organizations in an attempt to reverse political disengagement (Dunne, 2010). According to Dunne, when studying forums created by local governments from a variety of countries, they do not help with disengagement because they mainly consist of participants who are the information providers and they do not readily promote or support direct democracy. There are many ICT tools to assist in e-democracy implementation but Dunne's research focused on only one, a local political online forum. It appears that the type of interaction may vary among citizens. The Theory of Participatory Democracy stresses these wide-ranging participation levels of citizens. It is a theory that centers on the power of the people and consists of several components related to the citizens' roles. The four areas are: 1) the citizen

is involved in political decision-making and can take part in the decisions about their own lives and welfare 2) the citizen has the function to ensure good government- protective function 3) the level of participation has a psychological impact on the participant 4) the citizen has political equality. While the local governments may aim to achieve these levels, certain barriers arise because of the digital divide.

Furthermore, the design and implementation of the sites may have an effect on the participation levels. According to the study conducted by Dunne, just under half of the forums within the sample were inactive (Dunne, 2010). This was mainly attributable to:

1) Local government supported forums are not supporting full-participatory democracy. Because it is supported or sponsored by the government, they expect to have more of a say and that that matters and makes a difference

2) These forums are weaker than nongovernment-supported forums

3) Digital divide

4) Do not use government ones because they are more likely to be inactive

Dunne concluded with two main suggestions:

1) The cultural, institutional, and conceptual barriers need to be addressed

2) Framework of local democracy needs to change (Dunne, 2010)

While Dunne's research focused on online forums, some of the information may prove to be true when discussing participation levels via social media. As technological initiatives have increased over the last several years, e-government has received increasingly more attention. With the growing popularity, it becomes necessary to measure its development. Principal

component analysis (PCA), a five-dimensional model, can be used to capture the multidimensional and interdependent nature of e-government systems. The five dimensions of the evaluation model include project construction, information security management, special construction, transparency of government affairs, and informationized ability; all of which can potentially aid in measuring the effectiveness of the participation in e-government (Siqing et al., 2011). Hussain (2011) cautioned citizens and organizations against making certain assumptions related to these technological advances. Hussain's three assumptions that should be avoided are:

1) Assumption one- technology is a strategic tool- "Information technology can become another regulatory burden rather than a strategic tool. Once the excitement of technology implementation wears off, the tangibility of costs and reporting burden may outweigh and perceived value" (Hussain, 2011, p. 690).

2) Assumption two- technology will continuously improve quality; however, there currently is no real data to show this.

3) Assumption three- technology will work better if it is comprehensively implemented; however, this can be difficult with resources and different skill levels.

The aforementioned assumptions further highlight the need for and importance of measuring the effectiveness of social media efforts.

2.7 Ladder of Citizen Participation

Though Arnstein's ladder is technically considered a participation ladder, it incorporates transparency and collaboration components, as well. The ladder was first introduced in 1969 and does not incorporate the technologically advances that have occurred, more specifically

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concerning the areas social media may contribute to. Arnstein argues the rungs of the ladder are independent of each other and one must give up certain degrees of power if they wish to give some power away. As one progresses through the different rungs, more power is given away. Thus, the different areas are referred to rungs to climb and range from ineffectual to citizen control (Dassah, M., 2013)

Arnstein (1969) identified that there are three levels of participation known as non-participation, tokenism, and citizen power, with each of the levels advancing in the amount of disclosure and participation. Non-participation involves concepts related to manipulation and more of behind the scenes actions. Tokenism refers to informing and consultation and citizen power involving partnerships and more citizen control, such as collaboration. In the year 2000, the three levels were further expanded into five stages known as informing, consulting, engaging, collaborating, and empowering (Lin & Simmons, 2017; Arnstein, 1969). These levels of political participation are an important aspect of democracy and therefore, of interest to scholars in the communications, political science, and sociology disciplines. They offer different options for citizens to be involved and influence decisions made by the government. The inequalities of political participation are important to study to ensure everybody is being represented and their concerns are taken into consideration when decisions are made. This is critical to express as higher income and education level individuals tend to vote more often than those with lower levels. This gap has also been observed in other forms of participation, such as protests (Valenzuela et al., 2016).

While analyzing the components of Arnstein's ladder, there appears to be potential when incorporating the eight rungs into the three components of the OGD. These add another

dimension and help to clarify and define the concept of open government community

engagement which is explained below. The advancement of technology and social media may

play an important role when expanding the elements of not only citizen participation, but

transparency and collaborative efforts, as well.

<div align="center">2.8 Conceptual Framework</div>

DePaula, Dincelli, and Harrison (2017) state that "a common framework to explore the

information and communication that governments exchange on social media has been the 3-

category model of push, pull, and networking communication- which relate respectively to the

open government goals of transparency, participation, and collaboration (p.98)." However, there

is not much literature relating to e-government on the municipal level on the different ways and

examples of how this is happening between the citizens and elected official within the three areas

of the OGD.

The following social media framework highlights and defines open government

community engagement in terms of the tenets outlined from the Open Government Directive-

transparency, participation, and collaboration. These three areas incorporate theoretical

components from Lee and Kwak's Open Government Maturity Model, definitions from Mergel

as the terms pertain to social media, and are then further clarified utilizing the rungs found within

Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation. These tenets are then defined in terms of related

concepts found in the literature and applied directly to social media use. Transparency will be

defined as information shared by government official. Participation will be as any type of citizen

feedback the government official receives. Lastly, collaboration will be defined as the exchange

of citizen feedback that is directed toward some type of change. Each of the three tenets of the

OGD are defined and grouped according to the different related rungs in Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation. Transparency includes the manipulation, therapy, and informing rungs. Participation includes the consultation and placation rungs. Finally, collaboration includes the partnership, delegated power, and citizen control rungs. All of these components contribute to the term proposed: open government community engagement. This new term suggests open government through transparency efforts, while fostering participation and collaboration through the community engagement terminology. The framework and related literature is utilized to guide the interview questions as they pertain to the study. These interview questions seek to answer the research question by discovering certain themes related to open government community engagement outcomes. While social media allows for the areas highlighted below, it is unclear how or to what extent. Therefore, the social media framework will be modified based upon the findings from this study.
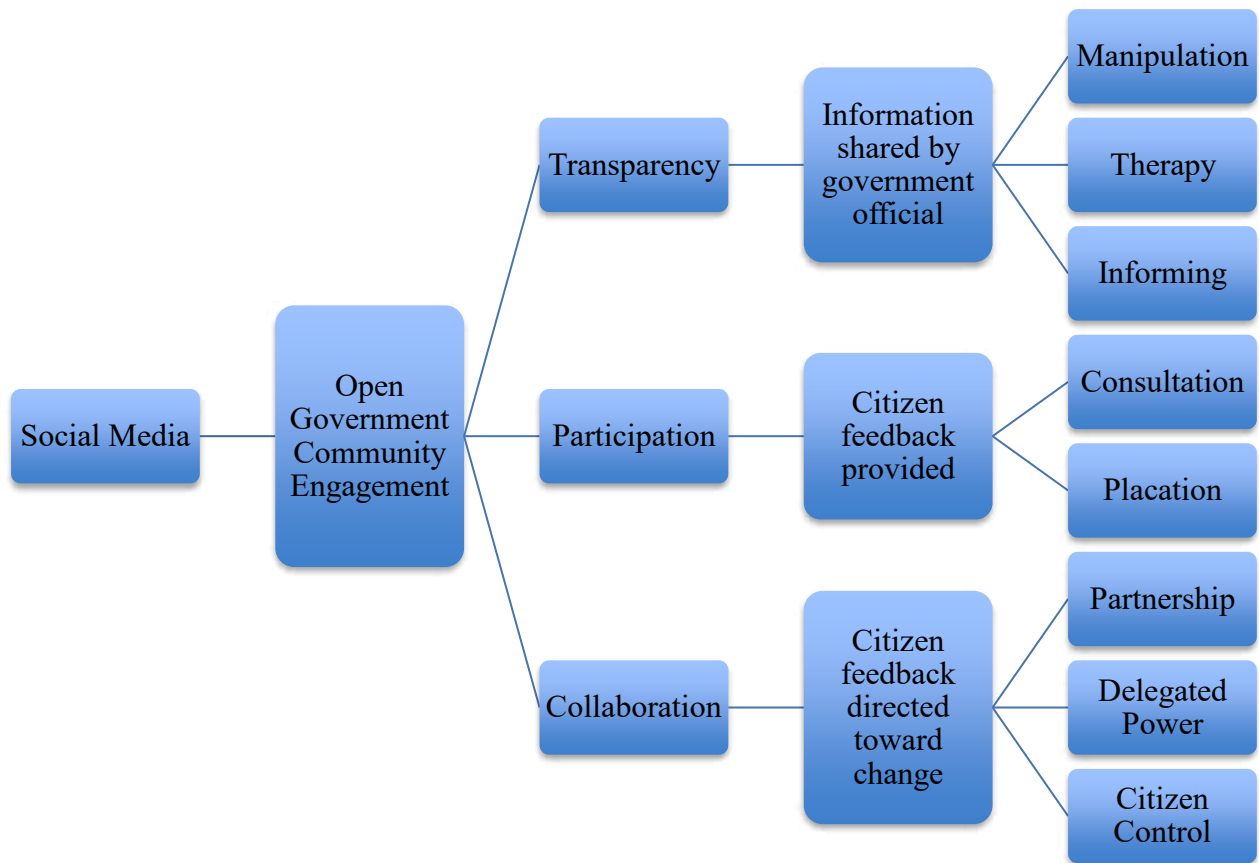
Figure 1. Social Media Framework

<div align="center">

2.9 Propositions

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This study bridges the gap between theory and practice and shows how social media may be utilized to foster relationships between municipal government elected officials and their respective citizens. The following question is what guides the research:

How does social media usage by municipal elected officials assist or detract in fostering open government community engagement*?

Sub-questions related to the main research question include:

1) *How do municipal elected officials engage with citizens?*

2) *How is inclusivity defined through practice?*

*open government community engagement will be defined in terms of transparency,

participation, and collaboration

Table three explains the propositions that have been developed based on the research question

and preliminary ideas found in the literature. In addition to the conceptual framework, these

propositions are utilized to help guide the interview process.

Table 3. Questions and Propositions

Questions about/for municipal elected officials	Proposition: Social media usage by municipal elected officials assist or detract in fostering open government community engagement as…
How do municipal elected officials engage with citizens?	P1: Municipal elected officials tend to utilize social media more for broadcasting information rather than gathering information P2: Twitter's primary function for municipal elected officials is to disseminate information
How is inclusivity defined through practice?	P3: Municipal elected officials tend to utilize social media more for citizens who reach out to them rather than attempting to reach out to those who are not engaging P4: Municipal elected officials tend to utilize Facebook more than other social media sites in order to elicit citizen participation P5: Municipal elected officials tend to engage in discussions about non-controversial matters more than controversial matters P6: Municipal elected officials utilize social media until a negative experience surrounding their use occurs

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In regards to proposition one, according to Adams (2016), Florida Public Records Act allows citizens to access information so there is not a question of whether or not to share as citizens already have certain rights to access the information. Therefore it could be argued it may be easier for elected officials to lean more toward disclosing what the law already allows. Ingrams (2017) stated earlier that citizens oftentimes view the government as withholding information and not encouraging the public to actively participate, thus supporting components and values of propositions one, two, three, five, and six. There was literature discussing the differences and advances made from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 technologies. While Web 2.0 technologies have emerged after Web 1.0, it can be argued that some elected officials may be stuck utilizing some of the social media tools at Web 1.0 technologies, such as more one-way communication, thus supporting propositions one and two. Darwish (2017) supports this notion when noting that many people and organizations do not utilize social media to their fullest capacity. He further states many organizations are stuck in the one-way communication methods and strategies. Furthermore, transparency tenets are oftentimes easier to achieve than participation and collaboration elements (Harrison & Djoko Sigit, 2014) and are still more popular thus supporting the first two propositions (Panagiotopoulos, Bigdeli, & Sams, 2014). Heiss and Matthes (2016) stated that participation among younger audiences was scarce and could be attributed to several factors, such as posts not being engaging in nature, thus contributing to values identified in propositions one and five. Mawela (2017) goes on to further state that responses among government officials have been known to be sporadic.

Sorensen (2016) noted that some people decide not to utilize social media when encountering negative experiences. This notion if further strengthened with personal

conversations had amongst local elected officials and support proposition six. Statista (2015) noted that Facebook had the most registered users of the social media pages mentioned and Fillmore (2012) noted that most Americans spend more time on Facebook than any other U.S. website, thus supporting proposition four. Proposition three is supported by some of Leighniger's (2011) notions of how government entities use their sites more for sharing 'about' the government rather than 'with' the government. Hand and Ching (2011) also noted that most of the posts made consist of informational pieces, thus supporting propositions one, two, and five. Lyons and Veenstra (2016) noted that while Twitter does allow for collaborative efforts, the character limits make it easier for more one-way communication strategies, thus adding to the reasoning behind proposition two. In addition to the literature, these propositions are further substantiated from the researcher's experience as a municipal elected official who utilizes social media and interacts with other elected officials about their social media usage.

Findings related to both the conceptual framework and the propositions listed above aid in understanding the role social media plays when it comes to the online relationship between municipal elected officials and their citizens. This knowledge adds literature and potential theory related to the OGD tenets, more specifically delving into the nuances found in Arnstein's ladder. Not only do these findings suggest theoretical implications, but also practical implications can be drawn for public administrators from the elected official and city management point of view. These findings also lay the foundation for future research studies in hopes of obtaining statistically significant results.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This study is qualitative in nature and utilizes the self-ethnographic approach, guided by the aforementioned propositions and conceptual framework. The propositions serve as a springboard for the development of the interview questions in order to establish common themes that are analyzed based on the interviews of the municipal elected officials, observations of social media sites, and critical reflection as a researcher and municipal elected official. Data collection involved interviewing municipal elected officials in the State of Florida regarding their social media usage, as well as analysis of social media pages utilized by the municipal elected officials. There has been no clear direction or guidance legally, academically, or practically surrounding the use by municipal elected officials so part of the goal of this study was to find out how they are using these social media tools. The interview questions are grouped into different categories related to the three areas of the Open Government Directive: transparency, participation, and collaboration and are based off the findings in the literature. Evidence supporting a self-ethnographic study is presented below, including literature related ethnographic studies for public administration and social media research. The sample includes municipal elected officials throughout the State of Florida and the variables are outlined.

3.2 Research Design

In order to analyze the research questions more holistically and deeply, as well as look at multiple variables, the methodology is qualitative in nature. According to Yates and Leggett (2016) "although quantitative analysis allows for a high degree of precision in research, it

represents a 2-D view of findings as compared to the rich, deep descriptions offered by qualitative approaches" (p. 225). This approach allows the researcher to be more reflective, analyzing various perspectives, as well as engaging in self-questioning and self-understanding. While quantitative research can see the what, qualitative research allows for the how and why to be answered (Yates & Leggett, 2016). The existing propositions developed from previous literature and theory helped to formulate and guide the interview questions in order to uncover certain patterns, themes, and categories. "Interpretation is the researcher's process of making meaning of patterns, themes, and categories. In doing so, he or she determines ways in which the results answer the research questions and sometimes the results raise new questions" (Yates & Leggett, 2016, p. 227).

The ethnographic approach is the type of qualitative method utilized, as the literature is unclear and contradictory on what could be discovered in certain areas. Some elements of this topic may suggest the case study approach would be a feasible methodology since the theme is defined broadly, has multiple variables, and utilizes several sources of evidence. Furthermore, case studies are able to be exploratory, explanatory, or descriptive in nature, such as with this study. However, the ethnographic approach focuses specifically on people and cultures (Brown, 2014) and oftentimes focuses on the researcher emerging themselves in a particular setting. Ethnographers look for patterns, analyzing multiple relationships, and piecing multiple pieces of evidence in order to in a sense "write a culture." These findings are typically then contextualized into broader contexts with the potential of developing hypotheses. Ethnographers are tasked with immersing themselves in the setting to not only gather data, but constantly self-reflect and analyze the findings through their own lens of critical thinking in order to appropriately interpret

the data (Parthasarathy, 2008). However, with the case study approach, it is encouraged to exclude the researcher's influence as a part of scientific methodology in order to account for any validity, reliability, or objectivity issues (Stake, 2015). While these concerns are still important in the ethnographic approach, ethnography seeks to be more inclusive and sees the researcher as a critical component in the research process (White & Hay, 2009).

The interviews in the ethnographic approach are not fully structured and allow for the conversations to branch off into different directions as certain themes emerge. The researcher may have an initial set of questions, the progression of those questions is left up to the researcher, as links connecting multiple conversations and questions are formed. This allows for more flexibility in the data collection and interview process, valuing context clues (Parthasarathy, 2008). Findings have the potential to look beyond the 'what' or 'how' and attempt to answer the 'why.' As a municipal elected official in the State of Florida, myself as the researcher gives me a unique opportunity to immerse myself in this setting and study this phenomena and hopefully offer more insight than the traditional case study approach (Wilson, W. & Anmol, C., 2010).

3.2.1 Ethnography

Qualitative research and the data collection process oftentimes consist of direct observation and in-depth interviews (Yates & Leggett, 2016). While ethnographic studies have roots in anthropology with most of studies being written by anthropologists and social scientists, studies involving this method have been found in the social sciences, human services, education, information technology, and health fields (Brown, 2014). According to Rosaldo (1993, p. 19) "the ethnographer, as a positioned subject, grasps certain human phenomena better than others.

He or she occupies a position or structural location and observes with a particular angle of vision." When ethnographic research is exploratory, it creates hypotheses that can be tested in quantitative research and/or finds certain themes or frameworks (Smith & Spitzmueller, 2016). Ethnography, at its core, is about observation, with fieldwork being the primary method of the research design. According to Brown (2014, p. 171), "ethnography is based on the assumption that the immersion of the researcher in the social situation will bring the understanding sought."

There is not necessarily a structured approach when completing an ethnographic study. Since some studies are exploratory, oftentimes the researcher is making choices and applying personal judgments at multiple stages in the research process. Therefore, the researcher plays a vital role, as well as his or her understanding and potential paradigm throughout the process. The participants and their understanding are also critical to the study. "If the participants do not understand the situation, then interviews will not necessarily help to understand the phenomena (p. 172)." There are also two ways you can observe your phenomena: participant observation or non-participant observation. Non-participant observation may involve shadowing or observing from a distance, with little interaction with the subject (Brown, 2014).

3.2.2 Self- and Auto-Ethnography

While ethnographic studies traditionally involve studying an outside subject, self-ethnography analyzes subject matter where the researcher is already a known participant. "It typically involves 'breaking out' of cultural and social structures taken for granted within this group, understanding them from within (Erikkson, 2010 p. 91)." Auto-ethnography, on the other hand, is the study of the self. Self- and auto- ethnography studies are typically used for drastic

events in one's life, such as deaths or divorces. However, they can also be used to add a different perspective to everyday occurrences (Erikkson, 2010).

There are apparent advantages and disadvantages to these methods. In ethnography, the researcher is a stranger; the researcher is viewed externally as a foreigner. In self-ethnography, the researcher is able to analyze a group in which he or she already belongs. In auto-ethnography, the researcher studies one's self and observes specific behavior for a particular role. The researcher analyzes the meaning behind the actions. While this method offers the researcher a closely connected advantage, the researcher does run the risk of personal bias and becoming too self-focused or narcissistic (Erikkson, 2010). This method is utilized for instances where the study of one's self may be able to "shed light on issues of general importance (Erikkson, 2010, p. 94).

The risk involved in self- and auto- ethnography as one's own flaws are made known can be high as to the amount of vulnerability that is displayed. Personal risk of exposure to friends, as well as professional risk to colleagues as you peel back certain layers of one's self becomes evident. Vulnerability can increase trust as honesty, closeness, and commitment becomes validated. It may require the researcher to expose shortcomings, unprofessionalism, doubts, insecurities, lack of reasoning or knowledge. It is argued that this vulnerability gives credibility to be truthful as to the findings (Erikkson, 2010, 95).

While it can be argued that vulnerability gives authority, one needs to be careful as to how they choose to present themselves. An appropriate balance of censorship and self-exposure needs to be established. The researcher is merely sharing observations; it is up to the reader to determine to meaning of the observed actions.

Erikkson argues that being close in these types of studies involves a healthy dose pre-knowledge and some type of emotional attachment (Erikkson, 2010). In order to alleviate these concerns, while still allowing for a rigorous data collection and analysis, self-ethnography was utilized instead of auto-ethnography for this study. This allowed me, as the researcher, to investigate themes related to social media engagement from municipal elected officials through the lens of holding the position of a municipal elected official. While personal bias is embraced within the self-ethnographic approach, interview questions remained relatively consistent for the research participants in an effort to mitigate validity, reliability, and objectivity concerns. Participants were informed of the confidentiality efforts regarding their participation in the study, hoping to alleviate any concerns and getting more honest responses. Additionally, the research study was explained to interviewees prior to the interviews in order for participants to understand the context of the study, as Brown (2014) mentioned the potential threat of respondents not being able to shed light on the phenomena without understanding it.

3.2.3 Ethnography and Social Media Research

Quantitative and qualitative studies add to the literature in their own unique ways. It is unfair to say that one approach is better than the other; rather certain approaches are more appropriate depending on the research study. According to Madianou (2015, p. 2), while data-driven approaches have acquired enormous popularity and contribute to the generalized understanding of social media practices, "only ethnography can unearth the nuanced ways in which people navigate the environment of social and other media and how this is shaped by relational dynamics." Ethnographic studies are able to analyze a broad topic through a

microscopic lens, which allows the researcher to understand the context but also the micro-dynamics that create them (Madianou, 2015).

Ethnographic studies centering on social media do not necessarily seek to define social media, but rather analyze the use of social media within certain contexts. From this viewpoint, ethnographers are able to test popular social media assumptions. One of the studies mentioned by Madianou (2015), analyzed social media in relation to disaster recovery. It was revealed that social media aided in facilitating grieving and coping with loss. Madianou (2015) introduces the term "polymedia," which "emphasizes the relational definition of all media from a users' point of view" (p.2). Considering the differing social media platforms, each may offer different advantages depending on the features each one offers the user and may prove to be difficult to quantify. The author argues that ethnography is the best way, if not the only way, to study polymedia as it enriches the understanding of social media.

While Madianou introduces the term polymedia, Cunliffe and Jun (2005) discuss the concept of reflexivity. They propose this term as a means of potentially changing the traditional ways of public administration. Reflexivity can be defined in terms of questioning and complexifying one's thinking and experiences. There is a willingness to look beyond the surface and search for the hidden nature of truth. "Reflexivity, therefore, goes beyond calculative problem solving toward exploring tensions and recognizing the ephemeral nature of our identities and our social experience." It is within the context of reflection of social media use, norms and behavior can be challenged and improved. Cunliffe and Jun argue that by analyzing assumptions, principles, and behaviors, a greater awareness of issues, responsibilities, and perspectives may lead to transformation of organizations and social practice (2005, p. 228).

The ideals behind reflexivity are crucial when considering the influence the ethnographer has in conducting research. The ethnographer is required to have a personal connection and has the responsibility of coming to the final conclusions regarding the subjects. When studying online social networks, individuals are given the ability to create their own identity and may choose the ways in which they present themselves. The ubiquity of these online personas and social media sites challenge the researchers' capacity to manage it. As a result, researchers must utilize different methodologies in order to effectively approach, study, and evaluate the data. According to Reich (2015, p. 402), "many great ethnographic studies have in fact been conducted by young scholars, particularly doctoral students who may be advantaged by their relatively clean slates. Collectively, these questions remind researchers that they no longer control how knowledge flows, which carries far-reaching consequences." The Internet as a research site, and especially social media, is a prime example of this shift in ethnographic studies. The literature suggests the study of Internet practices is developing alongside anthropological studies of the varying social media sites and respective behaviors (Postill & Pink, 2012).

Postill and Pink (2012, p. 2) suggests the "free culture activism" of the social media sites removes barriers and opens up discussion for citizen engagement. Internet ethnography differs from traditional ethnographic studies because the ethnographer does not necessarily have to physically travel to certain field site. These Web 2.0 technologies, coupled with social media ethnography, are shaping how the Internet is considered a research site. The varying, yet specific, ethnographic studies allow certain types of data to become available and further investigated. Furthermore, ethnographers are able to apply the knowledge to new situations of new

technologies, while at the same time retaining a reflexive (Cunliffe & Jun, 2005) awareness of the new knowledge being produced, analyzing both strengths and weaknesses. A critical component of the ethnographer is flexibility, especially while maneuvering multiple social media sites (Postill & Pink, 2012).

Social media ethnography is often used as an example of the changes occurring in qualitative inquiry. It allows access to new knowledge that is enabled through these online engagements. Postill and Pink (2012) focus on learning about ethnographic themes through their research and their corresponding implications. They argue that sometimes people who participate online may end up forming in person relationships. In order to effectively research utilizing the social media ethnographic approach, the researcher must live part of their life on the Internet, observing the online interactions, oftentimes on several different platforms. Postill and Pink (2012, p. 10) conclude with the idea that social media ethnography, in turn, "invites us to reflexively interrogate the concepts we use to understand the Internet. It is through such an exercise that we suggest a new research design for social media/internet ethnography, away from community and towards sociality and movement."

Nielsen (2011) conducted an ethnographic study analyzing two congressional campaigns in the United States of America. The study involved more than a hundred field trips, several interactions with staff and volunteers, and 59 semi-structured interviews. Web presence and email communications were also analyzed and mapped out. Nielsen (2011) stated that even though socio-economic status and levels of political interest are related to involvement in political campaigns, mobilizing practices are a separate component related to political participation. Nielsen (2011) suggests that internet-assisted activism should be theorized as a

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process for the coproduction of citizenship as the open Internet plays a big role in political campaigns and their success. He found that it is important to meet citizens where they are and by utilizing what he refers to as mundane Internet tools, such as email, citizens are then able to become producers as well by sharing the information via their own social media platforms.

Based on the previous literature review regarding ethnographic studies and social media, a self-ethnographic approach regarding social media usage is utilized for this study. Ethnographic approaches and grounded theory have been combined before in previous studies (Bamkin, Maynard, & Goulding, 2016; Iddo & Stefan, 2009) and allow for the entrance into the virtual world of municipal elected officials guided by a structural framework. The unit of analysis is elected officials in municipal governments in the State of Florida. Elected officials are tasked with representing and working for the people and as a municipal elected official, the researcher has an advantage of conducting data collection and analyzing the findings. Interviewing municipal elected officials throughout the State of Florida identifies their social media use as it relates to transparency, participation, and collaboration. Since the interviews reflect the interviewees' perception, content analysis of social media sites is utilized to complement the data. The interviews consist of both closed and open-ended questions, allowing for flexibility in order to establish certain themes to add to the literature, propose future studies, and improve practice.

3.3 Population and Sample Size

Qualitative studies generally require smaller sample sizes than quantitative studies. However, the sample size for qualitative research should be large enough to receive feedback for most perceptions. Glaser and Strauss (1967) introduce the concept of saturation and recommend

it for qualitative studies. Saturation occurs when additional participants does not add new information. Morse (1994) suggests 30-50 participants for ethnographic studies and 30-50 interviews for grounded theory. However, Creswell (1998) suggests that 20-30 interviews would be sufficient. There are no set rules when determining sample size in qualitative research; time allotted, the availability of resources, and the main goals of the study may determine the sample size (Patton, 1990).

Considering the researcher's position as a municipal elected official in the State of Florida and the ethnographic approach, the sample is from municipal elected officials in the State of Florida. There are 413 cities, towns, and villages in the State of Florida, with multiple council members for each. A purposive sample was utilized, as the sample was pulled from the population of 413 cities, towns, and villages in the State of Florida and their respective elected officials, with the exception of Titusville to avoid any ethical concerns. Both those that utilize social media and those that do not were invited to participate in the study. Furthermore, Florida's diversity of demographics and political affiliations increase the generalizability of this study.

3.4 Data Collection

Invitations were sent to all municipal elected officials (see Appendix A) to participate in the interview process after completing the IRB approval process. Following Morse's recommendation, the ideal response rate is 50 interviews or until saturation has been reached. Appendix B is a list of the interview questions that were utilized for those utilizing social media. Appendix C is a list of interview questions that were utilized for those not utilizing social media. These questions were derived from components of the conceptual framework, propositions, literature section, and personal experiences from the researcher related to social media use as a

municipal elected official. The interviews were recorded either in person or via telephone. The interviews were audio recorded and notes were taken during the interviews, as well. The recordings were kept on a password protected computer device. While they were not anonymous, they were kept confidential. Following the interviews, content analysis of social media sites by the participants utilizing social media were conducted on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram sites. The sites were analyzed during May 2018, prior to being informed of the research study in order to obtain a truer and more accurate depiction of how the municipal elected officials utilize social media.

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3.5 Variables and Measurement

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The term open government community engagement is a concept developed to encompass the three dependent variables for this study: transparency, participation, and collaboration. The unit of analysis is elected officials in municipal governments in the State of Florida. There are nine context variables identified, as well. These variables were utilized to understand the context of the study and sample. The nine variables include form of government, age, population of respective municipality, gender, race, educational level, political affiliation, years of service, and future political office plans.

The interviews were scheduled for a 30-minute duration for non-social media users and 45-60 minutes for social media users. Most of the interviews were completed within this time frame. The interview questions were formulated and grouped into areas related to transparency, participation, and collaboration based on the literature, propositions, and researcher experience. Questions relating to specific social media practices were excluded for the non-social media users, as they were not applicable. As themes emerged, the responses related to the interview

questions were then categorized into corresponding themes. The themes that emerged were different for the social media users as opposed to the non-social media users.

During the analysis process, notes were further analyzed and recordings were revisited in order to accurately depict core themes found. This allowed for accuracy regarding respondent quotes and the ability to revisit perceived intentions regarding responses given. Themes were not formulated until the conclusion of all interviews in order to mitigate the potential for leading or guiding the interviewees during the interview process. Responses were grouped together by question and then related questions were grouped together in order to identify related themes.

While the interview process related to more of motivations and perceived social media use by the municipal elected officials, the content analysis portion strived to identify and shed light on what was actually occurring in practice, and complement the interview portion regarding validity concerns. While the content analysis was independent of the interview process, the findings were able to shed additional light on in practice social media methods and provide examples of social media use related to the transparency, participation, and collaboration variables studied and analyzed.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the qualitative analysis of the fifty-seven interviews that were conducted. The first portion analyzes the descriptive statistics of the sample according to two groups: those who utilize social media and those who do not. Findings are organized into key themes from the forty-two interviews of municipal elected officials who stated they are currently utilizing social media. They are grouped into eight core themes utilizing the results and answers from the interview questions. The eight themes are (1) foundation of social media feelings, (2) social media sites used and why, (3) objectives of social media use and in practice methods, (4) types of social media posts and inclusivity efforts, (5) factors that potentially encourage or discourage social media usage, (6) social media in practice and feedback received from citizens, (7) perceived role citizens play, and (8) final thoughts. The next portion organizes the results from interviews with individuals who are not currently utilizing social media into four key themes. These themes are (1) waste of time/no value, (2) lack of guidance and fears, (3) misinformation, lack of accountability and loss of control, and (4) opportunities/potential. The last section of this chapter is content analysis of social media posts during May 2018 of the forty-two interviewees' social media sites.

4.1.1 Sample Size and Response Rate

Informal invitations, such as phone calls, to participate in the research study were made to personal contacts of the author beginning June 4, 2018. Formal invitations were sent via email on June 14, 2018. Individual reminders were sent out at least once to interested participants

depending on their original response date. The official closing date for all interviews was August 18, 2018. The sampling method was purposive sampling and incorporated three different techniques for obtaining results.

Invitations were sent to personal contacts that have been made throughout the State of Florida either by location or through municipal elected official conferences. There were seventy-eight of these types of contacts. Of the seventy-eight personal contacts, forty-five did not respond, nine responded but did not complete, and twenty-four completed the interview. This was a 30.76% response rate.

In order to increase the diversity of the sample size, and to account for reliability and validity concerns, an invitation was sent to a contact at all 413 municipalities in the State of Florida, with the exception of Titusville. As the city where the author serves as a councilmember, Titusville was excluded in order to avoid any ethical concerns, such as the potential of discussing specific agenda items as examples. Contacts came from the Florida League of Cities Municipal Elected Officials Directory. The invitation consisted of a request to forward the research study information to their respective elected officials. Of the 412, fifteen had a bad email contact, four had no email contact listed, thirty-seven stated that they would forward it on, four responded with the individual emails for the researcher to utilize, and twelve of them tried answering on behalf of their elected officials in their municipality. This method was utilized as a strategy to receive a higher response rate rather than sending the request directly to the elected officials. From this invitation, fifty-eight responded. Of the fifty-eight responses, thirty-three completed the interview. Twenty-five did not complete the interview. This was an 8% response rate.

The last method consisted of approaching individuals at the Florida League of Cities

Annual Conference. Five people ended up participating in the interview at the conference and are

included in the numbers and response rates above. Three were from the original reach out to

personal contacts and two were from the original email solicitation.

When combining the personal contact invitation and the municipal emails, there were a

total of 490 email invitations sent, with additional follow-up with elected officials within each

municipality. Fifty-seven total interviews were conducted. This is an 11.63% response rate.

Morse's (1954) recommendation of 30-50 participants and Glaser and Strauss' (1967)

recommendation of interviewing until saturation takes place were both met. The fifty-seven

interviews consisted of forty-two that use social media and fifteen that do not. The fifteen that do

not are discussed toward the end of this chapter. If using the forty-two interviews that consisted

of municipal elected officials using social media, the response rate would be 8.57%. Some of the

individuals that responded but did not complete the interview expressed that their schedules were

limited due to current campaigns, out for the summer, or in budget season. Other issues had to do

with scheduling constraints and the time needed for the interviews. The response rate was a little

higher than originally anticipated and many of the participants were eager to participate and

wanted to learn more about the results. The response period and interviews for the study

occurred from June 4, 2018 to August 18, 2018.

4.1.2 Sample Representativeness

Within the fifty-seven interviews, forty out of the 413 municipalities are represented.

Figure 2 shows the diversity of the interviews in terms of location throughout the State of

Florida. The dots are located within the corresponding county but exact location is not accurate

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to protect the privacy of the responses. There is a heavy concentration in the central Florida area, as this is the area where the author currently serves in her present role as a municipal elected official and has more personal contacts.
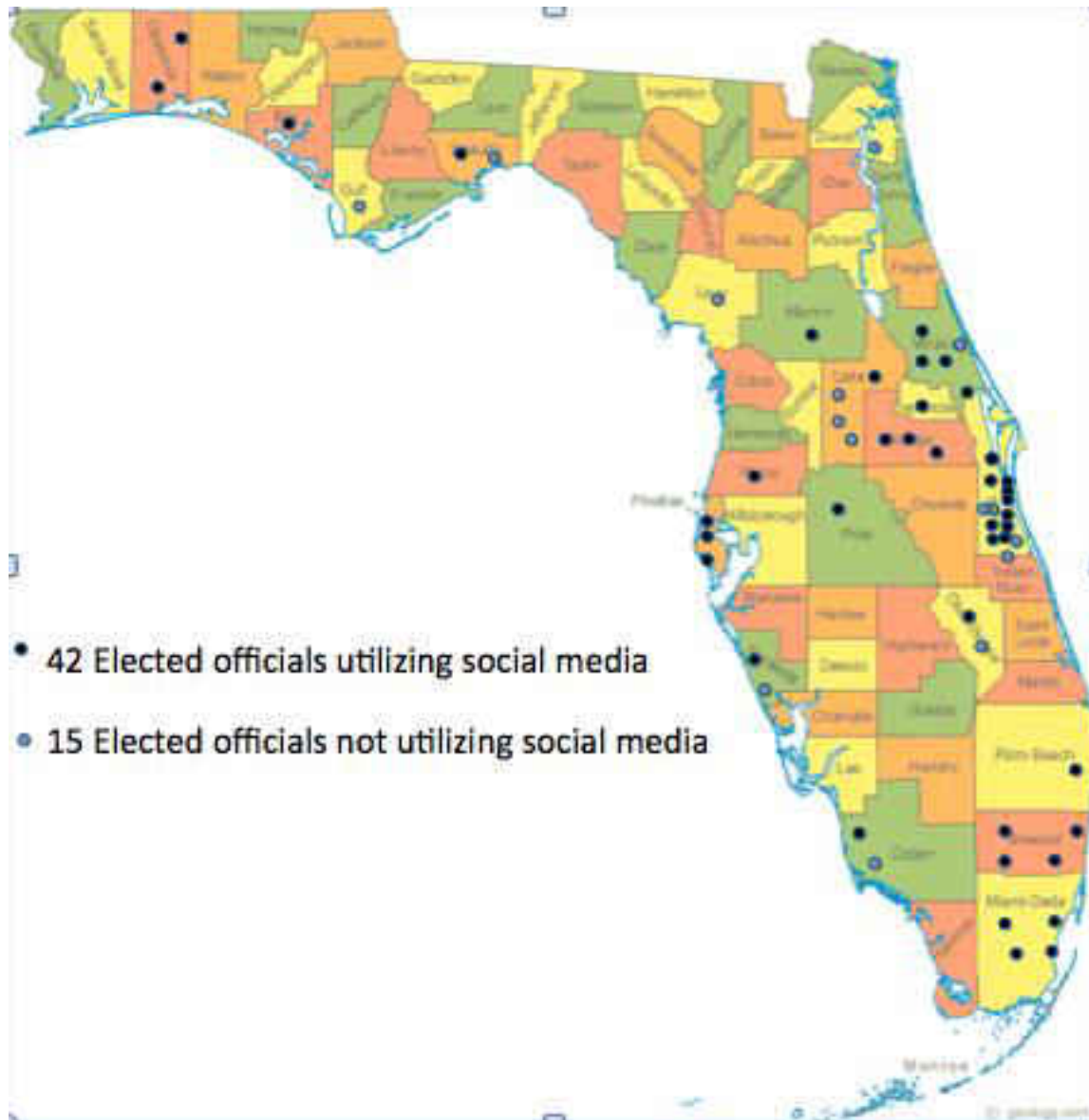
Figure 2. Location of Participants

The following descriptive statistics analyze and discuss the total sample of the fifty-seven

municipal elected officials within the State of Florida, forty-two of which use social media to interact with their constituents and fifteen that do not to utilize social media. The format will be the same for all variables: the fifty-seven overall sample size, the forty-two using social media, and the fifteen not using social media. This study is qualitative in nature and these statistics are used in order to better understand the sample. While these statistics were not measured for statistical significance, the information may prove to be useful for future quantitative studies to test certain hypotheses.

Two of the variables are not discussed and analyzed due to the lack of the diversity in their responses. The two variables include race and form of government. Fifty-six of the respondents were Caucasian and one was Hispanic. The forms of government were in the following categories located in Table 4.

Table 4. Form of Government

	Council-Manager	Council-Weak Mayor	Council-Strong Mayor	Commission	Total
Overall Form of Government Frequency	46	7	3	1	57
Social Media Users Frequency	34	4	3	1	42
Non- Social Media Users Frequency	12	3	0	0	15

In order to understand the context of the diversity in the forms of government represented, the forms for 412 municipalities in the State of Florida are broken down as follows according the Florida League of Cities as of October 2017:

Council-Manager: 272

Council-Weak Mayor: 85

Council-Strong Mayor: 49

Commission: 4

Hybrid: 2

4.1.2.1 Gender

The following frequency table (Table 5) show the overall genders of the sample, those

that use social media, and those that do not. The overall sample includes 63.2% male and 36.8%

female. 78% of the males utilize social media and 22% of males do not. 67% of the females

utilize social media and 33% of the females do not. The nominal variables were coded 1 for male

and 2 for female.

Table 5. Gender

	Male	Female	Total
Overall Gender Frequency	36	21	57
Overall Gender Percentage	63.2	36.8	100
Social Media Users Frequency	28	14	42
Social Media Users Percentage	66.7	33.3	100
Non-Social Media Users Frequency	8	7	15
Non-Social Media Users Percentage	53.3	46.7	100

Those that chose to utilize social media, show the percentage of males a slightly higher than the

overall sample; the ratio is 66.7% males and 33.3% females.

The ratio of males to females for those not utilizing social media to engage with their

constituents are a little more equal with 53.3% being male and 46.7% being female.

Unfortunately, gender is not on any candidate data collected by the supervisor of elections at this

time, so there is not an accurate threshold to measure how the ratio of the male to female sample

aligns with the genders of municipal elected officials throughout the State of Florida.

4.1.2.2 Age

The following tables and figures represent the ages of the interviewees. The order of the tables and figures analyze the overall sample, those that use social media, and those that do not. The scale variables were not coded into nominal variables in order for the true ages to be distributed. It appears the mean, median, and mode ages for the overall sample and those that chose to utilize social media fall between the ages of 52-54, as shown in Table 6. The minimum and maximum ages are 28 and 84, respectively. Figure 3 shows the distribution of the overall ages.

Table 6. Age Statistics

	Social Media Users	Non- Social Media Users	Overall Age
Number	42	15	57
Mean	52.1905	59.0667	54.0000
Median	53.5000	61.0000	54.0000
Mode	54.00[a]	61.00[a]	54.00[a]
Rage	56.00	39.00	56.00
Minimum	28.00	38.00	28.00
Maximum	84.00	77.00	84.00

a. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown
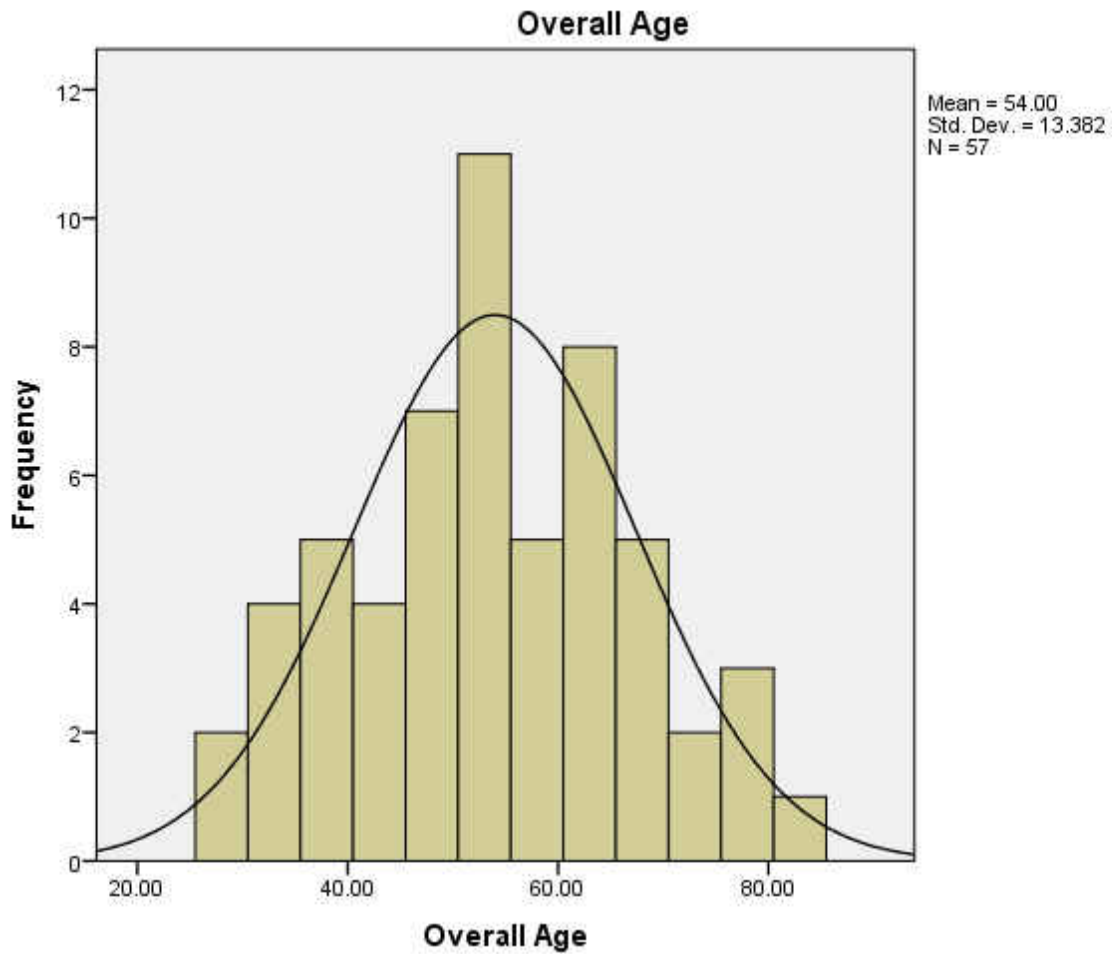
Figure 3. Overall Age

The distribution of ages for those that choose to use social media is close to the overall sample. However, while there appears to be a higher frequency in the ages of those individuals who are younger than 54, these ages only go down to the age of 28 while the ages to the right of the distribution go all the way up to the age of 84 as seen in Figure 4. As with gender, there is

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currently no data on the ages of the municipal elected officials throughout the State of Florida, as it is difficult to keep accurate with nearly 2,270 municipal elected officials and approximately 700 changing each year.
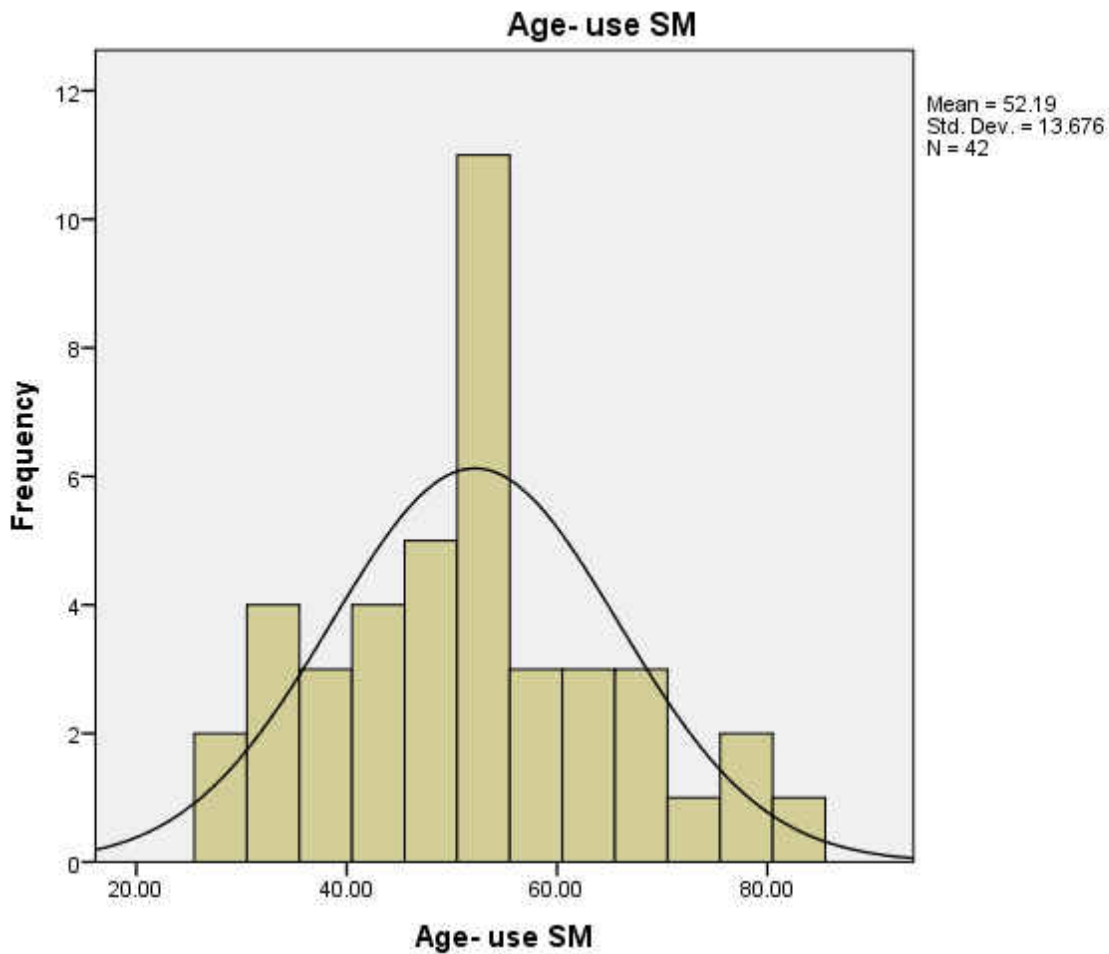
Figure 4. Age- Social Media Users

As shown below in Figure 5, the ages for those who choose not to utilize social media is a little higher than the overall sample and those who choose to utilize social media. The median and mode is 61, with the mean being 59.0667. The standard deviation is 11.45467. The minimum age is 38 and the maximum is 77. There are also gaps in the distribution to the left of the curve,

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showing gaps in the ages lower than 61 for those who choose not to utilize social media.
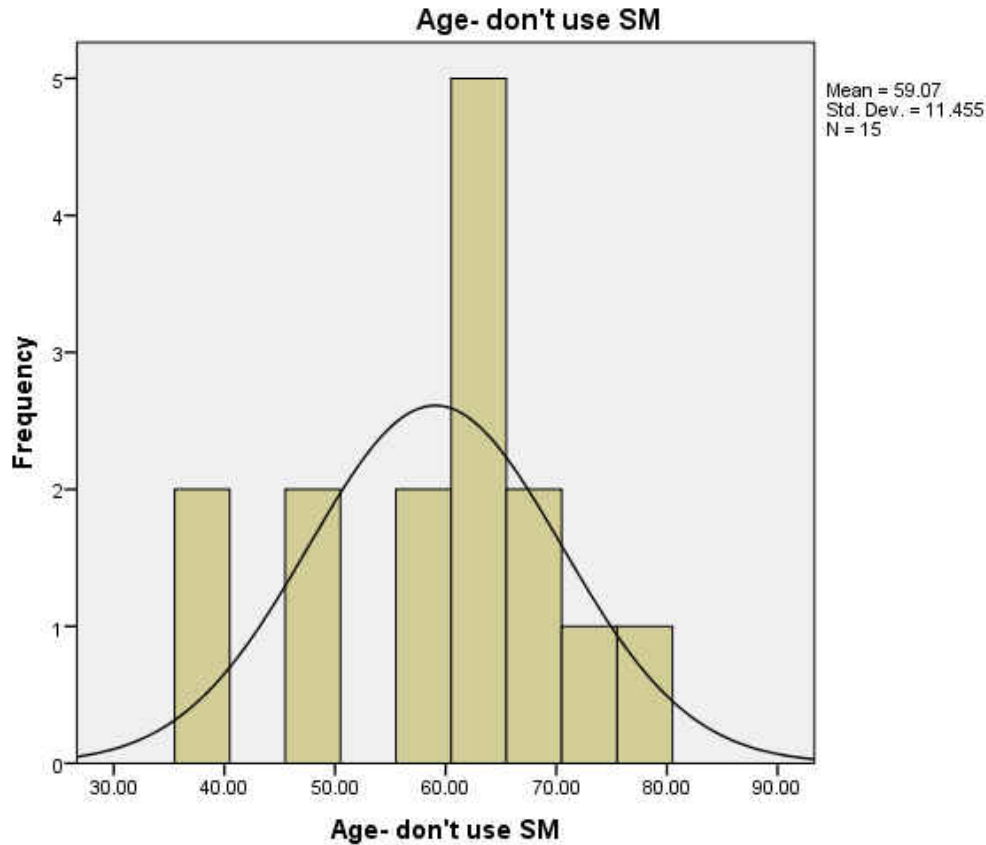
Figure 5. Age- Non-Social Media Users

4.1.2.3 Population Size

The following tables show the distribution of the population sizes for the municipal elected officials' respective municipalities. The scale variables were not coded into nominal variables so true population sizes could be distributed. However, exact populations are not displayed in order to protect the confidentiality of the sample. The distributions are not normal

with the highest frequency of population sizes being less than 20,000. The variations between the mean and the median are shown in Table 7 below.

Table 7. Population Size Statistics

	Social Media Users	Non-Social Media Users	Overall Population
Number	42	15	57
Mean	45785.8333	21029.2000	39270.9298
Median	20322.0000	13244.0000	19736.0000
Mode	80419.00	20127.00	80419.00
Range	145689.00	79953.00	145689.00
Minimum	466.00	466.00	466.00
Maximum	146155.00	80419.00	146155.00

Since Florida is a state of generally smaller cities, the median for overall population size for municipalities in the State of Florida is a better representation of the sample. According to the Florida League of Cities (2016), only 10% of cities have populations greater than 60,000. 22% have populations between 15,000 and 60,000. Another 22% have populations between 5,000 and 15,000. Lastly, 46% have populations lower than 5,000. The median population size in the State of Florida in 2016 was 5,711 and in 2017, it was 5,800.

4.1.2.4 Party Affiliation

Party affiliation was coded into a nominal variable in the following format shown below in Table 8:

Table 8. Party Affiliation Coding

1	Republican
2	Democrat
3	Independent
4	Libertarian
5	NPA (No Party Affiliation)

Table 9 shows that Republican was the most frequent response for the sample for all groups. All three groups remain relatively consistent, with no significant difference between the three. Since municipal elected officials in the State of Florida are non-partisan, there is no available data regarding party affiliations for municipal elected officials in the State of Florida currently to compare with the sample.

Table 9. Party Affiliation

	Republican	Democrat	Independent	Libertarian	NPA	Total
Overall Party Affiliation Frequency	32	12	4	1	8	57
Overall Party Affiliation Percentage	56.1	21.1	7	1.8	14	100
Social Media Users Party Affiliation Frequency	24	9	3	1	5	42
Social Media Users Party Affiliation Percentage	57.1	21.4	7.1	2.4	11.9	100
Non-Social Media Users Party Affiliation Frequency	8	3	1	0	3	15
Non-Social Media Users Party Affiliation Percentage	53.3	20	6.7	0	20	100

4.1.2.5 Educational Level

Educational levels were coded into a scale variable utilizing the following coding below in Table 10:

Table 10. Education Level Coding

1	High School
2	Some College
3	Bachelors
4	Masters
5	Doctorate

Table 11. Education Level Statistics

	Social Media Users	Non-Social Media Users	Overall Education Level
Number	42	15	57
Mean	3.07	2.93	3.04
Median	3.00	3.00	3.00
Mode	2[a]	2	2
Range	4	3	4
Minimum	1	2	1
Maximum	5	5	5

a. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown

According to the data, it appears those who utilize social media may have slightly more education, with the mean for those using social media being a 3.07 and the mean for those not using social media being a 2.93.

Table 12. Education Level

	High School	Some College	Bachelors	Masters	Doctorate	Total
Overall Education Level Frequency	4	17	16	13	7	57
Overall Education Level Percentage	7	29.8	28.1	22.8	12.3	100
Social Media Users Education Level Frequency	4	11	11	10	6	42
Social Media Users Education Level Percentage	9.5	26.2	26.2	23.8	14.3	100
Non-Social Media Users Education Level Frequency	0	6	5	3	1	15
Non-Social Media Users Education Level Percentage	0	40	33.3	20	6.7	100

4.1.2.6 Years of Service

Years of service as an elected official was coded into a scale variable using the following coding method seen below in Table 13:

Table 13. Years of Service Coding

1	Less than a year
2	1-2 years
3	2-5 years
4	5-10 years
5	Over 10 years

According to Table 14, it appears those that choose to utilize social media have a little more years of service as an elected official. 3.12 is the mean for those that use social media, while 2.93

is the mean for those that do not. The majority of the sample has served as a municipal elected

official for between 2-5 years. Table 15 shows the exact frequencies.

Table 14. Years of Service Statistics

	Social Media Users	Non-Social Media Users	Overall Years of Service
Number	42	15	57
Mean	3.12	2.93	3.07
Median	3.00	3.00	3.00
Mode	2[a]	3	3
Range	4	2	4
Minimum	1	2	1
Maximum	5	4	5

a. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown

Table 15. Years of Service

	Less than a Year	1-2 Years	2-5 Years	5-10 Years	Over 10 Years	Total
Overall Years of Service Frequency	5	15	16	13	8	57
Overall Years of Service Percentage	8.8	26.3	28.1	22.8	14	100
Social Media Users Years of Service Frequency	5	10	10	9	8	42
Social Media Users Years of Service Percentage	11.9	23.8	23.8	21.4	19	100
Non-Social Media Users Years of Service Frequency	0	5	6	4	0	15
Non-Social Media Users Years of Service Percentage	0	33.3	40	26.7	0	100

4.1.2.7 Future Plans

The last variable discussed is a nominal variable displaying whether or not the municipal

elected official plans to run for either the same elected position again or another elected position.

This question was posed to see if there was any relation to choosing to utilize social media and future political aspirations. The nominal variable was coded according to Table 16 below:

Table 16. Future Plans Coding

1	Yes
2	No
3	Unsure

Table 17. Future Plans Statistics

	Social Media Users	**Non-Social Media Users**	**Overall Future Plans**
Number	42	15	57
Mean	1.43	2.53	1.46
Median	1.00	1.00	1.00
Mode	1	1	1
Range	2	2	2
Minimum	1	1	1
Maximum	3	3	3

The mode is used for this dataset as the desire to run again was the highest frequency and the mean would not be a true representation of the sample. Overall, 75.4% expressed plans to run for the same or another elected position. The percentage goes up to 78.6% for those who do utilize social media and down to 66.7% for those who do not currently utilize social media. Only two municipal elected officials expressed that they do not plan to run again and they both do not currently use social media. The ones that do utilize social media either said they do plan to run again or they were unsure at this time. The exact frequencies are shown in the following tables.

Table 18. Future Plans

	Yes	No	Unsure	Total
Overall Future Plans Frequency	43	2	12	57
Overall Future Plans Percentage	75.4	3.5	21.1	100
Social Media Users Future Plans Frequency	33	0	9	42
Social Media Users Future Plans Percentage	78.6	0	21.4	100
Non-Social Media Users Future Plans Frequency	10	2	3	15
Non-Social Media Users Future Plans Percentage	66.7	13.3	20	100

4.2 Foundation of Social Media Feelings

Before getting into how social media is used by the forty-two elected officials utilizing it, questions were asked regarding their overall feelings and experiences with social media. These questions were posed in order to gain a better understanding on their personal views and how they may or may not play a factor in the ways they are currently implementing their social media pages. More specifically, gaining insight on whether or not their feelings have an impact on their inclusivity attempts and engagement levels. The following three questions were asked in order to aid in these efforts and help understand their individual perspectives.

4.2.1 What are Your Personal Feelings about Social Media?

The feelings regarding social media were mixed but a majority of the users expressed how useful social media was for connecting and communicating with citizens. Ten stated they loved social media, five said they liked it overall, four stated there was good and bad with it, and three stated they hated social media.

There were several positives that were mentioned regarding the benefits of social media. One elected official mentioned he felt it was a game changer for people and that social media is filling a gap in terms of communication; it's evolved communication and is an unfiltered bridge

to people that allows people to express themselves without the ability for someone to filter them. Several mentioned the connectivity aspects of social media and how it is a great way to engage with citizens and communicate what is happening in the community with very little investment. It can also be a huge cost savings over traditional mailers. One stated there were bigger gaps in communication before or no communication at all. Not only are elected officials able to communicate quickly and easily, especially in terms of crises, they are also able to have the two-way interaction and hear the concerns of their constituents quickly and easily. This allows them to see and hear other sides to things and stay current and up to date with what is happening in the news. Several elected officials mentioned how it is the only way to engage with the younger generation now. People do not want to go to boring meetings but social media platforms allow them to stay connected and express their feedback.

Other elected officials were quick to mention the good and the bad when asked about how they feel about social media. Other words they used to describe their feelings were mixed, positives and negatives, and upsides and downsides. Some of them mentioned it was a great tool to disseminate information but oftentimes it can be misused with poor intent depending on the user. This can create a lot of the misinformation that several others mentioned. While some prefer more face to face interactions, it was mentioned that people have the assumption everyone is on social media, so it is especially great for the younger generations and those that live in larger cities. However, people (elected officials) have to be able to handle the criticisms that come with its use and be sure they are actually responding and engaging.

There were a lot of negative aspects of social media mentioned related to the idea that social media is still being defined and figured out so people are learning at the expense of others

and their mistakes. Some of these mistakes include publishing something incorrect and attempting to correct it after the fact and understanding that intent could be misconstrued. It is hard to pick up on tone and body language via social media text. Because of this, people can run with things that are published, potentially manipulate and abuse it, perpetuating misinformation with very little, if any, control. Therefore, improper information is disseminated, distorting reality from those that may not be as educated as they should, thus leading the "fake news" movement. With so many people on social media, in a climate of misinformation and opinions, drama, nastiness, and negativity follow. This leads to some elected officials not being a fan of social media. As one elected official stated, "it allows negativity to fester issues that we've always had, but they just now have access to more information and are able to use social media to blow the issues out of proportion." People on social media do not usually reach out unless they are mad, contributing to challenges for individuals to draw certain borders in order to not overreact, becoming emotional or reactionary. One of the elected officials who dislikes social media but still chooses to use stated,

> I hate it. I think it's one of the primary reasons to declining American culture. It's a way for people to play a character- what they can't do in real life. People's lives now are not real- they are fake. I believe it's pretty awful for society in general. People spend too much time on it. It leads to comparison where they end up limiting themselves. It generally prevents people from being present. Politically, I am on it because everyone else is. It's an effective means to spread news, let people know what is going on, and get people's feedback because they don't come to meetings.

Another elected official mentioned it would be a great communication tool as opposed to a political debate, where he felt many use it to express their partisan views, and that the country may be better without it. Several mentioned concerns about how emboldened some online users feel they are to say things via social media that they would not dare say in person. These "keyboard warriors" as one elected official called them feel safe behind a screen with no personal confrontation or consequences. They do not appreciate how people hide behind the screen and are quite surprised what people will say and do while thinking they are anonymous.

In terms of the elected official role, there were concerns for safety in terms of cyber-attacks, hackers, and so much personal information out publicly for the world to see. One of the participants stated he would not have been elected without social media so it is a great marketing tool for campaigning. However, in practice, it needs to be approached with caution and wisdom. If one does not understand how to use social media, it could cause more harm than good. It is important to have a mission for the use of social media and understand the expectations for one to not only respond but also be instantaneous. Therefore, one almost has to always be on social media checking the interactions and feedback. However, some mentioned the time constraints of their positions only being part-time and not utilizing social media as much as they would like. One mentioned she wished she knew more about social media, while another stated she had concerns about public records and keeping up with the copying, pasting, and sending everything to the clerk since she does a lot of events and posts.

4.2.2 Do You Want to Use Social Media and/or Do You Feel You Need to?

While some individuals understood the benefits of social media, it was important ascertain whether or not that lead to the actual desire to use social media or more of the feeling

that it was needed. This information helped to better understand the elected officials' perspective going into their own personal social media choices in their role as an elected official.

Nineteen stated that they felt there was both a desire and need to use social media. Many stated social media was the primary source for information nowadays; therefore it has become necessary to utilize and also an effective way to not only gather random information from multiple sources and users but also collect information specifically from residents. For small towns, it is the primary way to communicate with citizens. It can be used at any time and is especially useful for emergency management, such as hurricanes. One went so far to say that elected officials are "missing out on a huge segment of people if they aren't on social media; I don't think you are doing your job if you aren't on some form of social media." However, some stated that they do feel the pressure some days because social media requires more time because of the need to respond.

Six of the participants were quick to say they wanted to utilize social media. They don't necessarily feel they need to but it helps them to be more effective and efficient in terms of disseminating information and being able to read responses at any time. While they are very careful with the Sunshine Law, they love the way it is unfiltered and an easy way to get the pulse on the community without having to take a random phone call. One of the interviewees stated he strives

to excel and do a great job. While it is a very valuable tool it is also very demanding. You have to be constantly looking and engaged if you want to be first. Each post creates work. It's time consuming to do it well. Social media has really raised the bar for elected officials. People are posting pictures and tagging elected officials all the time. Residents

have higher expectations; you have to answer with total quality, as it will be there

forever. These are high stakes.

With the pressures mentioned above, sixteen of the interviewees stated they feel they need to use

social media in order to keep citizens informed and stay current. Some stated that people do not

read the newspaper anymore and it is an inexpensive tool for communicating. Some stated it is

needed to be successful in today's society but they have to work at it harder than most because of

their age. One stated it "can be annoying to try and keep up with because there are so many

pages and it feels like people are always expecting to hear from me." This is not fun when people

are slamming you so some are careful with what they say and overly cautious to not say

something that may haunt them later. One stated if they could come up with another way to reach

people, they would but social media seems to be the best option, as email seems to be going

away. Another tries to avoid accusations and prefers the city post more so she does not have to as

much. Lastly, one interviewee stated they did not want to use social media and do not feel it is

needed and is therefore slowing down with utilizing it.

4.2.3 Have There Been Any Moments You Regretted Using Social Media?

While there were a variety of feelings regarding whether the elected official liked social

media or not, most of them do not regret using social media. Thirty-six stated they do not regret

using it as several stated the benefits outweigh the consequences. One stated frustration with how

to utilize certain social media platforms (Twitter), and therefore chooses to only utilize

Facebook. Two stated they wish to utilize social media more but regret how demanding of time

social media use takes. From those that do not regret utilizing social media, some admitted they

try to avoid some of the negativity by avoiding certain groups that have been created within their municipalities.

Six of the participants disclosed having feelings of regret with using social media as an elected official. When discussing if there were any regrets, one of them stated "I think that is an everyday thing for us. Why am I doing this for the limited pay when it is so emotionally draining? There is days you wish you didn't have to use it but we are seeking to be transparent." Others expressed concern about it being a waste of time and draining, as well. Expressed frustrations with attempting to utilize social media to engage citizens came from feelings of people not understanding social media or the issues at hand. Lastly, one of the elected officials expressed fear of her own lack of understanding with how to utilize social media within the laws and stated she almost had a panic attack that she had done something wrong.

4.2.4 Section Summary

There was a mix of personal feelings regarding how the interviewees felt about social media. While some truly enjoyed social media and the benefits they feel social media provides, there were others who were not very fond of social media but still recognized its value and chose to use it regardless. While some may have had negative perceptions of social media, most of the respondents never expressed any regret of utilizing social media. Overall, there seemed to be a mix of both positive and negative feelings, nonetheless they did not allow those feelings to prevent them from utilizing social media. However, those feelings may impact the extent to which they use social media and how often they choose to utilize it.

<u>4.3 Social Media Sites Used and Why</u>

After getting an idea of how the elected officials felt about social media, the social media sites they chose to use and why were addressed. These questions were asked in order to gain insight into their intentions and motivations before looking into the objectives they hope to accomplish with their social media use.

4.3.1 What Social Media Platforms are You Currently Using and Why?

Facebook was by far the most popular social media site utilized. All forty-two social media users stated it as one of their social media sites. However, some had both a personal profile and a separate political page, while some chose to use only their personal page or vice versa. Those utilizing both types of Facebook profiles stated they do so either so they can reach more people or because they hit the 5,000-friend limit on their personal page. Those that do not use both stated they like to keep their personal page more private and separate the two in order to maintain a certain degree of privacy.

The top three social media platforms stated includes Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. However, most Instagram users admitted Instagram was the one social media tool they were still trying to figure out. Table 19 shows the social media sites utilized by the elected officials and how many of them stated they were using the corresponding platform.

Table 19. Social Media Platforms Stated

Facebook	Twitter	Instagram	Nextdoor	Linked In	WhatsApp	Pinterest
42	21	14	5	3	1	1

Three stated they were using Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram because those were the most popular platforms currently. One of them even created their own hashtag to utilize to help brand himself more. Those that only use Facebook and Twitter stated it is because they were the best outlets available to them at the time. However, one stated they were using those two platforms in order to reach more mature audience.

While several elected officials were using multiple social media platforms, many of the elected officials stated they were only using Facebook for a variety of reasons. These included being more comfortable and familiar with it, already on it, being older in age, believing it is more personal than the other platforms, convenience, and feeling like Twitter is easier to get in trouble with because people are not as intentional with those types of posts. Other reasons elected officials chose to use Facebook included more connections and larger audience, most popular platform, the groups they engage in, no limitations on character limits, and sponsored posts. The reasons given for utilizing Twitter included the fact that it was short and to the point, in real time, useful for one-way communication, retweeting younger colleagues' tweets, and monitoring the pulse. Those utilizing Nextdoor mentioned feeling more comfortable with it and believing a lot of their citizens are on that platform. The one utilizing WhatsApp mentioned it being the best site in terms of participation levels from their citizens. He is able to engage the group and rally them rather easily and it is great for small towns. Lastly, the one utilizing Pinterest stated they like the photo side of the platform.

Some mentioned they were still learning how to utilize social media. This became evident as several mentioned email as a social media platform they are using without realizing email was not considered a form of social media. One mentioned that social media was manageable and

easier for their small population size but would probably not use social media if in a larger city. Others mentioned they were not as consistent with their posts and oftentimes mingled their personal and political pages due to time constraints. One mentioned quitting Twitter because of Sunshine Law and archiving everything, while another mentioned quitting Nextdoor due to all of the opinions on the site. Lastly one mentioned utilizing social media management platforms, such as Hootsuite, due to the efficiency of posting the same content on multiple platforms to increase their reach. However, another individual specifically mentioned not utilizing those tools for his multiple social media platforms because people are looking for elected officials to be more personal and genuine, stating, "If you don't make time to invest in people, they won't invest in you."

4.3.2 If You Use Twitter, What is Your Main Objective for Using It?

For those utilizing Twitter, some admitted they were not the best at it and chose to use it only to gather information and stay up to date on national news and learn what is going on. Some mentioned utilizing it to display live happenings and engagement in short, quick posts, as well as the same type of engagement they are having on other social media platforms. Others stated they do not use it much for engagement, but rather to broadcast out sound bites of information, promoting their city and current events, and retweeting. Not many use it for engaging in dialogue.

4.3.3 Concerning Participation, Which Social Media Site Do You Utilize Most for This?

Most of the participants stated Facebook was the platform they utilize most for participation. They stated that is where they experience the most engagement and interaction.

They felt that was the platform most of the people are on and where people are most responsive. However, one individual stated that his use of the WhatsApp platform was the best way for him to experience participation with citizens. He was the only one who was interviewed that was utilizing this platform to engage with his citizens. He proactively invites people to join in on the discussion and has different topics that are discussed. Another elected official stated he felt Nextdoor was the best site regarding participation. This platform allowed him to get a better pulse on the citizens and receive their feedback concerning issues.

4.3.4 Section Summary

There were a total of six different types of social media sites disclosed as being utilized by the elected officials. Facebook was the most popular for several reasons relating to ease and comfort, larger reach, no character limitations, and sponsored post capabilities. The elected officials identified Facebook as the best social media site for participation. There appeared to be a lack of understanding regarding what social media actually consisted of, as several mentioned email as a social media platform they are currently utilizing. For those using Twitter, this site was mentioned more for collecting information and staying up to date on items, as opposed to engagement with their citizens. WhatsApp and Pinterest were uncommon responses given, as only two different elected officials are using those sites, respectively. The interviewee utilizing WhatsApp disclosed that was the best platform he is currently using for participation as it allows him to directly engage with his constituents freely, without the concern of other elected officials on there. Pinterest was used more for personal projects regarding potential ideas for the city and not so much for engagement.

<u>4.4 Objectives of Social Media Use and In Practice Methods</u>

After getting an idea of what social media platforms were being utilized and what the elected officials believed was the best platform for participation methods, objectives for deciding to utilize social media were explored. This provided insight as to why the elected officials were spending time on social media and what they were accomplishing or hoping to accomplish with their efforts.

4.4.1 What is Your Main Objective with Your Social Media Sites? How are You Using Social Media?

At least thirty elected officials stated educating and informing citizens and pushing information out was a main objective for their social media use. The types of information included sharing what their city shared, current issues, budget updates, hurricanes and storms, what their city is doing, new projects, new openings, new ordinances, highlights of upcoming agendas, monthly video updates, activities, articles, live videos at events, local history, pictures, events, meetings, live streams of meetings, personal experiences that may be helpful, summaries of meetings, sneak peak of the week, interesting items, job opportunities, and town initiatives. One of the interviewees mentioned sharing the same information he sends out through his email distribution list, while another mentioned sharing their own editorials. Another interviewee stated he wishes to be the first mover in his city and for people to say his page is giving them value, while another stated he "wants people to see him in public and say 'because of your social media I know what is going on in the city.'" Transparency and accessibility were mentioned, with one stating the biggest complaint he hears is people having difficulty accessing government

officials and believes the role of elected officials is to be a servant to the people. He feels the people are his boss and the government is

> sick and ill when it comes to transparency. Some people wear two different masks- a personal and government official one. We are entitled to privacy but it is too much. We need 100% transparency and let people know where we stand. Social media allows me to do that.

Other objectives mentioned getting a little more personal with citizens and providing them answers, especially concerning information they might not understand. The public needs to hear from elected officials and not only explain items, but also educate them as to reasoning behind stances and votes made. While some mentioned they hope to share their opinion on their social media platforms, others stated that is not one of their objectives.

Although several mentioned wanting to promote their city, update them on city matters and what the city is doing, and direct them back to the city sites, there were quite a few individuals who were more focused on themselves and their role as an elected official. Some stated that because everyone is on social media, it was a great way to get his face out there. It is a great tool to update everyone on what they are working on and doing, as well maintain name recognition. Some of their objectives focused on building up their network and building relationships. One of the elected officials makes sure he sends a birthday message to his friends every morning on Facebook. Another interviewee stated he wishes to be the first to report what is happening and mentioned that the local paper has oftentimes quoted him in articles utilizing "per his Facebook."

While a majority of elected officials touched on the one-way aspects social media allows, several mentioned having two-way objectives for utilizing social media. One of the interviewees mentioned his main goal was to

> Engage as many people as possible and to be helpful. The city didn't understand engagement when I was first elected and I helped get policy implemented. It's not just pushing information out; you have to be willing to respond and answer questions-otherwise don't have a presence.

Many others stressed the importance of the engagement aspect, stating it is less intimidating than coming to a meeting. Their goal is to find out what citizens are thinking, correct misinformation, and respond to their concerns. Though some stated they simply wanted to be accessible and available to engage, others were more proactive in their objectives with wanting to gather opinions, asking citizens how they feel, utilizing polling strategies, and encouraging them to write if they cannot come to a meeting in person. Traffic studies and pedestrian infrastructure were a couple examples given regarding citizen input. Some of the elected officials' goals centered on utilizing social media to move citizens from online engagement to attending meetings, getting more involved, and rallying people if needed for an issue. Not all interviewees desired to utilize the engagement opportunities social media allows. One stated that he only uses social media to inform and explanations can get tricky in regards to Sunshine Law. He stated explanations create a record of what is being said back and forth and that one of their elected officials had their computer hard drive taken away because it was being utilized for government purposes and they needed to archive the comments.

<u>4.5 Types of Social Media Posts and Inclusivity Efforts</u>

After understanding and analyzing the objectives guiding the decisions to utilize social

media, it was imperative to examine how certain behaviors and types of posts aligned with stated

objectives. The following sections analyze types of posts and inclusivity efforts related to one-

way and two-way communications. This theme gauges transparency and participation elements

within the disclosed information regarding the elected officials' posts and engagement efforts.

4.5.1 Do You Use Social Media to Inform on Facts, Share Your Opinion, or Ask for the Opinion of Others Primarily?

While several elected officials mentioned they utilize social media to share their opinions

or ask for the opinions of others, the majority of them stated they either strictly use it to inform

or primarily use it to inform. The reasons given for not sharing their opinion or asking for the

opinions of others were related to lack of time, Sunshine Law, control and educational concerns,

and feeling it was not appropriate or needed for their current position. In regards to Sunshine

Law, several stated the law was very gray so they shy away from sharing or asking for opinions.

Some indicated they feel they are not allowed to state their opinion beforehand to avoid other

councilmembers or commissioners potentially seeing their posts, especially concerning quasi-

judicial agenda items. They felt they should not share their opinion from an ethical standpoint

and that they have been warned against it. As an elected official, some stated it was not their

place to state their opinion as they were elected to represent everyone. Furthermore, when asking

for opinions online, there was a concern of not hearing both sides.

Several elected officials mentioned concerns about the public not understanding the full

picture and therefore running the risk of losing control and misinterpretations when sharing and

asking for opinions. Everyone has an opinion and caution needs to be drawn as there is "no Facebook police" to ensure it is working for your benefit. One of the newer elected officials expressed concern about sharing his opinion because he was afraid of alienating citizens and did not want to ask for the opinion of others, as it may appear he does not know what he is doing. Other elected officials decided to utilize social media for only informing, as opinions have the tendency to bring out the "trolls and nastiness," which can be difficult to manage, especially when people start verbally attacking. One of the more seasoned elected officials stated he has

> Been at this for a long time and people set you up. I do not want to leave a door open for anything; experience has taught me to be very careful. I'll respond to set up a meeting. If you are not willing to meet one on one, then your issue is not that important. I am always at city hall.

There were also concerns about the levels of civility and thus shying away from anything controversial. One of the elected officials mentioned a lot of people getting banned from citizen run, city related Facebook groups and lots of division within their council. With the rise of individuals being rude and mean, she was also being informed she was not able to block anyone or delete comments due to the statutes, which she referred to as the "beauty of democracy." However, this type of behavior has also limited the types of posts she wishes to make available. A few others stated the opinion and feedback aspects social media provides are not really needed at this time so it is used primarily to inform. Some will use social media to gather feedback from groups they monitor without directly asking for it from their pages. One of the elected officials stated open meetings are the appropriate forums for his opinions, not his social media pages.

While using social media to inform was a primary reason given for utilizing it as a tool with citizens, some elected officials did express their openness and willingness to state their opinions via social media. This was generally only if they felt strongly about a particular item or topic, such as a tax increase. While some are more conservative about sharing their opinion because they want to see how people feel and avoid drama, others like to post their opinion and watch where the dialogue goes because those opinions do play a role in the decision making process on items related to their municipality.

Some of the elected officials expressed more concerns with asking for opinions via social media while others loved this feature. Some of the interviewees have utilized social media to ask about potential millage rate increases, the location of a new city hall, and opinions on red light cameras. The goal is to get them engaged, with some choosing to respond and others simply watching the dialogue happen. Some of the participants stated they wanted to ask for more feedback and opinion, while also understanding the need to be careful, as it is a tool and not necessarily a comprehensive sample of the true population of the municipality. Due to the low number of responses in relation to total population sizes for their municipalities, several elected officials stated they do not use this feature because it represents a "vocal minority" and is not very professional. There was a desire for the cities to understand social media more in order to utilize social media more effectively. Others stated they will ask for opinions sometimes and invite citizens to share their concerns but very few citizens actually engage or respond. There was also concern with elected officials not being able to have enough time to post everything that is needed for citizens to form educated opinions. Lastly, one elected official stated there was not a need to ask for their opinions, as citizens will post their opinions regardless. He focuses more

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on engaging those that do not agree with him and feels that aspect is what is missing in today's society.

While several elected officials were quick to say they utilize social media for all three purposes, a few also stated they do not share their opinion or ask for the opinion of others often. One stated she wants to but does not know how. Others mentioned all three strategies are helpful when investigating the whole picture and gaining insight into varying perspectives. Additionally, it is great for instantaneous feedback, such as posting an idea or picture and quickly getting responses. One mentioned he appreciated the WhatsApp platform because he can engage in all three strategies, especially since other commissioners/councilmembers are not in the group he created. One of them also noted there is perceived value in all three types of posts because it is coming from an elected official and not the city.

4.5.2 Do You Use Social Media More for Broadcasting Information or Gathering Information?

A majority of elected officials stated they utilize social media more for broadcasting information out to their citizens. Twenty-eight of them stated this was what they are currently doing, five said they use it more for gathering information, eight stated both, and one said neither, as he only uses it occasionally. While some stated they utilize it more for broadcasting information while still gathering feedback, there were some individuals who stated they use it solely for broadcasting out information. The reasons for avoiding the gathering information aspect of social media included not wanting to be involved in arguments, not wanting to gather information from only a small segment of residents, and usually making decisions on their own set of values and being true to who they are as a person in their elected official role.

While the initial intent of the question assumed gathering information from citizens, several of the participants referenced gathering information from news sources as opposed to citizens. Some of the interviewees expressed interest in wanting to gather information but wanting more guidance on finding ways to do it effectively as others mentioned they are trying but getting little response from citizens. There were several indirect methods mentioned for gathering information, such as monitoring certain pages and groups to get a better sense of the municipality's culture. For the one that does not really use social media much (mainly for the budget and emergency situations, such as hurricanes), he stated most people do not really care and he is able to gain more traction with his posts because he does not use it that often. "Nobody gives a crap but when I find something they do care about then I will post," he stated. He also indicated that his posts usually get a lot of shares and more responses because of the increased reach from the shares.

4.5.3 Do You Post about Controversial Matters? Do You Engage in Dialogue Regarding Controversial Matters?

About half of the elected officials interviewed stated they will post about controversial matters but only seventeen stated they would engage in dialogue regarding them. Some of them will get to a point where they stop engaging if they feel it is not worth the time anymore. They are not afraid of engaging to try and correct misinformation but one stated "it gets to the point where you feel like you are just beating your head against the wall." Some of them will not usually engage when it is opinion based and not if another council member is participating in the discussion. There were eight participants who stated it depends on the individuals involved and the matter as to whether or not they will engage in the controversial discussion; most often they

will choose to message the individuals privately rather than posting publicly. They have experienced receiving nasty comments back even though they stated they were only trying to share facts. When analyzing those willing to potentially post and/or engage in controversial matters, this number is just a little over half of the interviewees (twenty-five).

For the twenty-one that stated they post about controversial matters, the spectrum varied. On one end of the spectrum, the participants stated they would if they needed to correct information but really try to get to the root of the issue and may only correspond offline about the issue. They will not usually engage and believe the conversation is more productive when it is private. Although, one elected official stated he would if it was constructive and mentioned affordable housing as an example. One said they will respond with a "thank you" but will not get into an argument. Some expressed the need for only participating in those types of posts if they were with residents and about local issues affecting their respective communities. Another one stated he does without realizing it was controversial until the comments start appearing. One stated that it is almost impossible to get away from controversial posts in a small town. On the other end of the spectrum, there were those who had no issues with controversial posts and dialogue and stated that they enjoy them. They expressed interest in knowing what people are thinking. They will post their own opinion and invite people to participate in the discussion. One of the elected officials stated he posts the issue along with the other side of the argument so people can have all of the facts. Another interviewee stated he would use it for advocacy of an issue, while another interviewee stated it depends- every now and then he will try to stir the pot. One of the elected officials mentioned the controversial item facing their municipality regarding sea level rise. He posted his opinion after listening and learning first, and stated he did not mind

people disagreeing with him and chose to engage. He did express it needs some boundaries due to time constraints. Lastly, one of the elected officials stated it seems everything is controversial. He had remembered two instances where he upset a lot of people related to a national issue and one related to a local issue. He shared that citizen opinions and comments do not affect what he chooses to post, however. He continues because he feels certain citizens are trying to get him to stop.

About half of the elected officials stated they try not to post about controversial items and typically will not engage in controversial dialogue, either. Some of the responses included, "no, I stay out of that; nothing good can come from it," and "no, there are so many critics out there; I'm not going to open that up." Several elected officials stated they try to keep their pages more positive and attempt to stay away from anything controversial. Others stated items "might go over the citizens' heads" and it is best to wait sometimes. For those stating they would not engage in dialogue regarding controversy, they mentioned other forms of communication. These included calling them, messaging them privately, inviting them to meet in person, or inviting them to send an email. Several mentioned the citizens almost never take them up on the offer. Other elected officials stated they would not engage because they either do not have time or they do not feel anything they say will change someone's mind about an issue or change the way people feel about them, personally. Many of the participants stated they oftentimes just ignore the comments and do not respond.

4.5.4 Do You Have Sponsored Posts? Do You Reach Out More to Those Who Engage You or Do You Attempt to Reach Those Not Engaged?

Even though eighteen of the elected officials stated they do sponsored posts, twelve of them stated they only do it during campaign season and do not really see the value in it otherwise. The remaining six stated they still utilize sponsored posts in order to be more proactive and inform people that are not necessarily on their page of issues they may care about. Twenty-four stated they do not do sponsored posts currently.

Understanding sponsored posts costs money, an invite and friend request question was posed to the participants. Fifteen stated they are constantly looking for people to add on social media and will utilize proactive approaches to reach out to people in their communities. Some of them will share their own posts in some of the citizen run, city related groups in order to broaden their reach. Six stated they were somewhat in the middle or indifferent and twenty-one stated they generally wait for others to find them. Some of the responses included being very selective, not having much time, wanting to improve in this area, being afraid of trolls, and only accepting requests from people they know are safe.

4.5.5 Have You Ever Blocked People or Deleted Comments?

The results for this question were almost 50/50, with twenty stating they have never blocked anyone or deleted comments and twenty-two stating they have blocked people or deleted comments. There were several selected officials who admitted they have not felt they needed to block anyone or delete any comments but they are open to it if they felt it was needed. There were several who stated they would not block anyone or delete any comments because of the potential legal ramifications and the fact that there is very little to no case law yet regarding this

matter. One stated the city attorney told him he was not allowed to block anyone. Some enjoy leaving even the hateful and negative comments up because they are big defenders of the first amendment and feel people will be able to see how that person truly is with the comments they leave. Additionally, one elected official stated, "negative comments can sometimes be opportunities for positive if turned around and used to your advantage if you are smart about it." There were several who stated they were not okay with blocking anyone because they have the right to access information but they are open to deleting comments. Several elected officials mentioned they felt a way around potential legal trouble from deleting comments is utilizing the "hide" feature for comments on Facebook. They will do this if the comment is vulgar or inappropriate, especially if attacking someone else.

The ones who stated they have block people and/or deleted comments did not have any concerns with their decisions and felt justified in their actions. One mentioned she blocked someone on Twitter and then shortly stopped using Twitter altogether. One mentioned just as the mayor sets the tone for council/commission meetings, an elected official sets the tone for their Facebook page as to what will and will not be tolerated. Several felt it is their page and they are able to do what they want. Criteria for deleting posts included if it is offensive, not a resident, 'F' bombs, something stupid, inappropriate, bad information, attacking posts, obnoxious. There was one who said she deleted a comment where someone was attacking the police officers but she did message the poster about it privately.

4.5.6 Have You Noticed Any Trends with Age, Gender or Race?

The question regarding trends with age, gender, or race was posed to gain a better understanding on how elected officials felt they were doing in terms of their own personal

attempts in reaching the community. Additionally, it was used to understand if any themes existed regarding active citizens. However, just over half stated they did not notice any trends. Only three commented regarding any trends with gender, but all three stated they felt females were a little more active. One stated he felt the males tend to just watch but the females interact more. Three of the elected officials stated they felt their followers on social media were very diverse in the aspects mentioned. Seven mentioned their followers were diverse in terms of race but that most of them were Caucasian. Some of the elected officials mentioned a very diverse age range, 20-60 year olds and then a little narrower of 35-65. A few mentioned the age range of 30-50 but were not sure if that was because their own age fell into that range, therefore influencing the age of their followers. Six of the elected officials mentioned they felt the older citizens are more engaged and want information. While some of their followers are younger, the older ones tend to be the most active. A couple elected officials referenced their particular area as being more affluent and Caucasian, with one elected official who is in his 70's, stating the younger citizens expect him to have a social media presence.

4.5.7 Are You Doing Other Things Outside of Social Media to Help Engage Citizens that May Not Use Social Media?

In order to better understand how elected officials viewed social media engagement, they were asked about their engagement methods outside of their social media use. Some were quick to state other strategies they were utilizing, while others had to think about it for a minute. Some of the most common answers included town halls, community events, Home Owner Association meetings, belonging to other groups, utilizing emails, listservs, and traditional calling and texting. About four mentioned writing articles and editorials in the local newspaper, while one

commented the newspaper does not report on facts correctly. There were quite a few who stressed the importance of "not just Facebook but face-time." These strategies included going door-to-door even when not campaigning, getting personal with citizens and building relationships, holding office hours, creating an event with opportunities for citizens to talk in person, and sending out thank you cards. Lastly, there were a few who touched on not really doing anything outside of social media to engage citizens, either feeling social media is the best tool or simply not having enough time.

4.5.8 Section Summary

There appeared to be a mix of social media posts targeted toward one-way and two-way communication. However, several stated they utilize social media more for one-way communications due to time constraints, the Sunshine Law, better control, and aligning more with their vision of social media's purpose. While sharing opinions and asking for opinions of others may lead to more engagement, there were legal concerns and fears of only hearing from vocal minorities. They did not want to get into arguments or lose control of the situation. When it came to gathering information, some stated they use social media to gather information from other sources, such as news sites, and not necessarily from their constituents. There was also a concern of not many of the residents posting responses for them to assess. When it came to controversial posts, some avoided them altogether. Others, who do engage in them, stated they prefer to engage with the citizens privately and not necessarily publicly. Some choose to post desiring to correct misinformation, while others appreciate the advocacy aspect of rallying people together online about an issue.

When it came to intentionally engaging citizens and being open to everyone, there were some concerns and diverse feedback. Of those who pay for sponsored posts seeking to reach those they are not connected with, this seemed to be done primarily only during election time. While some stated they would actively seek to add people on their social media pages through free methods, there were some who still stated they wait for people to find them and not necessarily attempt to reach out to others proactively due to fears related to the unknown. For those that are engaging on their pages, around half of the elected officials stated they have blocked people or deleted certain comments. Those individuals feel justified in their actions; those who stated they have not either have not needed to or felt as though they are not allowed to under the Sunshine Law. There was little discussion on any need for allowing comments or individuals regardless of their behavior or type of post. When discussing trends on their social media pages, it appeared the ones engaging were the ones who fell into the elected official's own circle. While many stated social media has been a great tool to engage with their citizens and keep them informed, several of them are doing other things outside of social media which they feel is important, as well. These strategies include email, phone calls, and face to face time.

4.6 Factors that Potentially Encourage or Discourage Social Media Usage

While determining how social media may have an effect open government community engagement levels, there may be certain external factors that play a role in social media use decisions. The following questions posed external factors related to laws, respective cities, and social media users.

4.6.1 Does Your Municipality Encourage or Discourage Your Social Media Usage?

Only two of the elected officials stated they felt their municipality encouraged the elected officials to utilize social media. One of them stated their city used to be drastically against it because of sunshine laws but they have changed their mindset and are more active with the official city pages, as well. The other interviewee stated the city appreciates their use and views the elected officials as the face of government. The citizens do not respond as well to the city page as they do to the elected officials' pages; it appears the citizens appreciate information when it appears to come from a person rather than the government. The elected official also stated he believes there is opportunity for more training, however.

Fifteen stated they were unsure of their city's perspective or the city was neutral. Several of them mentioned their cities have their own pages so they did not feel they were too concerned with their own decision to utilize social media. One of them stated the city "leaves them to do their own thing and they do their own thing." Even though the city does not really encourage or discourage the elected officials in their use of social media, they did inform the elected officials to not violate the Sunshine Law, to not comment on other elected officials' pages within their municipality, and of the need to save posts for public records. Public records were the main reason one of the elected officials does not use other social media platforms; she is unsure how she can save deleted posts.

The twenty-five elected officials who stated their cities discouraged their social media use, mentioned their cities having similar concerns regarding the Sunshine Law and certain fears. One stated their city was afraid of a scandal happening, while others mentioned their cities' concerns with the negativity and complaints. Some of the practical advice given to them if they

did choose to utilize social media was being careful with quasi-judicial items and being sure social media does not act as an electronic conduit. One city advised their members to create separate pages and another cautioned them saying "social media is difficult to use as a communication tool." One of the elected officials stated his city tried to put an item on the agenda to police the council members via social media but council did not approve it. Another interviewee mentioned he was the only one utilizing social media for his small town and his city actually implemented a social media policy. His city was trying to censor his posts from anything related to the city because they did not want people thinking he represented the city. However, he received a lot of support via social media and at the council meeting.

4.6.2 Do You Have Any Concerns with the Sunshine Law? Do You Believe This is Influencing Your Social Media Use or Lack Thereof?

Considering the Sunshine Law affects whether or not municipalities encourage or discourage social media use by their elected officials, it is critical to see if the Sunshine Law plays a role in elected officials choosing to utilize social media. Thirty-one stated they have concerns with Sunshine Law. They mentioned being extremely cautious with utilizing social media so they do not jeopardize themselves. They expressed their desire to make sure they adhere to the law; especially one who stated another councilmember is constantly requesting public records. Several elected officials stated they wait to post about issues until they have already been handled in a meeting so they do not violate the Sunshine Law. One interviewee commented that it would be easier to just not utilize social media, and another stated the Sunshine Law is why he does not advocate or take positions on issues. Other concerns dealt with multiple commissioners/councilmembers being tagged in a post, being very careful not to

comment if another colleague has commented on a post, unsure if doing the record keeping correctly, calling the attorney before making posts, and avoiding issues so it does not look like he is in support of something that may come before a council/commission meeting. Some of these examples include allowing dogs on the beach and height restrictions. One stated the Sunshine Law is the reason they have not created a separate page yet for their elected official role; he believes if you set up a separate page, you cannot delete anything so he is using his personal page for now. Another interviewee struggled with understanding what it is she needs to capture from her social media pages because she is still a person and not just an elected official.

Several mentioned the law is very gray and the legal guidance is not clear. One stated she was a stickler for following protocol but it is difficult to do when the rules are unclear and have not quite been defined yet within the social media context. Several mentioned the unknown and wondering where the line is exactly. Some expressed frustration because their colleagues will post misinformation and they are not able to respond because of the Sunshine Law. There were frustrations regarding the decision to not share opinions, censoring posts, and choosing not to respond at times in fear of violating the law.

While one was pretty adamant about hating the Sunshine Law, others stated they understood the intent behind it but it made their jobs very difficult when trying to utilize social media. There were uncertainties around when they are able to comment, when they can delete comments, and what is expected in terms of transparency. There were concerns the law creates a lot of barriers and contributes to ineffectiveness as it poses a very difficult standard to comply with. One stated the Sunshine Law

Makes liars out of innocent people. I hate it and it bothers me that the state is exempt; the law is pretty strict and it's annoying. Others aren't on social media and it's fine for them to see our posts as long as it's public. To me, it's such a dark and murky area, it's gray.

Another elected official stated "the law is a disaster and makes it so you can't get anything accomplished and prohibits us from moving forward." He mentioned he had a complaint filed against him when trying to tell someone he did not know the answer and to reach out to another elected official. He fears it is causing people to not engage as much as they would like to via social media.

Eleven stated they felt comfortable with understanding Sunshine Law and what they can and cannot do. The aspects mentioned were communicating online with other elected officials and maintaining appropriate records. Some stated they are not connected with their colleagues on social media. Others stated they are but do not communicate with them about issues. One stated he had to inform someone on their council that they could be connected with each other online because she was unsure of the rules. One shared they can communicate and engage freely online as long as it is not something on the agenda. Another stated they do not look at the other pages and do not really care what they are doing. In regards to maintaining records, several felt confident in this area because their city pays to have their social media pages archived.

Not many touched on the issue of blocking citizens or deleting comments in regards to the Sunshine Law. However, many stressed the importance for the laws to catch up with the technological advances. There was a lot of frustration expressed and a need for the rules to be more clearly defined, whether it is revising the Sunshine Law or doing away with it. One stated

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they feel a lot of people are afraid to use social media because of that law. Another stated she

was not sure if she should be sharing certain information on her page. Concerning public records,

several felt there was not a good system or method for tracking everything and there were issues

trying to correct and capture misinformation. One stated since you cannot delete posts or

comments, there should be a timeframe for this. "At a point information becomes declassified or

destroyed- what is that for us? How long? Two terms?"

4.6.3 Have You Encountered Any Negative Experiences?

Twenty-seven of the forty-two interviewees stated they had encountered negative

experiences on social media. At least six of the elected officials mentioned the word "trolls" as

individuals who do not actually care about the issue. One of the interviewees stated she stopped

allowing people to post on her page because of a person who would not stopping posting on her

page. Other elected officials mentioned people stealing their profiles and creating fake accounts,

random accusations, misinformation, name-calling, sarcastic and condescending

questioning/complaining, personal attacks, and hassling. One of the newer elected officials stated

she has had more negative experiences than positives. "Damned if you do, damned if you don't.

In regards to the budget right now, people will put words in your mouth. Name-calling. Bashing.

It will not stop me from trying." Another stated someone accused him of being all in with

developers. He does not mind the name-calling but does not like it when people question his

character. Another elected official stated social media "gives a voice to someone that has no

money and no credibility and allows them to cast some shade out there." One of the interviewees

stated they stopped using Nextdoor because the "vocal minority" started bashing him on the site.

There were two examples where people were attacked for their posts regarding other elected

officials. People on their social media page were mad when a municipal elected official posted a picture with a state elected official even though it was just a picture with no type of endorsement caption. Another was called terrible names and people used foul language since he was vocal about being a Trump supporter and Republican. The drama online has caused some of the elected officials to almost give up stating "people are set in their ways and I'm done trying to educate as much." One of the interviewees was a little more optimistic stating social media will be misused by people with agendas- it is best just to ignore it. Negativity is just an opportunity because it is really just bottled up frustration so if you can defuse the emotion, then you can come to a place of reason.

Fifteen stated they had not encountered a negative experience that they could recall. For the most part, they are positive experiences with typical "trolls" every now and then. One stated while they had not experienced anything negative, one of their colleagues had some negative experiences causing her to not use social media anymore. Others said they had seen negative things happen to others, as well. There were a few who stated they do not let anything potentially negative affect them and simply look at them as opportunities.

4.6.4 Section Summary

Over half of the elected officials stated their municipalities discourage the use of social media. Whether that is accurate or not, the feelings and perceptions the elected officials have may be influencing the way they are utilizing social media currently. The Sunshine Law is influencing the types of posts elected officials post and how often they post. Some of the elected officials had concerns with public records and the time needed to capture posts and when they should. Others stated they do not post about issues because other elected officials could see the

posts and potentially violate the Sunshine Law. Many had concerns that the Law was unclear and causing people to not engage as much as they would like via social media. Negativity did not seem to be a factor as much regarding the decision to utilize social media. Most either indicated they had negative experiences on social media or have seen others go through negative experiences. While the negative experiences may not cause the elected officials to stop utilizing social media, it may affect the types of posts they make and the extent of their use.

4.7 Social Media in Practice and Feedback Received from Citizens

After assessing factors related to the elected officials' social media usage, practical methods were addressed. The following questions and responses assess potential guidelines and rules affecting how the media pages operate. Perceived citizen characteristics are also analyzed in regards to their actions and behavior.

4.7.1 Do You Have Any Rules Posted on Your Social Media Sites?

Four of the elected officials addressed some type of formal rules posted; one stated they hired someone to run their social media and another stated their rule is they have to review and approve all posts. The third stated the he posted a disclaimer that it is his opinions and not those of the city and a disclaimer about Sunshine Law. The last one has a line that warns people they are open to public record if they post. The others stated they do not have any rules posted. Some stated that it is not their place and there is no need. Legally, one stated they would not do anything that violates the first amendment so it would not matter anyway. Others stated they would just remove something if needed because it is their page.

One went as far to say people do not listen to rules so it does not really matter. Others stated they had not really thought about it but it is probably a good idea to post some rules, especially as it seems people are looking for an online fight rather than trying to find answers. One stated, "There should be some sort of rule book or policies for social media pages. The city should be able to monitor it and have full access because I am their representative."

4.7.2 Do You Have Any Goals for Your Social Media Usage?

Most (thirty-three) state they do not have any specific goals for their social media use and typically just post as needed. Some of them did say they have thought about it before and would like to establish some type of routine. One stated they were nervous to commit to something consistent due to time constraints. For the eleven who stated they do have goals, some were more specific than others. One simply stated he is extremely strategic with his posts, where every post, even the more personal ones, serves a specific purpose. Others had goals of posting every day, once a week, or every three weeks because they do not want to post too much. Others said they aim to post several times a week and attempt to stay very interactive. One elected official posts every Monday a highlight of the week, while another does daily birthday posts to those who are celebrating a birthday. One of the interviewees mentioned there are certain times that are better to post if you are trying to increase your reach and engagement.

4.7.3 Does Anyone Else Help Manage Your Social Media Sites Besides You?

There were twenty-eight who stated they do not have anyone else who helps manage their social media pages. Some of their responses included "only during election time," "I wish," "wouldn't want anyone else to help," and "no, but if I did they would have to know the rules

very well." The most common answer given for the fourteen who stated they were not the only one who monitors their social media page, was their spouse. Besides their spouse, it was an assistant or aide.

4.7.4 Have You Found Those Outside Your Jurisdiction Participating in Your Posts?

Almost everyone stated they have noticed people outside of their jurisdiction participating in their posts. Typically, they are special interest groups, other elected officials, people who used to live in the city, or people in neighboring cities. There were five who stated they were unsure and they were not sure why they would if they were not residents.

4.7.5 Are the Ones Participating Online the Ones That Show Up to Your Council/Commission Meetings?

Almost everyone stated not many people show up to the meetings in general. Six of the elected officials stated the online users show up and even provide live updates of what is happening at the meeting to online groups. While not all of the online users show up, one interviewee definitely feels there is a correlation between online activity and public participation. Five stated they were unsure and four said it was about 50/50. Typically the people will just email or find a way to get their voices heard if they could not show up in person. The remaining twenty-seven participants stated they do not show up or even make a percentage. One referred to the online users as "keyboard cowboys, strong behind a keyboard but won't come out in public." This interviewee was different from the previously mentioned interviewee who used the term "keyboard warriors." Other comments included "the loudest mouths don't actually show up to anything," "they are not actually involved- they have never been to a meeting," "invites them to come but they never do," "they are just complainers with their opinions," "wish they would

come so they would understand what is going on," and "people just want to be heard and choose to follow through on a different level." One elected official stated people do not have time to come to meetings, which is why social media is an excellent tool.

4.7.6 Do You Believe Your Social Media Use Has Helped Citizens Become More Aware of What is Happening within Your Municipality?

While a majority of the participants stated they felt their social media use had helped citizens become more aware of what was happening within their municipality, four elected officials could not say it had. They either said it was a very small impact or not yet because they do not post that often. One stated not within their city but their posts have helped those in the surrounding areas. Another said they were not sure because people become reactionary and stretch the truth. The remaining thirty-eight stated their use has helped citizens become more aware. Some of these responses included words and phrases, such as "without a doubt," "definitely," "100% absolutely," "probably," and "definitely, especially during the hurricanes." Others stated it might not have the biggest impact but it still has helped. One said only to the degree the citizens actually pay attention. There was a desire to reach more people while also recognizing the citizens also have a voice to complain with increased awareness. One of the interviewees stated this is "why the city clerk hated my page. Most business was done in the dark and people don't really go to our meetings. I became a threat because I was bringing light to issues." Several mentioned receiving feedback from citizens that their social media use has been helpful to them. One elected official stated, "It's been a very valuable tool to respond to people. People want to know things and we can help them. I do it because it's the right thing. How important it may be is an open question- open for debate."

4.7.7 Do You Believe Your Social Media Use Has Either Directly or Indirectly Caused Confusion or Perpetuated Misinformation?

After investigating whether or not the elected officials felt their social media use had helped citizens become more aware of what is happening, they were asked if they felt their use had either directly or indirectly cause confusion or perpetuated misinformation. Twenty-eight stated they did not feel their social media has caused any confusion. The responses varied from "quite the opposite," and "not me, but other commissioners, yes," to "hope not," "don't think so," and "no, though some may say it has." Several of the interviewees mentioned the goal of their social media use is to try and correct misinformation, especially if they see misinformation on social media. However, there was a concern that facts do not seem to be believed in this day and age. Strategies some of them mentioned to ensure their use does not cause confusion include sending posts to the city administrator prior to posting about big issues, keeping posts factual, being very clear and concise.

Fourteen stated their social media use has caused confusion, directly and/or indirectly. Several of the interviewees stated they have posted incorrect information but attempted to clear it up and edited the post. One person mentioned they put something up that was unclear and someone called him out for it. There could be a risk if not done correctly. Another one stated, "I put something up that was wrong before and issued a correction. I left the wrong information up and posted an update. It's possible people may read one sentence and run with it." A couple elected officials stated their pages might have caused misinformation because of other people's comments on their page or another councilmember twisting his posts. Some of the elected officials were unsure stating there is always a concern, especially if people do not understand the

issue. No one can say they are perfect. Others stated it has happened when people have misconstrued or misinterpreted their posts or comments. One stated he was not sure if he was to blame for that, however; he is unsure how he could say things differently. Others expressed the issue of people not agreeing with certain events or ideas, which causes opinions and potential misinformation to perpetuate. One stated they see the confusion coming from other elected officials' pages and it is "annoying because you can't go on their page and correct the misinformation."

4.7.8 Section Summary

Most of the elected officials did not have any rules or goals for their social media pages. There was a desire there for it but something they either had not thought about or have not taken the time to formulate. While most stated they take care of their own social media pages, there were several who stated others help them with their posts and monitoring. Almost everyone stated they have noticed people outside of their jurisdiction participating in their posts. While some stated those participating online do show up to meetings, most stated they do not. These responses typically had a negative connotation and disdain for residents who want to complain online but not actually do anything about it, such as showing up to a meeting. Most agreed their social media sites have helped citizens become more aware of what was happening in their municipalities, while some understood the risk of potential misinformation or confusion coming from their posts.

4.8 Perceived Role Citizens Play

While the desire to inform and engage citizens has been expressed by several elected officials, more specific questions were asked in order to assess the value placed on the engagement. These questions focused more on how the activity of citizens affected decisions regarding their respective municipalities. The goal was to assess how participation levels via social media might have impacted the decisions elected officials made, as well as collaborative efforts.

4.8.1 Has Citizen Response Online Influenced Your Decision-Making at a Council/Commission Meeting?

Nineteen of the elected officials stated citizen response has influenced their decision making at a council or commission meeting. Three of those nineteen stated citizen response online reaffirmed or reinforced the opinion they already had, such as whether or not to allow dogs in parks. Several mentioned how it is important ethically to be open to citizen response online. One stated, "I'm not sure how it can't because we are public servants. It doesn't change principles but does help to steer my decisions – we are there to serve people within the will of the law." Several mentioned how they will read every response online and weigh it alongside information they already have. Since they are representing the citizens they are serving, it has changed how they investigate the issues. One stated, "You can make a new decision based on new information."

There were several examples given in regards to how citizen feedback impacted their decisions. One changed his mind regarding allowing dogs on the beach after seeing citizen responses online. Two mentioned how they were willing to listen to all sides and they changed

their minds on a tax increase. He was very much against it at first; however, the people online helped make up his mind that it was needed. Other areas where citizens impacted decisions included new projects, trash and water issues, a new hotel, and shopping areas. One stated,

> Absolutely! A gentleman brought an issue of crime to me and I engaged with him and ended up calling the police chief – not sure if I've changed my mind yet but I like having a finger on the pulse of town. It brings issues never heard of and helps me to get to the root of them.

Another one mentioned how after trying to educate the citizens on a certain issue, it was not worth it anymore so he just went along with what the community stated they wanted online.

There were two who mentioned they were unsure. They will listen to other arguments but they typically do their own research and then take a stand. The remaining twenty-one stated citizen response online has not affected their decision-making. While their feedback online never swayed their decisions, some did state it made them feel better about their decision already and glad they were able to get citizens involved. There were a couple who stated they value citizen opinion but it has to be weighed against the experts' time and research as the citizens may not have all of the facts. One stated they struggle with allowing it to impact them because of the lack of data and it not necessarily being a true representation of the majority. Another said citizen response online has not influenced his decisions because he only posts about items after the fact so he does not violate the Sunshine Law. Other responses included, "absolutely not," "nope, I go with my gut feeling," "not that I can think of," and "not yet." One mentioned he prefers to talk to people offline about issues, while another stated he tries to avoid reading the responses online, especially in the groups because it is annoying and does not affect his decisions. There were

several who stated they may see posts online but they do not affect their decisions; the ones who actually take the time to come in person and show up at a meeting carries a lot more weight for them.

4.8.2 In What Ways Have You Seen Collaboration Take Place Online?

Eight of the participants said they were unsure if they had seen collaboration take place online and seven said they have not seen it happen. The remaining twenty-seven stated they have seen collaboration happen online and provided examples. One stated she utilized social media before she was elected to organize people together to get their city to spray paint soccer fields; she stated the city received so many calls/emails that it crashed their system. Since getting elected, she has seen citizens rally together online to get answers regarding paying parking for a firework event when the city did not end up providing a firework show. There were several who mentioned citizens organizing themselves online to host a park cleanup or cleanups after hurricanes. Some of the other examples given included:

- People went online and collaborated on how a new Dollar General should look and feel for their city and what they could do to help the store stay in business
- People formed a volunteer group for the new dogs on the beach ordinance
- People wanted to stop a hotel from coming in so they utilized social media to create a petition and invited people to rally
- Dogs in parks
- Golf carts in the city
- Splash Park funding

- Citizens went online and utilized social media to link people to change.org on a street renaming issue

- A controversial mural in the city

- Sea turtles

- Resolution regarding banning straws and plastic bags

- People were complaining online about officers being rude when pulling people over and it lead to a discussion at a council meeting

- Fire fee

One of the interviewees stated without the social media platform, several citizens would not have knowledge about certain items. Social media allows citizens a channel for them to organize themselves to stay informed and engaged. It allows them to navigate information for themselves and leads to them being more empowered. Several elected officials mentioned how social media allows citizens to organize themselves so a lot of people show up to meetings about an issue that is important to them. However, one interviewee stated that it is usually nothing productive. There were a few that stated they have seen collaboration happen but not with them personally. Others stated they have seen it happen in groups citizens create online but most of the time they are just a place for them to complain.

4.8.3 Section Summary

About half of the elected officials stated citizen response has affected their decision making, while the other half stated their comments online have not had an impact on the decisions they have made. While some stated online comments would absolutely not affect their decisions, there were others who stated they were open to it even though it has not happened yet.

While discussing the collaborations online, most of the elected officials mentioned several collaborations they have seen. However, the collaborations were not necessarily started on one of their own posts, but rather on a separate page or group that was able to gain traction.

<u>4.9 Final Thoughts</u>

After the interview questions were asked to all of the elected officials, each of them were given the opportunity to add any final thoughts they had regarding social media use as an elected official. This opportunity was given in case there was additional insight that could be gained that was not covered under the questions posed. The responses given ranged from social media trends to how they see social media being utilized currently.

4.9.1 The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

One of the interviewees stated, "The trend is moving toward elected officials using social media. However, they need to be very careful as it can hurt more than help." He felt it was imperative that elected officials educate themselves and be more thoughtful in their posts, as posts can turn negative very quickly. One mentioned the future being social media and not email. He stated there are too many emails. There were several who touched on the importance of being more thoughtful in how citizens are reached as social media is just going to evolve more and more. One elected official stated, "Facebook allows the user to be a lot more thoughtful in posting, as opposed to Twitter." There was the desire to push more information out to citizens through social media channels, as governments have been last to respond to the social media trend.

There were additional concerns regarding the underutilization of social media. One elected official stated, "Social media is heavily underutilized because of the culture of wearing two different masks; people don't want to expose themselves. It's because of fear. I was fearful at first." One of the elected officials mentioned they feel social media is what helped Trump get elected mainly due to the fact he tweets every day. Some of the elected officials touched on the fact that most people are afraid of rejection. In regards to being an elected official, they are under a microscope. Regarding his social media use, one stated he "started with trying to make everyone happy but soon realized that will not happen." The importance of being proactive and getting feedback was stressed. It is important to learn how to use social media and be open to asking questions. One stated they felt elected officials are the worst when it comes to asking for help.

There were additional fears mentioned regarding the unknown aspects of social media and the loss of control. Anyone can post anything without any facts. While the goal is to inform citizens, people do not want the truth sometimes. There were concerns regarding the whole environment of social media where people accept everything as the truth. There was general discourse over it and some of the elected officials stated it could be very dangerous; they also stated they felt there was nothing they could do about it. One of the elected officials mentioned how after they had a school shooting, people kept putting up fake information and there was nothing she could do about it. Some of the elected officials mentioned difficulty with some of their own colleagues, with comments such as, "they have no clue," "nervous she doesn't understand the Sunshine Law," and "one member posted inflammatory comments on social media so going to have to censure them soon."

There were additional concerns mentioned that contributed to some of the elected officials stating they are choosing not to get any more involved than they need to at this time. While it is a good tool, sometimes it is the same people that are reached; it does not give a true sense of what the majority of people are thinking. One of the elected officials mentioned people screen shoot a lot of posts in her city, which is why she is so nervous to be more active on social media. She wants to give the citizens a glimpse of what is happening in her city, she wants to see who they are and the needs of her community but it is so awful online. There was mention of the numbers of people who actually engage and the quality of their posts. One mentioned they are attackers and she discourages her friends from attempting to engage with them or defend her. They go after people "with fire and fury." There is so much hate and people being mean to each other, saying things online they would never say to your face. "It's given people engagement power that they have never had before."

Some of the comments addressed certain social media strategies the elected officials found helpful regarding their own use. The importance of image was stressed, with understanding a proper balance regarding how personal and active to be on the social media platforms. One interviewee stated, "Be intentional with which platforms you choose to use. A social media page that is not kept up looks a lot worse than not having a page at all." The importance of being engaged with your online citizens was mentioned, as there are certain expectations citizens now have. Social media allows elected officials a way to communicate their message. However, some are very cautious with what they choose to comment. One stated they choose their battles carefully and another mentioned the importance of not commenting on emotion and just stating facts. It is okay to take time to think about how to appropriately respond.

One mentioned the concern of not wanting to say something about state or national issues that could potentially affect him at the local level.

There were several external factors many of the elected officials felt played a role in the way social media is utilized. Some mentioned the age of citizens played a factor, while others thought population of the municipality contributed to levels of engagement. One stated, "part of the issue is the age of the population in your town, the working people of ages 25-45 don't have time for social media." One mentioned the grandparents are only using social media to talk to their grandkids now and teenagers are saying only old people use Facebook now. There was frustration expressed in regards to being a "big city with a small town mentality" and the city not wanting to utilize social media to its fullest potential. There were quite a few who mentioned they believed social media was a better tool for larger cities and less important for the small towns. There was mention of when utilizing social media correctly, it may be used to engage people for a little while, but the hard part is the ever-changing platform.

Factors concerning the first amendment and social media postings were mentioned. One elected official, who mentioned blocking citizens during the interview question, stated at the end of the interview "I 100% support the first amendment. I'm not politically correct and I'm not going to play the game." Another elected official mentioned citizens have rights to first amendment within certain guidelines. The example of not being able to say the word "fire" in the theater was given. Several mentioned wishing there was better guidance as to what and when they should and should not use social media. There was a feeling of missing the mark regarding social media because everyone is utilizing it to engage. Opportunity costs lost were more of a concern than risks of using social media for some of the interviewees. One stated, "Social media

is not really risky, it is more of the user. I share because no one else is and it is hard to do when you aren't really getting paid." Others mentioned they were not concerned with the liability, as they felt social media is the best tool to effectively communicate a message. Several mentioned preferring the traditional public meeting format to express their thoughts. One likes to say things "on the record," while another stated they were hesitant to say something prior and did not want to be accused of making a decision because of a post. There was concern of perception of him basing his decision on something he read online. It was an internal fear he struggled with and did not want people thinking he did not do his due diligence. There were additional comments related to the types of postings and what can occur via social media. One elected official tries not to allow people to make comments he cannot control and another stated social media is not the best environment to share opinion. Some expressed how they have seen social media used to manipulate people and other elected officials bully residents online. One asked, "Is it better to not respond or not post at all? I don't know."

4.10 Section Summary

The forty-two interviews with the municipal elected officials discussed above consisted or a diverse group of individuals in terms of interview responses. There was desire to utilize social media regardless of both positive and negative feelings about social media. Many viewed social media as a great tool to inform their residents, as well as collect information they felt was important. Facebook was the most popular social media site utilized, though there are several other platforms the elected officials are utilizing. The types of posts and frequency vary due to time, municipal opinions, the Sunshine Law, and personal feelings surrounding social media.

Most of the elected officials had no issue utilizing social media to inform, but there were

hesitations regarding the aspects of sharing an opinion or asking for the opinions of others. While some are proactive in their outreach for varying reasons, most stay involved with the circle they are already connected to online. This somewhat controlled environment is further controlled by the deletion of comments and blocking of citizens by some of the elected officials. However, social media is not the only way most of the elected officials are choosing to engage their citizens; several of them are very involved in their communities and appreciate and value the in person dialogue, phone calls, and email strategies, as well.

There was an overwhelming sense of the unknown in regards to how elected officials are utilizing social media. There was little clarity on how to effectively utilize social media and what was allowed. Not only was their expressed hesitation regarding what they should do or can do, there was the additional unknown component and fear of who would be on their pages and what they would be commenting. There was a sense of understanding the benefits of social media, but a lack of confidence in what they were doing or simply just doing what they wanted. There was a hunger for more understanding and better direction, as many expressed they wish they could do more or knew how to do more. However, it is unclear as to what level the elected officials want to use social media. Many enjoyed utilizing it strictly to inform and do not see it as two-way communication, where citizen response online affects their decision-making. There were others that saw the potential for the two-way communication dialogue but were unsure how to effectively control and utilize it appropriately. There were a few who felt confident in their abilities and are using it to effectively engage with their citizens.

4.11 Interview Results- Non-Users

There were twelve municipalities who did not participate in the study but responded saying they do not use social media or their town was too small for social media. There was one city manager that responded on behalf of the city stating the elected officials do not use social media and that the city discourages them from using it. There was another city manager that did not want to forward the request to participate in the study to the elected officials and he attempted to answer on their behalf. There were a total of fifteen elected officials interviewed that do not utilize social media.

The standard questions used for those not utilizing social media can be seen in Appendix C. The interviews were conducted either via phone or in person, were recorded, and notes were taken. The recordings allowed for the opportunity to revisit the interview for accuracy. The interview responses were then organized into themes regarding views on social media from a municipal elected official's point of view. Researcher bias is accepted and encouraged within the ethnographic approach and was utilized to help categorize the themes created and understand the perspective of the elected officials further. Two of the interviewees are from a city that had a commissioner who I was very familiar with; this commissioner was in the news a lot and was not shy in his posts about his feelings on several issues. One of the interviews came from a municipality that also participated in the interview process about their own use of social media so I was able to analyze both sides and assess their feelings on social media. Three of the interviewees also had other municipal elected officials that participated in the study and I was able to draw conclusions about their potential decision not to utilize social media based on their colleagues who utilize it.

The average age of these interviews were slightly older. The population size of their municipalities was little lower. Difference in party affiliation, education, years of service, and future plans were nothing noteworthy between those who use social media and those who do not. Some of the interviewees had used social media in the past and others did express plans to utilize social media in the future for campaign purposes.

4.11.1 Waste of Time/No Value

A majority of the interviewees mentioned how time consuming and counterproductive social media can be for elected officials. Some of these responses included:

- Drain on your time

- Energy put in outweighed the benefits

- Too much give and take

- Waste of time

- A lot of time to maintain and update

- Creates expectations

- Too difficult to track and keep up with public records

- It's one-way communication and is not productive

- Understands the responsibility that comes with it

- Was not worth the time

- Counterproductive; face to face is better

- Not sure it draws enough attention

One of the elected officials stated social media engagement was more of the city's job and not her responsibility. Another said she would rather spend her time researching agenda items. She stated her job is to move policy forward and make sure the city is fiscally sound.

Since these elected officials are not utilizing social media, they were asked about other engagement strategies they are using; these answers were similar to the answers given by the ones who do utilize social media, as well. These included responding to emails and phone calls, meeting one-on-one, hosting town halls, Home Owner Association meetings, events, newsletters, email lists, and being out in the community a lot. There was nothing significant or new that was mentioned that the non-social media users are doing that the social media users are not.

4.11.2 Lack of Guidance and Fears

When asked if they had any concerns about the Sunshine Law, most of the elected officials stated they did. For the ones who did not, they stated they were not really concerned but would just need to be careful when using it. One mentioned another elected official potentially seeing colleagues' opinion on their own social media post. Another one mentioned how ethics charges can come up even if someone did nothing wrong. One of them mentioned how she looked into the consequences of an ethics charge because she felt one of her colleagues had all the power and she had none. She stated even if she was allowed to comment, he would delete it. "He would bring up items before a meeting and twist it in a way that it spread misinformation. I felt like my hands were tied because I can't respond. He is a master manipulator." Several elected officials commented stating the discussion needs to happen at meetings, not online.

For those who stated they do have social media concerns, there were many reasons given. One stated the Sunshine Law was a huge part of her decision to not utilize social media. The

most popular reasons centered on the Sunshine Law needing to catch up to social media by updating its rules. They would want better rules and guidelines before utilizing social media. One stated, "People are blocking people but you shouldn't be allowed to block. I would want everything set up to handle those issues." The other most common reason given centered on social media being a conduit for information where elected officials are able to see their colleagues' posts, thoughts, opinions, and misinformation. They did not want to violate the Sunshine Law in this manner. Other answers regarding their concerns were:

- Not being able to respond to other elected officials

- Not enough protection for elected officials currently; would feel better if it was an even playing field

- Hard to keep up with the public records requirement

- Fear of the unknown, especially with Facebook

- Afraid to comment because it could potentially open up illegal activity

- The Sunshine Law does more harm than good. People who will be unethical are going to break the law regardless. It is prohibiting good people from doing good. Bad people are already breaking it. Personal ethics should outweigh the law.

When asked about the how their respective city felt about social media, there were a variety of answers given, with differing perspectives. A few stated their city utilizes social media and they do a great job of it. When discussing how the city uses it in practice, one stated he believed the city could edit comments but he could not as an elected official. Another stated their city prohibits comments and only uses it for one-way communication. Lastly, one stated their city uses social media but they are a small town so it really is not needed. There were several

comments regarding the city discouraging the elected officials' use of social media. The responses given were:

- Risk outweighs the reward

- Not using it is safer

- City attorney advised against it

- City discouraged it because it is a small town; don't feel it is needed and not an effective form of communication

- City discourages from using it because people turn it around for negative

- City attorney has grave concerns about it

One of the elected officials expressed a desire to utilize social media but stated the City Attorney told him not to as it would expose the city to risk.

> If a commissioner responded to another commissioner, because of Sunshine, the city would be liable. They basically all but prohibited me from using it. The city does have a page but I wish I could have a page. Is Sunshine Law a violation of the first amendment?

Another elected official stated the online crowd is a vocal minority who are against almost everything. Their city had them sign a civility oath for social media stating they would not partake in certain actions. A couple of the elected officials stated their cities told them not to read their colleagues' posts and to not post their own opinions. They were also told to not allow comments, that way their colleagues would not be able to see those thoughts, as well. One of the interviewees stated posts look better if they are coming from the city rather than an elected

official because sometimes their colleagues' posts are crazy. They believe the city has more

resources and their city even hired someone to run all of their social media platforms.

4.11.3 Misinformation, Lack of Accountability, and Loss of Control

Almost all of the elected officials not currently utilizing social media mentioned the

epidemic of misinformation and "fake news." They are only seeing the negative and not much

positive. They had major concerns regarding the credibility of certain posts and sources and how

people can change what someone said and misquote them. They had concerns regarding

individuals taking posts they see on social media as fact; social media has allowed a lot of people

to now have a platform where they can claim expert status and share their thoughts as if they

were experts. Perception is fact and they wish they were able to give them all of the facts to

make informed decisions. This lead into other concerns regarding people forming strong

opinions over inadequate information as they are only getting small snippets. Social media is not

an effective form of interaction as it trivializes complex issues. There is no in depth analysis and

official distance is promoted. The value of dialogue is reduced and there is no risk of personal

interaction; people are more focused on winning an argument. There was concern of newly

elected officials finding credibility in comments when maybe they should not; there may be an

internal struggle of voting on what is best versus voting based on a comment from some random

person. One elected official stated social media is not good for making policy decisions.

There were multiple concerns regarding the lack of accountability with social media use.

The fact that individuals can remain anonymous or create false personas, acting in ways people

would not act in person, alarmed a lot of the elected officials. While the intent of individuals can

be lost via a social media platform, other intents can become evident rather quickly. There was

concern about giving people a voice who maybe should not have that voice, as there is no regulating their social media use and people can become bullies. They hide behind their keyboards and when given the opportunity to stand behind what they said publicly, they are cowards. One stated social media is an "outlet for spewing venom; I was called names before when I was trying to present another perspective."

Several of these concerns led to a feeling of lack of control and referred to social media as a "slippery slope." There were fears of how social media is misused in a lot of ways, intentionally, and feeling their hands were tied. They felt they were not able to respond to their colleagues' misinformation and certain groups will block them if they do not like their opinion. There were also concerns over loss of privacy and how too much of their personal information is out there with social media use. Several elected officials were concerned about the risks involved with social media and the permanency of posts. One mentioned "when you post an opinion, you are locked into it prior to the actual meeting." Another elected official stated, "I'm not comfortable with putting something out there permanently. There is a lack of care there and it becomes public and out of your hands at that point."

<u>4.11.3.1 Negativity</u>

Four of the fifteen elected officials stated they had not had any bad experiences happen to them online. The rest of the elected officials stated they did and they varied in terms of their responses. One of them stated they think social media is evil and they have seen a lot of nastiness happen online. Almost all of them mentioned the name-calling, slander, threatening, and lying aspects they have encountered. Some of the names they were called were "liberal radical snowflake" and "carpet bagger." One of them stated they did not want to drag their kids through

the negativity. Some of the interviewees mentioned how they have felt attacked on social media, as some users manipulated what they said and treated them as though they made stuff up. One mentioned feeling bullied and that she did not have a voice; people were able to weigh in on the issue with anonymity. Another elected official stated she would see groups remove other elected officials illegal posts when the elected officials were caught. There was one interviewee who mentioned the police had to get involved with her situation and that a person harassing her was almost arrested so she feels a little more vulnerable than the average person. Another mentioned how social media was used for collaboration in getting citizens to show up for her censure. Lastly, one elected official stated he found himself getting nasty in his own push back and felt he started to lose control so he decided he was better off not using social media.

4.11.4 Opportunities/Potential

Even though the fifteen elected official are not currently utilizing social media, they did mention potential opportunities for its use. One mentioned how she heard Hootsuite was useful to help with social media and would consider looking into utilizing that tool to help with her time constraints. Another elected official mentioned how people are able to cover a large population with the click of a button. It was stated social media is an untapped resource and the government is not utilizing it effectively. It has a role but the elected officials have an obligation to monitor their own pages and set an example of civility. It is not going away and needs to be governed well as it appears it is taking over media, with Americans getting their news from social media nowadays.

There were several who mentioned how social media is great for broadcasting information and felt citizens do not always have enough information to make decisions. One

mentioned it was great to inform if it is not used against people. Several mentioned if they did decide to utilize social media, it would only be for one-way communication as they would not be sure the person lived in their area. One stated they would utilize social media if they lived in a larger municipality. One stated how she is only seeing it used as one-way communication now and how social media could be more useful if there were more specific and targeted strategies. There were a few who mentioned social media as a great way to access feedback from citizens, if the situation was perfect. One indicated they stopped using social media because it was picking and choosing which posts to boosts. One elected official stated they would use social media if their position was a full-time job, while another expressed interest in utilizing it now that one of former colleagues is no longer in office.

4.11.5 Section Summary

Those choosing not to utilize social media expressed concerns related to time, unknowns, misinformation, and lack of control. In regards to time, many felt the benefits of social media did not outweigh the costs and choose to utilize their time differently. The concern regarding the lack of guidance and fears were similar to those expressed by the elected officials choosing to utilize social media, however this group allowed those concerns to affect their decision to not utilize social media at this time. There were a few who mentioned their respective cities have social media pages so that may be influencing their decision to not utilize social media at this time if they feel there is not a need. The opinions of their municipalities and the Sunshine Law appeared to be a factor in choosing not to utilize social media, with one elected official expressing his desire to utilize it but his city not supporting that decision. There were similar concerns regarding the abundance of misinformation and not having the right to respond to people to allegations

made by other council members. This resulted in feelings of powerlessness and loss of control worries. While this group chose not to utilize social media, they did acknowledge some of the benefits it provides and admitted to potentially utilizing it in the future.

4.12 Content Analysis

After conducting all of the elected official interviews, their social media pages were analyzed. When looking at their pages, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram were analyzed, since those were the three most popular social media platforms the elected officials were utilizing. The other pages were not as popular, had certain privacy settings, and would have been difficult to analyze, especially Nextdoor and WhatsApp since they are more group orientated and not necessarily an individual profile. There was a mix of personal Facebook friend pages and Facebook like pages that were analyzed. Some of the municipal elected officials used a personal page and/or a like page when it came to Facebook. There were sixteen who only utilized a personal page, sixteen who only utilized a political page, and six who utilized both. When looking at the Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram pages, there were some discrepancies as to what was reported as being utilized and what was actually examined, as shown in Table 20. The following table shows what was actually discovered in terms of the social media platforms utilized. Six of the users had post settings for friends only, one had everything but Twitter on private, two users could not be found.

Table 20. Social Media Platforms Found

Facebook	Twitter	Instagram
38 instead of 42	18 instead of 21	6 instead of 14

During September 3-5, 2018, follower/friend counts and number of posts posted during the month of May 2018 was collected. The three different social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) were reviewed for the entire month of May 2018. Frequency of social media posts and types of posts, along with engagement levels are analyzed in reference to the May 2018 timeframe. The number of followers/friends include the overall number across all three social media platforms: Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The number of followers/friends is categorized as low, medium, or high according to the table below. The number of posts included the overall number across all three social media platforms: Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. They are categorized as low, medium, or high according to Table 21 below:

Table 21. Key for Number of Followers/Friends and Number of Posts

Number of Overall Social Media Followers/Friends	
Under 500	Low
500-1000	Medium
Over 1000	High
Number of Overall Social Media Posts	
Under 15	Low
15-60	Medium
Over 60	High

The lowest amount of followers was zero and the highest was 5000 Facebook friends, 4,601 Facebook likes, 6,618 Twitter followers, and 2,065 Instagram followers. The Facebook friend limit currently allows up to 5,000 friends. The highest numbers for all of those four categories came from the same elected official. The next highest numbers came from different elected officials and were 4,992 Facebook friends, 2,345 Facebook likes, 1,204 Twitter followers, and 1,042 Instagram followers.

Table 22 below categorizes the elected official social media users as high, medium, or low in terms of their level of open government community engagement. Open government community engagement levels of low, medium, high took into account several different factors relating to transparency, participation, and collaboration. Some of these factors consisted of number of posts, type of posts, likes, comments, responses, tags, overlapping same posts across multiple social media sites, and shares. The low engagement level refers to little to no reactions to posts and little to no responses back from the elected official. Medium engagement level is defined as some reactions to some of their posts and some dialogue between citizens and the elected official but nothing consistent. High engagement level consists of multiple reactions to almost every post. This also includes the elected official engaging in dialogue with the citizens and responding to their questions and concerns. There is no set amount of each of these as the overall social media presence was taken into consideration. While there was some great interaction on Twitter, most of the engagement happened on Facebook. Instagram posts consisted mainly of likes, a few comments, and little to no responses from the elected official to the comments.

Table 22. Open Government Community Engagement Levels

Open Government Community Engagement level	Follower/Post Ratio Numbers
High (12)	5 High/High 3 High/Low 1 High Medium 2 Medium/Medium 1 Low/Medium
Medium (7)	2 High/Medium 1 High/Low 1 Medium/Low 1 Low/Medium 2 Low/Low
Low (21)	1 High/High 3 Medium/Medium 2 Medium/Low 1 Low/Medium 13 Low/Low 1 High/Low

When analyzing the social media pages, there were fifteen categories of posts that were identified through content analysis of the municipal elected officials' social media pages. Table 23 categorizes and defines the types of posts that were posted by the elected officials on their social media pages.

Table 23. Descriptions of Posts

Type of Post	Description/Examples
Personal	Church; Marriage; Travel; Food; Animals; Funny;
Other	Fitness challenges; Awards; Thank yous; Quotes; Pictures of municipality; History of municipality
Holidays/Observances	Mother's Day; Memorial Day; Mental Awareness; Suicide Awareness; Armed Forces Day; Anti-Bullying Day; Pink event; LGBT awareness
Education/Sports	Kids; Teachers; Sports; School; Graduation
Public Safety	Fire; Police; Crime Statistics
Retweets	Retweeting someone else's information they already posted (these included colleagues' tweets)
Shares	Sharing someone else's information they already posted (these included colleagues' shares)
Events/Meetings	Events/Meetings attending/attended; Speaking; Chamber; Community events; Council/Commission meetings; Florida League; Ribbon cuttings
Awareness	Invites to events, meetings, and causes; Hunger projects, Red Nose Day, Workshops, Council/Commission Meetings; Cookie with a Cop
Informative	Contact me information; What's been done; New businesses; Weather/Hurricane updates; Restaurants; Council/Commission meeting agendas/summaries; Volunteer opportunities; Charter revision; Board updates; Economic Development; Budget information; Road closings; City information
Articles	Gender pay gaps; business; Local paper; Tourists; Real estate; Beaches; Neighborhoods; Human trafficking; Minimum wage
Videos	Live at events/meetings; Recap of Council/Commission meetings; Preview of agenda items
Political	Candidate/Elected official events; Voting information; Election information; Campaigning, Partisan opinions; Endorsements given; Endorsements received
Issues	Guns; Medical marijuana; Cigarettes on solar panels; Plastic bag ban; Sustainability; Tiny homes/shipping container houses; Big sugar; Gay rights; Veterans; Sea level rise; Scooters
Poll/Survey	Bridge proposal; Purchasing lights; Panhandling; Plastic bags

Table 24 shows the overall number of the different types of posts on the respective social media

sites by the elected officials.

Table 24. Types of Social Media Posts

Facebook Personal	Facebook Political	Twitter	Instagram
Personal (123)	Informative (112)	Retweets (433)	Personal (14)
Informative (62)	Awareness (63)	Articles (55)	Events/Meetings (11)
Articles (61)	Articles (52)	Informative (55)	Holidays/Observances (6)
Awareness (46)	Events/Meetings (50)	Awareness (23)	Political (4)
Events/Meetings (31)	Shares (45)	Other (20)	Other (4)
Holidays/Observances (26)	Political (22)	Political (19)	Awareness (3)
Shares (26)	Education/Sports (17)	Personal (19)	Public Safety (1)
Other (23)	Public Safety (17)	Education/Sports (16)	Issues (1)
Education/Sports (20)	Holidays/Observances (16)	Events/Meetings (15)	Informative (1)
Political (20)	Videos (16)	Issues (10)	
Public Safety (14)	Other (15)	Holidays/Observances (8)	
Videos (6)	Issues (8)	Public Safety (5)	
Issues (4)	Personal (7)	Poll/Survey (1)	
	Poll /Survey (3)		

Some of the numbers have been duplicated, as some of the elected officials post the same content across multiple social media platforms. Personal Facebook pages were only analyzed if they were public posts (not limited to friends only) and the interviewee disclosed that as a means to engage with citizens. The personal pages of whom I am a friend with on Facebook are a lot more personal and opinionated; since I was a friend, I was able to see those posts though they were not included in the numbers above. For those using both a personal Facebook page and a political page, similar information was posted to both pages, although the personal pages included more opinions on issues and endorsements of candidates. Some use social more and see its purpose more useful when campaigning. There were several partisan posts, which could be considered a form of manipulation. However, it may be difficult to assess where one draws that line from elected official and individual.

There were several observations made when analyzing the social media pages. While a high amount of followers/friends usually resulted in a higher engagement level that was not always the case. The ones that did result in a higher engagement level tended to be more consistent in their approach, whether posting a lot or not as often. It appeared they were more intentional with their posts and were quick to respond and comment back. They also had a variety of types of posts. There appeared to be a balance of informative and personal posts, and they were not afraid of posting about the issues. Engagement levels did not take into consideration whether or not the citizens agreed with the post, but rather the dialogue and actions occurring on the posts. A majority of the ones who did have a high level of engagement tended to come from municipalities with a larger population size. There was one who had a high level of followers/friends and high level of posts but low engagement. Her page would get a few actions every now and then but she posted multiple times a day; it was hard to follow and keep up with. They were mostly articles with a short comment or questions and not much, if any, feedback. She also overlapped across all three platforms, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, and appeared to be overwhelming. It appeared she was effective in pushing out information but not with in terms of two-way communication. The other one who had a high follower/friend count had low engagement because there were not many posts on their page. And the few posts that were posted were not very engaging. There was not as much of a proactive approach for inviting feedback on Twitter and Instagram, as there was on Facebook. This resulted is not seeing much engagement on Twitter and Instagram; the two platforms consisted more of one-way interaction. Some of the elected officials had low engagement and very few posts but accepted a lot of tags. These tags consisted of other individuals posting pictures and statuses, while tagging the elected

official. It gave a sense of indirect transparency in terms of what events they were at and what they were doing in the community.

In terms of types of posts, personal posts were utilized most on personal Facebook pages and on Instagram. Twitter had a high number of retweets with 433. The other types of most used posts included articles, informative, and awareness; these types of posts primarily focused on transparency and broadcasting information out to their followers. The political Facebook pages focused on broadcasting information out, as well, with informative, awareness, and articles being the top three types of posts posted, respectively. While some of the articles, informative, and awareness posts could potentially elicit dialogue and conversation, most of them resulted in a like or a simple comment. The posts that elicited the most engagement and dialogue were grouped into the issues type of posts. There were only twenty-three of these types of posts across the three social media platforms analyzed, with the most (ten) being posted on Twitter. While Twitter had the most amount of issues post, there was more engagement and dialogue from these types of posts on Facebook. While there was not much engagement on the personal and holiday/observances posts, those posts would still get a good amount of likes/reactions. Facebook consisted of a good amount of events/meetings posts which could have been the result of the elected officials wanting to the citizens to know what they are doing for them or for campaign purposes, as stated in their interviews. When analyzing the shares category of posts, there were several shares from their respective city pages, as well as sharing their colleagues' statuses. While there were not as many videos posted, they were popular in terms of feedback and appreciation from the citizens. While some of the posts invited feedback from citizens, there were only two official polls or surveys that were posted.

4.12.1 Section Summary

Attempting to find some of the social media pages were a little difficult, with some of the pages not located at all. Some of the pages were not as active as anticipated, with most of them focusing on one-way communications. Facebook had the most engagement and Twitter had a lot of retweeting and not much engagement. Instagram was primarily personal pages with some political posts mixed in there because of their role as an elected official. There seemed to be an appreciation of posts in terms of transparency but little engagement because the posts were more one-way and not as inviting.

Some of the pages attempted to engage their residents with questions, but feedback was sparse. Those with the most engagement seemed to come from cities with high population sizes. However, that was not always the case. Engagement levels seemed to have more to do with the type of post and perceived genuineness and responses. Quantity did not play as much of a factor, but rather the intentionality of the post. There was a feeling of needing to post on some of the pages that had a medium to high number of posts, rather than a true desire to solicit feedback. Some of these types of posts were vague or random articles and appeared to be difficult for the citizens to connect to. Overlapping or duplicating posts seemed to dilute the message, whereas intentionally having different posts across the different platforms seemed to have more engagement. While some of the pages did not have many posts made by the elected officials themselves, they had been tagged in numerous posts that citizens seemed to enjoy. Without having to post as an elected official, citizens were able to get a sense of what their elected official was doing in the community.

In terms of engaging posts, it appeared the citizens had a desire to feel valued and their voice mattered. This was achieved best through the posts encompassing issues, videos, articles specifically related to their community, and some personal posts. These types of posts seemed to result in the citizens feeling more connected and a part of the process. While there was engagement throughout the various social media platforms, some of this engagement was controlled when it came to utilizing personal Facebook pages for political reasons. There were certain elected officials the author was a friend with on Facebook that allowed her to see the ratio of friends only posts to public posts. The friends only posts were a lot more opinionated, personal, and political. It also appeared the social media pages were more active when the elected official is campaigning.

<u>4.13 Chapter Summary</u>

Chapter four discussed the findings of fifty-seven interviews from municipal elected officials throughout the State of Florida regarding social media as a tool for elected officials. Forty-two of the elected officials currently utilize social media and their personal feelings and practical application of social media was explored. The remaining fifteen elected officials are not currently utilizing social media and their reasoning behind that decision was investigated. Following the interviews, the social media pages of the elected officials currently utilizing social media were analyzed. These included analysis of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram posts for the duration of one month.

There were mixed feelings regarding social media and the way it is currently utilized in today's society. While there was an understanding of several of the benefits social media provides, there were also some negative aspects mentioned by most of the elected officials. Some

of the concerns related to social media appeared to not hinder elected officials use, while it impacted the way in which others are currently utilizing social media, or the decision by some to not use social media altogether. There were six different social media platforms utilized by the elected officials, with Facebook being the most popular and the one stated that was best for participation. Social media may need to be more clearly defined, as several referred to email as a social media method.

When it came to ways in which social media is currently utilized, one-way communications seemed to dominate over the two-way strategies. This appeared to be evident from the interviews and content analysis of social media pages. There were fears and concerns regarding the unknown of utilizing social media as a two-way engagement strategy by some of the elected officials. While issues, which may be considered controversial, appeared to solicit the most engagement, these types of posts were not as popular among most of the elected officials. While some appreciated social media as a tool and desired to utilize it more, it did not seem to be a pressing issue as most of the elected officials were still connected to their communities in other capacities. There was little effort and time spent, if any, on developing a social media strategy, as most had no stated rules or goals for their social media pages.

Even though some of the posts were engaging there were still about half of the elected officials who stated the online engagement does not affect their decision-making. Additionally, while several elected officials admitted to seeing collaborations forming online, most of them occurred independent of the elected officials' pages. Furthermore, while they believed their social media pages helped citizens become more aware of happenings within their city, they also

understood how their use had the potential or did cause misinformation to be spread in terms of comments made on their posts or their own posts made.

The biggest barriers to social media engagement appeared to be the lack of credibility and control, municipal opinions, and the Sunshine Law. While these issues affected the decision for some elected officials to not utilize social media, it appeared to affect those that are utilizing social media in terms of limiting the types of posts and engagement they wish to have with their constituents and colleagues.

The inclusivity efforts were mixed with some elected officials proactively reaching new citizens, posting about issues citizens care about, and not blocking or deleting comments, while others were on the other end of the spectrum. It is unclear if the inclusivity strategies were motivated by a desire to engage or a desire to get reelected, as most of the elected officials were either unsure if they planned to run for office again and knew for certain they would. The issue that was most gray and affected social media use the most appeared to be the Sunshine Law. There were several fears relating to public records and types of posts. Concerning the issue of blocking people or deleting posts, it appeared some did not because of the Law, while others did what they felt was right and needed. There was a lack of consistency and understanding in this area. The inclusivity efforts appeared to be controlled by most with governing who was on their pages, what posts were made, what comments were allowed, and which posts were open to the public. These ideas are explored more in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

The original research question for this study was:

How does social media usage by municipal elected officials assist or detract in fostering open government community engagement?*

Sub-questions related to the main research question included:

1) *How do municipal elected officials engage with citizens?*

2) *How is inclusivity defined through practice?*

open government community engagement will be defined in terms of transparency, participation, and collaboration

This chapter explores the findings disclosed in chapter four and analyzes them through the lens of the research questions, conceptual framework, and propositions.

5.2 Conceptual Framework

Figure 5.1 below is the framework for which the findings are analyzed and discussed. This research analyzes how social media assists or detracts in fostering open government communication. Open government communication is defined in terms of the three components related to the Open Government Directive, with abbreviated definitions from Mergel (2013) utilized. These definitions encompass the rungs from Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation.
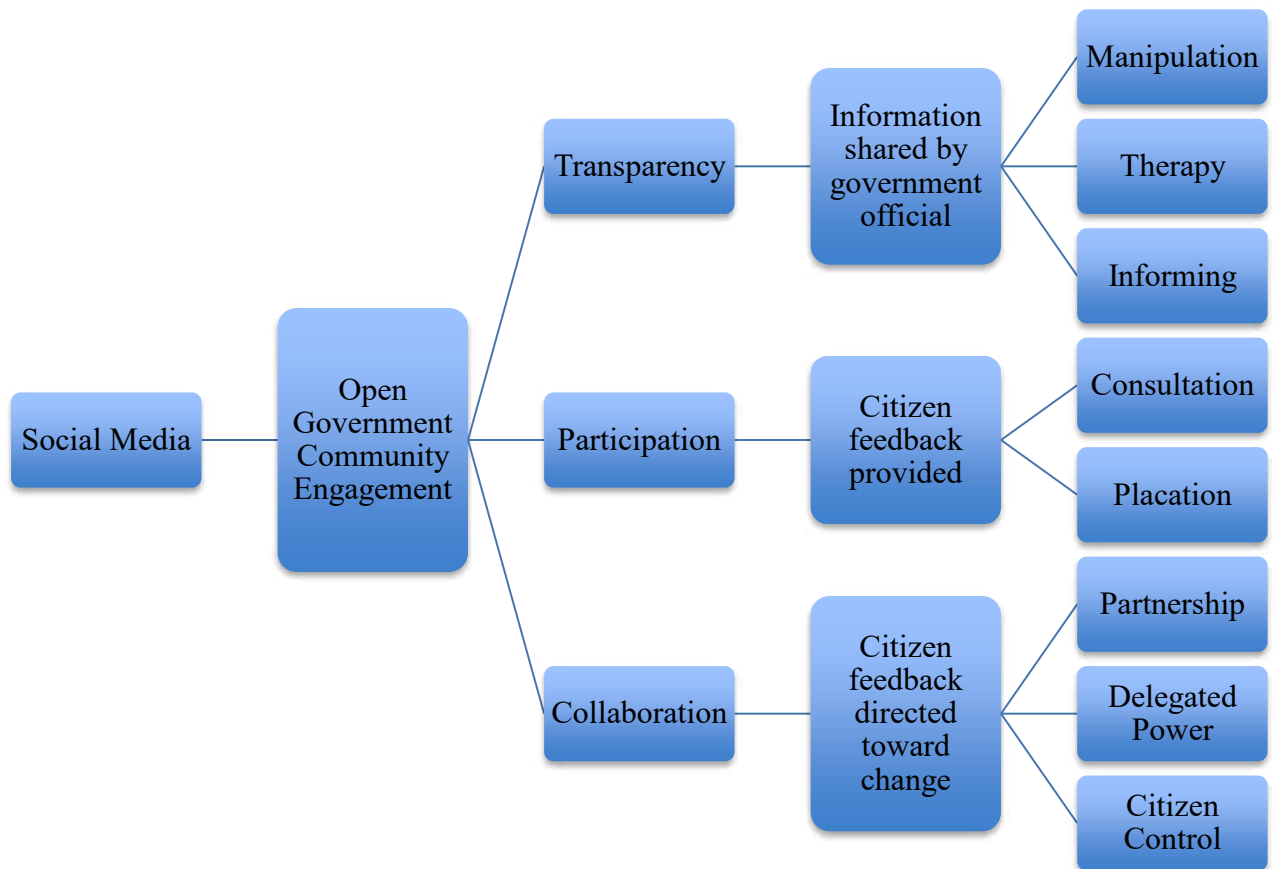
Figure 6. Social Media Framework

When analyzing the social media pages after conducting the interviews, there were discrepancies regarding how respondents described their social media activity and what was actually practiced; the social media pages were not as active as were originally disclosed in the interviews. While some of the elected officials stated they did not use social media much, there were others who stated they were very active but their pages did not have much engagement at all. It is unclear whether the interviewees equated pushing information out with engagement. The elected officials who were newer to their positions seemed to embrace social media more and

take more risks with their posts and engagement. Some of the ones who had been in office for at least two years appeared to have frustrations around time commitments and the value of dialogue.

There was an understanding of social media as a new way to connect with people and having an unfiltered bridge of two-way communication. This excited some elected officials, while it scared others. Though some expressed the benefit of spreading information, there were equal concerns regarding the spreading of misinformation. Despite the potential for citizens to manipulate and abuse information, and the lack of control elected officials have over this, some of the elected officials still chose to utilize social media. Many of them understood the need to use social media and indicated they would use it regardless if they want to or not. However, the extent to which they utilized social media in terms of one-way and two-way dialogue, as well as the types of posts, varied amongst the individuals. Additionally, about half of the elected officials utilizing social media stated they have not blocked anyone or deleted comments either because they do not want to, feel they are not allowed to, or have not felt the need.

Facebook was by far the most popular social media tool utilized for transparency, participation, and collaboration. The elected officials stated they believed Facebook was the most popular social media platform, more convenient, more personal, and larger audience capacity for existing networks. While several of the elected officials utilize social media quite often regardless of the engagement, there were others who only use social media as they feel it is needed, such as with emergency situations. While the engagement is not necessarily consistent on their pages, engagement may occur at different times throughout the year based on the desire of the elected officials or the need felt from the citizens. Some of the elected officials stated the

lack of use by either their municipality or colleagues encourages them to utilize social media more in order to represent the citizens. Others will share their municipality's social media posts in order to broaden the reach. There was a perceived value from some of the elected officials, in the belief citizens desired to receive information from a person (elected official) rather than the government (the municipality).

'Quality over quantity' and 'less is more' strategies seemed to work best in terms of engagement for the elected officials, though not always. High quantity seemed to work as long as the posts were unique, genuine, and intentional. They did not work with there was a flood of articles and random posts because it was difficult to sift through them to get to ones that directly related to city concerns. The overlapping and duplicating of posts between the different social media platforms may allow residents to reach different audiences but they oftentimes lacked the personal touch and did not appear as inviting for public comment. Less was not always better in terms of posts either when the connection seemed to be lost or the page appeared to be dead. It is difficult for citizens to engage if there are no posts to engage on.

Not only did frequency of posts appear to be a factor with engagement, the types of posts played a critical role, as well. It seemed as though engagement had little to do with follower and post count when compared to the types of posts made by the elected officials. Although, it is hard to be engaged if there are few people you are reaching and no post to engage on. It appeared people desired to feel connected, as the pages with the most engagement had elected officials who had unique, specific, and intentional posts and responded to the comments. Simply sharing someone else's post, a picture, or an article with no caption or context did not elicit much engagement. Citizens seemed to enjoy posts related to specific issues facing their communities

by liking, commenting in agreement, or commenting in disagreement. There were a variety of posts that were centered on transparency, participation, and collaboration. However, while there were posts with clear participation levels, it is unclear which posts resulted in collaboration or change. Though it is easy to see posts that focus on participation and collaboration and assess the engagement level, it is hard to measure the effectiveness of transparency posts, as many citizens may appreciate the information but take no action on the post.

5.2.1 Transparency

Most of the posts made by the elected officials fell into the transparency category, as opposed to participation and collaboration type posts. The transparent posts focused primarily on residents becoming more educated and aware of city related business and events. Social media was viewed as an additional tool to disseminate information and be more transparent. In addition to Facebook, Twitter and Instagram were utilized for one-way communications of either sound bites of information or pictures. However, Instagram was not utilized as often and many explained they were still exploring how to utilize that specific social media platform. One of most appreciated aspects of social media was how the elected officials felt they were able to get information out quickly and effectively, especially during a crisis. While they also noted that their specific social media pages have aided in transparency efforts in terms of disseminating information and correcting misinformation, there was also the understanding that their pages have in the past or had the potential to perpetuate misinformation, either directly or indirectly. The concept of indirect transparency was noticed from elected officials who utilize their personal Facebook pages to engage with citizens. While some of these elected officials are not necessarily posting often, they are letting others tag them in photos and at events so the general public has

access to what they are doing in the community. While the overall engagement may be low, there are aspects of transparency that are evident.

In addition to transparency efforts related to informing, there are also ways elected officials are sharing information through manipulation and therapy tactics. Some of the elected officials see the benefits of social media as a marketing tool and as a means to gain more name recognition. Several elected officials expressed how they choose to use social media more prevalently during campaign season. In addition to utilizing social media for marketing themselves, elected officials will oftentimes use their social media pages to endorse certain candidates and/or make partisan posts. Though transparent, these types of posts can appear to be leading and attempting to further one's own agenda. However, it may be difficult to understand where the line is drawn from serving as the role of an elected official and maintaining individual rights, especially when personal social media pages are utilized to connect with citizens. Lastly, some of the elected officials admitted to posting their opinions only if they felt strongly about an issue, while others enjoyed keeping their pages engaged with controversial topics. These posts, while they are informing the public of issues, may also have manipulation and therapy elements.

There were several elected officials who stay in the transparency box and do not move into the participation and collaboration areas. Some of these reasons include a lack of time, the Sunshine Law concerns, a fear of losing control, and feelings of participation and collaboration posts not being appropriate or needed at this time. More specifically, there were concerns with time because their roles are only part-time and public record requirements can be time consuming. Additionally, the need for time when engaging and interacting with citizens, as well as responding to their comments and providing feedback was a concern. These were some of the

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barriers mentioned that potentially keep elected officials from utilizing social media in more of the two-way aspects they were designed to incorporate.

For those utilizing social media, there was the desire to keep their citizens informed and be transparent despite the negative characteristics of social media. Their motives behind this are unknown. When analyzing the different types of transparency posts, they were a lot more complex than what appeared on the surface, especially if diving into motives behind certain posts. While some of the transparency posts focused on informing, one could argue there are certain strategies for choosing what to inform the public on. Some who share full agendas and unbiased comments may fall strictly into the informing category, while others who choose to share one specific agenda item may encompass the manipulation, therapy, and informing categories of the transparency component.

5.2.2 Participation

Participation moves further along the engagement spectrum and seeks to not only inform, but to have citizens be a part of the process, as well. The two rungs of Arnstein's ladder that fall within this area are consultation and placation. Both of these involve hearing what citizens have to say, but the elected officials still maintain power and control. Many of the elected officials expressed how social media not only allows them to push information out, but serves as an excellent way to collect information. Social media allows the people to be accessible to the government in a way they never had before and has the potential to allow their concerns to be heard. There are concerns that municipalities and elected officials do not fully understand engagement and see social media as a means to push information out, rather than collect. Some of the elected officials were not sure how to properly engage with their constituents via social

media. Social media creates expectations and increases accountability, as citizens are able to reach out to their elected officials much easier if they have a social media presence. If an elected official does have a social media page, it is important that they are willing to respond and answer questions because of these expectations. Posts need to be intentional if seeking engagement and responses; people pay attention when the post is something the citizens care about.

While some elected officials seek to proactively engage their citizens and receive their feedback by directly asking and initiating, others utilize social media to gather information indirectly (monitoring, lurking) via multiple social media platforms. Twitter was one platform mentioned that allowed the elected officials to monitor and gather information but not through the two-way dialogue necessarily. Other indirect consultation and placation occurred by visiting Facebook groups and Nextdoor pages in order to get a sense of what the community is discussing. There was an appreciation for the ability receive an unfiltered pulse of the community without having to take a random phone call as it is much easier and convenient because you can check the different social media platforms at any time and see what people are thinking.

In terms of direct participation and dialogue on the interviewees' social media pages, it appeared there was more dialogue and engagement on the pages of elected officials that lived in municipalities with a larger population. However, that was not always the case. Furthermore, some of the elected officials stated their social media was more manageable for those that live in smaller cities and towns and could be overwhelming if they lived in a big city. However, there were those who are not currently using social media that stated they would consider using social media if they did live in a big city. There appears to be differing opinions of when social media

should be utilized in order for the benefits to outweigh the consequences. Controversial topics or polarizing posts seemed to elicit more engagement, however the comments and engagement may not equate to much in terms of affecting decisions made at council/commission meetings if the elected officials never allow their feedback to move from the participation category of consultation and placation into the collaboration category of moving toward developing partnerships and sharing power. When it came to engaging citizens eliciting participation, Facebook was the best platform as it included a wider audience and did not have character limits like Twitter did. However, there was one who expressed how useful WhatsApp has been for rallying people together and getting their feedback rather quickly and easily.

When it came to participation posts, overlapping and duplicating posts did not appear to be a good strategy. It is possible to make similar posts without having the appearance of spamming all of your social media networks. The most engaged elected official had commented, "If you don't make time to invest in people, they won't invest in you." He stressed the citizens' desire for personal and genuine posts from their elected officials. However, the views concerning the value of social media in terms of eliciting feedback varied. While some viewed the engagement online as less intimidating and more convenient than coming in person to a meeting, some elected officials do not value the online presence as much as the decision to come in person as that requires more effort than the click of a button.

It appears that some of the elected officials stay in the participation category, where they allow citizens to make comments but stay in the consulting and placating components without progressing forward into any form of collaboration. This was confirmed when nearly half of the interviewees stated the feedback online does not influence their decision-making. However, the

potential to move into the collaboration aspects is there if the elected officials are willing to share that power and make decisions based off of information received via online. The other half of elected officials who stated citizen response online has affected their decision-making at council/commission meetings confirmed this. However, while they are willing to change their minds, they may still stay in the participation category if they wish to retain the desire to decide regardless of the comments and feedback.

5.2.3 Collaboration

There was not much direct collaboration occurring from the elected officials' social media pages. There were minimal polling and surveys posted on their social media pages. Furthermore, there were posts inviting citizen feedback. However, it is unclear how either of these methods resulted in a release of power, with the exception of half of the elected officials stating that citizen response online affected their decisions during council/commission meetings. Some of the more controversial posts and posts related to specific issues provided an outlet for citizens to have some control or power. While it may not have resulted in change, it did allow them to have a voice in a different area online, which may fall more under the consultation and placation rungs of Arnstein's ladder.

There was the goal of getting citizens engaged and a part of the process but it was unclear whether a part of the process referred more to educating them or allowing them to influence decisions. There was a desire from some of the elected officials to allow citizens to play a role but to what extent still needs to be defined. One elected official expressed the desire to engage with those who do not agree with him, which could lead to potential change. There was also of a

lack of understanding as to how to effectively involve citizens collaboratively via their social media channels, though they have seen citizens use social media to collaborate with others on their own.

There was the concept of indirect collaboration that occurred when online comments influenced decisions, though the release of power was not mandated, but the elected officials chose to release their perceived power for whatever reasons. There was no formal partnership, delegated power, or citizen control expressed; it would simply occur at the discretion of the elected official. This indirect collaboration results in changing a decision based on online feedback and hovers closely over the placation rung. Other collaborations mentioned came from social media but not necessarily from the elected officials' pages. This type of indirect collaboration gives citizens power and voice that almost demands answers depending on how loud they become. Social media allows them a channel to organize themselves and feel more empowered, albeit independent of the elected officials' social media pages.

5.2.4 Open Government Community Engagement

One of the elected officials referred to social media as an untapped resource government does not use as effectively as it could. That becomes evident as we analyze the different components of open government community engagement. Rather than attempting to compartmentalize posts into different categories, more awareness on how certain posts fall into one or more categories may prove beneficial. Social media has changed the ways communication has traditionally occurred and has allowed for different levels of two-way communications. The transparency related posts can oftentimes overlap all three components of open government

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community engagement; posts are not necessarily independent of each other and various posts can have different motivating factors behind them. These rungs are very fluid; posts could easily begin with an informing motive and later result in manipulation or a partnership.

The issue with collaboration and the associated components of Arnstein's ladder of partnership, delegated power, and citizen control, is that there is never an opportunity for elected officials to release official power. Polling and surveys may contribute to change, but unless they directly impact the outcome of a decision, they fall more in the participation section or consulting and placating. Therefore, open government community engagement may not be fully reached if elected officials do not progress past the participation components. There has been increased pressure from citizens utilizing social media on their own but never really from elected officials giving that power away. The question then becomes- if elected officials are not directly giving up power, can collaboration online still occur? It can, if elected officials allow their social media presence to become a platform for citizens to engage and intentionally make decisions that take citizen comments into account. While it is not necessarily giving up power, it does create informal partnerships and relationships, which can potentially lead to shared power. However, the citizen has to feel valued and a part of the process, otherwise the collaboration can lose credibility.

Table 25 explains how the components of open government community engagement relate to how the elected officials interviewed are currently utilizing social media.

Table 25. Open Government Community Engagement Findings

Collaboration	Rallying; indirect; polling; two-way communication
Citizen Control	Citizens utilizing social media tools on their own to elicit power
Delegated Power	Unclear
Partnership	Unclear
Participation	Providing avenue and not reciprocate; two-way communication; polling; surveys
Placation	Listen and may affect decision or reaffirm decision
Consultation	Asking for opinions; monitoring; listen but doesn't affect decision
Transparency	Various types of information; broadcasting; one-way communication; marketing; indirect transparency (tagging); issues
Informing	Summaries; agendas; meeting notices;
Therapy	Events; correct misinformation; opinionated posts
Manipulation	Endorsements; campaigning; rallying

5.3 Open Government, Limited Community Engagement

Open government, limited community engagement refers to the elected officials choosing to utilize social media for the transparency components social media allows, while attempting to avoid the participation and collaboration aspects. These elected officials tend to use social media more for one-way communications as opposed to two-way dialogue. Those that currently use social media and those that do not, both mentioned social media as a tool that is excellent for broadcasting information out with relative ease. When it comes to gathering information, the elected officials tend to gather information more so from news sites and other pages they may follow, rather than their citizens. These citizens prefer to stay in the transparency category because they feel it is easier, less time consuming, and safer. This is understandable, as most of the elected officials had no disclosed rules on their social media pages and no set goals for how

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they wish to use their social media platforms. It can be argued that not having defined rules or goals may lead to a lack of strategy and in turn, a lack of confidence in one's approach.

Attempting to define and publish rules may prove to be difficult through the expressed concerns regarding the understanding of the Sunshine Law. How can one post rules if they do not know the rules themselves? Other barriers contributing to the lack of participation and collaboration strategies included negative experiences, by products of controversial items, and "trolls" who are perceived as not really interested in meaningful discussion. There was one relatively new elected official who stated he was afraid to reach out and use his social media platform to ask for the opinions of his constituents because he feared others may perceive it as he does not know what he is doing.

While he was afraid of what others might think of his posts, other elected officials were afraid of what their citizens would post. There was concern about receiving information from "vocal minorities" who may lack a proper understanding of the full picture. They did not want to get involved in arguments and generally make decisions based on their own set of values since they do not have enough time to post everything for citizens to make an educated opinion. The online engagement was not valued by some of the elected officials, often referring to them as "keyboard warriors" or "keyboard cowboys." They prefer the citizens to show up if the issue is really important to them. As one of the elected officials stated, "If you aren't willing to meet one on one, your issue is not that important." This was substantiated by the interview results, as a little over half of feedback stated online comments do not affect their decisions.

5.4 Closed Government Community Engagement

The concept of closed government community engagement appears to be almost synonymous with the idea of controlled engagement. These are the elected officials who are typically engaged in their circle only. This became evident when analyzing the different social media platforms. There were several elected officials who utilize their personal Facebook pages to engage with their citizens. While this decision does not necessarily have to lend itself to the closed government aspect, it does when at least six of the users had their post settings set to friends only and did not allow the posts to be public. There was one elected official who had all of her social media pages set to private, with the exception of Twitter. There were two social media users who I was unable to locate. Some of the elected officials utilize both a personal Facebook page and a political Facebook page in order to expand their reach. However, there was still more controlled dialogue on the personal pages, either intentionally or unintentionally through profile settings set to friends only. These settings could have been unintentional as there was a lack of understanding how social media worked by some of the elected officials who were older in age. Some of the elected officials chose to only use their personal page because it was easier, while others did because they believed they would not have to abide by the rules of the Sunshine Law.

When discussing trends in regards to the people interacting on their social media sites, it appeared that some of the responses centered on people that were already in their own network or people who were like them in terms of age and race. WhatsApp was a useful platform for the one elected official who disclosed utilizing it, but appears to be more of a controlled engagement strategy. There appeared to be different strategies for nurturing their own network. Some of these

included sending birthday messages on Facebook every morning, while about half of the elected officials admitted to blocking people or deleting comments, as they felt appropriate. The only time some of the elected officials will do sponsored posts are during campaign season and they typically have hesitations with reaching outside their current audience. The elected officials in this category typically wait for people to find them due to lack of time or because they are afraid of trolls. For those that do reach out, it is more for expanding their network or name, although the exact motives remain unknown.

People in this group are okay with controversial posts but prefer to do it privately rather than publicly to order to avoid wasting time, going down rabbit trails, or nasty comments. They involve themselves in other engagement strategies that are not online, which may make them feel justified in the closed government community engagement approach. Other engagement strategies include face time, events, meetings, emails, phone calls, and door to door.

<u>5.5 Avoidance</u>

The concept of avoidance needs to be explored further as there are different types of avoidance related to not using social media at all, to only utilizing social media for one-way communications rather than two-way communications, to utilizing it for two-way communications while avoiding certain topics and/or people.

Those that choose not to utilize social media tend to be slightly older and reside in municipalities that are somewhat smaller. There was an important aspect related to municipalities and their opinions on social media. When the email invitations originally were sent out, there were twelve people from different municipalities that stated they do not use social media or that their area is too small for social media. There was one city manager that responded

on behalf of the city stating they discourage it as a city and that the city does not utilize social media either. Another city manager did not want to forward the request to participate in the study and attempted to answer the questions on behalf of the elected officials. When it came to the interviews with the non-social media users, there were concerns about privacy and feeling as though it was more of the city's role and not theirs as an elected official. There were some that felt they were involved in the community already and that it would be a waste of time and too much to keep up with. There were several that alluded to the benefits not outweighing the risks and had concerns about misinformation, things being blown out of proportion, and the ability for negativity to fester with increased access. The fears of the "keyboard warriors" and "keyboard cowboys" who do not really contribute much value and the belief that only people who reach out are the mad ones seemed to play a role in the elected officials choosing not to utilize social media. There were concerns of bullying, threats, and slander, especially related to colleagues' use of social media. The impact of other elected officials played a role in choosing not to utilize social media, as there appeared to be a feeling of powerlessness and a loss of control as they felt they were not able to respond due to the Sunshine Law.

For those that do utilize social media, there was also an avoidance component in terms of the extent to which the elected officials use social media. The Sunshine Law seemed to be a huge factor limiting social media by elected officials. Some of the elected officials mentioned being cautious with posts, concerns about public records and what to capture, concerns about the time needed to capture posts so not posting as often, and choosing not take positions on items or advocating. There were concerns regarding all of the uncertainties and how gray the Sunshine Law; it is not clear and affects the types of posts and how often some of the elected officials post.

One mentioned it might just be easier to not utilize social media because of the Sunshine Law, while another stated they believed it was causing elected officials to not engage as much as they would like.

Other factors contributing to the limited use of social media included feeling they only had time for transparency posts. Although, some elected officials have others who help with their social media sites in order to improve in this area. There were concerns regarding potentially saying something that may haunt them later in life or feeling that nothing good comes from controversial dialogue. Items may go above citizens' heads and it is better to engage offline rather than via social media. It was mentioned that several citizens typically do not take up the elected officials' offers to take the conversation offline and there were other concerns that the elected officials' responses would not make a difference in changing someone's mind anyway. Despite the negative occurrences some of the elected officials experienced, most elected officials continue to utilize social media, though the exact extent of the social media use remains unclear.

Some of the actions taken by the elected officials that resulted in less social media use included quitting Twitter because of the archiving requirements, quitting Nextdoor because of all the varying opinions, and avoiding online community groups on Facebook because of the negativity. It appears the elected officials' perceived discouragement due to fears of the unknown from their municipalities plays a role in what extent of avoidance occurs. The use of social media by municipalities may play a role as to what extent the elected officials feel social media is needed to engage their constituents. However, there was still a concern regarding the lack of credibility from the citizens and the potential for forming strong opinions with inadequate

information. There was also concern of a loss in the value of dialogue occurring online and the belief that decisions should be formed and made at meetings and not online.

<div align="center">5.6 Propositions</div>

Table 26 discusses the findings from the propositions previously presented at the beginning of the study. Some of the propositions were supported and substantiated, while others remain unclear.

Regarding proposition one, elected officials tend to broadcast information out more than gathering information. While the original intent behind gathering information assumed gathering information from citizens, several referred to gathering information more from news sites and other social media pages, rather than from their constituents. The same was true for proposition two regarding the primary function of Twitter as an elected official. When it came to their roles as elected officials, they preferred to utilize Twitter to disseminate information rather than engaging back and forth with their citizens. However, they appreciated the aspects of Twitter that allowed them to get short updates from various news sites.

Proposition three stated that municipal elected officials tend to utilize social media more for citizens who reach out to them rather than attempting to reach out to those who are not engaged. This was found to be true from the results of the interviews. The majority of elected officials who use sponsored posts admitted to only using them during campaign season. While some elected officials seek to actively add people and build their network, more than half of them wait for citizens to find them and can be hesitate to add people they do not know for a variety of reasons.

Proposition four stated municipal elected officials tend to utilize Facebook more than other social media sites in order to elicit citizen participation and this was found to be true. However, there was one individual who mentioned how WhatsApp allowed him to achieve high participation levels from those in his network.

Proposition five stated that municipal elected officials tend to engage in discussions about non-controversial matters more than controversial matters. While this appeared to be true, elected officials still were open to engaging but preferred to do it more privately than publicly. However, the ones that do post about controversial issues tended to yield higher levels of open government community engagement.

The last proposition, proposition six, stated that municipal elected officials utilize social media until a negative experience surrounding their use occurs. This was the only proposition that appeared to not be substantiated. While negative experiences did have an impact on some of the non-social media users, many elected officials continue to utilize social media despite the negative experiences they have encountered.

Table 26. Questions, Propositions, and Findings

Questions about/for municipal elected officials	Proposition: Social media usage by municipal elected officials assist or detract in fostering open government community engagement as…	Findings
How do municipal elected officials engage with citizens?	P1: Municipal elected officials tend to utilize social media more for broadcasting information rather than gathering information P2: Twitter's primary function for municipal elected officials is to disseminate information	P1: Yes; however, several admitted to wanting to gather information in more of an indirect rather than direct fashion P2: Yes, as opposed to responses and feedback; however, several admitted to utilizing the site more for information gathering
How is inclusivity defined through practice?	P3: Municipal elected officials tend to utilize social media more for citizens who reach out to them rather than attempting to reach out to those who are not engaging P4: Municipal elected officials tend to utilize Facebook more than other social media sites in order to elicit citizen participation P5: Municipal elected officials tend to engage in discussions about non-controversial matters more than controversial matters P6: Municipal elected officials utilize social media until a negative experience surrounding their use occurs	P3: Yes; however, they are more proactive with their attempts during campaign season P4: Yes P5: Yes; controversial issues are where more of the engagement came from P6: Not necessarily; it does have an impact but many continue to utilize it regardless of the negative experiences

5.7 Conceptual Framework Modified

After discussing the findings in depth in relation to the conceptual framework, there was

a desire to add further components that surfaced from the results of the interviews and analysis of

social media pages. Figure 7 added the concepts of "open government, limited community engagement" and "closed government community engagement." Open government, limited engagement described the individuals who stated they only use social media primarily for one-way communication. The open government aspect is there through the transparency efforts. They tend to avoid participation elements and place little to no value on online citizen feedback. Closed government community engagement encompasses the same components of open government community engagement but specifically consists of tactics that limits those who have access to posts and the ability to participate. These elected officials employ transparency, participation, and collaboration strategies but only do so within the circle of influence they have created and feel they can control.

The transparency, participation, and collaboration categories were all updated to add the direct and indirect components. The indirect components were found when analyzing the findings and warranted a separation from direct efforts, though they may still produce the same results. Indirect transparency occurred from elected officials by allowing others to tag them in posts and have that information on their (the elected officials') social media pages. This allowed the citizens to stay informed via the elected official's page, though the elected official was not necessarily the one posting the information. Indirect participation occurred when elected officials sought out citizen feelings on different social media avenues without directly asking or necessarily engaging. Indirect collaboration occurred when citizens were able to rally amongst themselves on social media without the elected official necessarily initiating or contributing to the discussion.

Lastly, the avoidance component was not added to the social media framework at this

time, as it remains unclear where it fits in the overall open government community engagement framework; however, it is a concept which deserves to be explored further. Avoidance occurs from elected officials choosing not to utilize social media to engage with their citizens for a variety of reasons and has its place throughout multiple aspects of the social media framework. These vary from not having enough time or not seeing the value of social media to wanting to avoid the negative aspects of social media. This type of avoidance has no place on the social media framework as no social media use occurs. Other aspects of avoidance occur in regards to how open the elected officials choose to be with their social media pages. Some avoid the two-way aspects of social media and stay solely in the transparency components of social media, while avoiding the participation and collaboration aspects. This is where the term open government, limited engagement emerged. Others may engage in two-way conversations but avoid certain topics and issues. This is where it remains unclear how the concept of avoidance within this context of the social media framework fits. Those that do not avoid certain topics and engagement but avoid interactions from certain individuals, contribute to the emergence of the closed government community engagement concept.

Figure 7. Social Media Framework Findings

A flowchart titled "Social Media Framework Findings." The root node "Social Media" branches into two boxes: "Open Government, Limited Community Engagement" and "Open Government Community Engagement & Closed Government Community Engagement."

The second branch connects to three pathways:

- "Transparency (directly & indirectly)" → "Information shared by government official" → "Manipulation," "Therapy," "Informing"
- "Participation (directly & indirectly)" → "Citizen feedback provided" → "Consultation," "Placation"
- "Collaboration (directly & indirectly)" → "Citizen feedback directed toward change" → "Partnership," "Delegated Power," "Citizen Control"
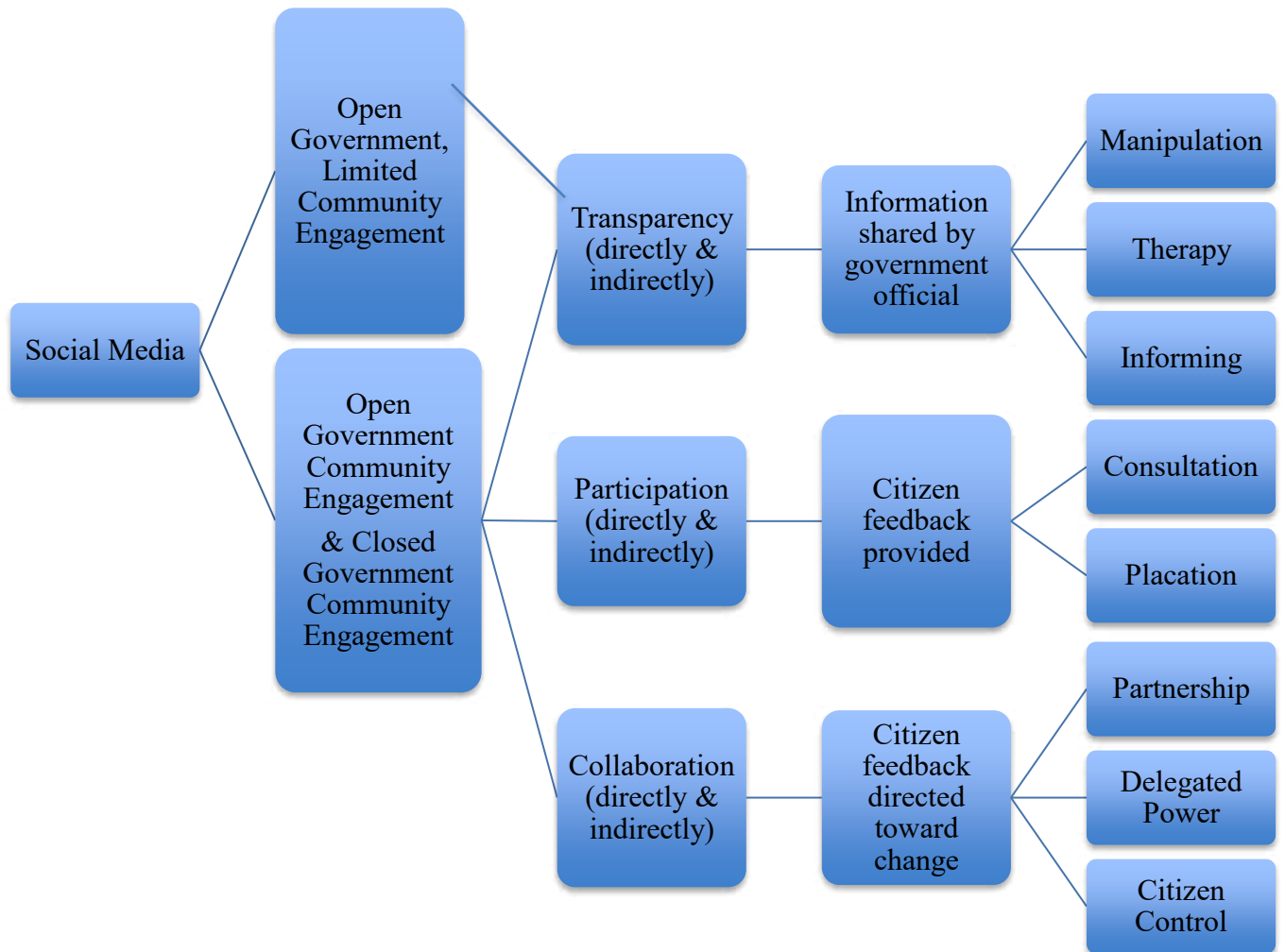
Figure 7. Social Media Framework Findings

5.8 Chapter summary

Chapter five discussed ways in which social media usage by municipal elected officials is

assisting in or detracting from fostering open government community engagement. While social

media assisted in fostering open government community engagement, it also assisted in fostering controlled government community engagement. Social media did not necessarily detract from fostering open government community engagement; it just had more potential to aid in open government community engagement aspects but did not do so for a variety of reasons relating to the perceived role of social media, certain fears, and lack of clarity as to what was allowed.

Elected officials engage with their citizens through a variety of methods and often overlap and jump through different components of the open government community engagement model but typically desire to maintain control or are unsure how to give up control via social media. They typically stay within the transparency sections.

The concepts of closed government community engagement and open government, limited communication were introduced as they related to the notion of inclusivity. Closed government community engagement referred to elected officials who have created their own circle they desire to control and seek to engage with them only. Open government, limited engagement refers to the elected officials who are more open with their posts but limit the types of posts they make and the type of interaction they have online. There appeared to be this fear of a vocal minority potentially having too much control and making the decisions, rather than viewing social media as a means to increase citizen feedback and utilizing it as a tool.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

This chapter will present the key findings from the research study as they relate and pertain to the research questions. Then, implications and recommendations will be discussed in terms of both theoretical implications and practical implications. The chapter will end with study limitations and future research. The goal of the study was to gain further understanding as to how municipal elected officials are utilizing social media as it pertains to open government community engagement. While this study did not seek statistical significance as it relates to the variables presented, the conclusion suggests that the foundational concepts discovered offer a deeper understanding of the concepts explored and a strong foundation for future research.

6.1 Key Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore how social media use by municipal elected officials assists or detracts in fostering open government community engagement. There had been very little research regarding theory and practical applications of social media, and no research regarding social media through the lens of the Open Government Directive and Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation prior to this study. Results from this study indicate that social media use assists in fostering components of open government community engagement, but not necessarily all of the components. Some of the negative aspects of social media lead to the additional concept of open government, limited community engagement for many of the elected officials. Some of these negative aspects of social media kept some elected officials from using social media altogether. The lack of understanding of current laws and associated time

constraints also played a role in limited social media usage, thus affecting open government community engagement levels.

Municipal elected officials engaged with citizens in a variety of ways and move in and out of the different components of open government community engagement. While Arnstein's ladder was originally designed to move from one rung to the next, elected officials appear to move across different rungs and sometimes incorporate multiple rungs at one time; thus, Arnstein's ladder and the Open Government Directive become more fluid as they relate to the open government community engagement concept. There appears to be varying motivations for utilizing certain components of the open government community engagement model that could be explored further. What was discovered through the findings, however, was how transparency, participation, and collaboration all had indirect aspects in regards to their social media usage. The biggest issue arose when trying to explore and define ways in which municipal elected officials can effectively use social media for collaborative efforts. These elements require a loss of control to some extent currently, which may prove difficult to relay or achieve in practice.

While there were many elected officials broadening their scope of influence via social media for various reasons, inclusivity efforts suffered some resulting in the concept of closed government community engagement. One of the ways some elected officials are dealing with the negative aspects social media lends itself to are leaning toward a more closed government community engagement strategy where you control who you are engaging and collaborating with. This was the result of actions related to privacy of social media pages, more intentional with users on social media pages, blocking citizens, and deleting comments.

While it was encouraging to discover many elected officials continue to utilize social media despite the negative experiences, it was discouraging to see little to no value given to citizen comments and feedback. There was a theme of not trusting citizens for a variety of reasons related to education and credibility. There are multiple ways to use the different social media platforms to engage citizens, yet there was a fear of utilizing when only a small population of the residents may participate. It was somewhat ironic because rather than viewing social media as another engagement strategy alongside their other efforts, it was almost as if they were afraid of decisions made solely based on the pressure that may occur from a vocal minority. There was a sense of undisclosed pressure to keep up online because they felt citizens had higher expectations.

The controversial or issues types of posts solicited the most engagement. However, that may not necessarily equate to changes in decision-making. This is especially true for those elected officials who choose to utilize social media only for one-way communication. This led into the avoidance concept that was introduced which encompassed the aspects of avoiding certain types of posts or avoiding social media altogether. The varying municipalities and the Sunshine Law were contributing factors to this idea of avoidance.

Another aspect relating to avoidance and limited engagement may have partially been contributed to the fact that none of the elected officials disclosed a defined social media strategy they followed, with the exception of consistency with certain posts. Not having defined rules and goals may impact their level of confidence regarding social media and practical applications concerning open government community engagement.

<u>6.2 Implications and Recommendations</u>

The following two sections discuss the theoretical and practical implications regarding this study. The theoretical implications discuss new concepts and ideas concerning potential for future studies and additions to the literature. The practical implications discuss ideas both elected officials and governments may want to implement as social media continues to expand.

6.2.1 Theoretical Implications

The model found in Figure Seven adds to the field of public administration by synthesizing values and concepts found throughout public administration literature. These concepts are further analyzed through the social lens and present new terms for suggested use within the public administration field. While seeking to define and validate the concept of open government community engagement, other concepts were discovered. The idea of closed government community engagement was identified in regards to those elected officials who engage online with those they choose. Through different actions, the elected officials create a closed group of people they engage with and no longer have their sites being open to all. The concept open government, limited engagement also emerged to incorporate the elected officials who primarily use social media as a one-way communication strategy. While the concept of open government community engagement may seem ideal in theory, it may prove more difficult in practice depending on the value placed on the role of the citizens. The effectiveness of the model may be in jeopardy if citizens are not able to move past the participation elements and their feedback does not result in some type of action. All three of these concepts have the ability to

add to the literature regarding varying theories related to transparency, participation, and collaboration.

Motives related to the avoidance components and the avoidance concept itself serves as the foundation for a potential avoidance theory related specifically to open government community engagement. There was clear avoidance overall regarding the decision to not utilize social media, while a struggle remained as to what topics and or people should be avoided. The dynamic of manipulation versus empowerment became evident but would need to be explored further before suggesting certain theoretical implications. Additionally, results support a path for future research to explore updating or modifying Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation through the social media lens. The new term of Open Government Community Engagement and related concepts may be developed over time and more finely detailed as additional research is conducted. As the findings related to this study are explored further, public administration implications could be altered as it pertains to the dynamics found within the relationships between governments and citizens. This study provides potential guidance regarding the dynamics related to the roles citizens play and how they are viewed as citizen power continues to grow.

Lastly, the findings suggest another area for further research in regards to the participation element. While there was a desire to utilize social media for gathering information, oftentimes the gathering of information referred to different news sources rather than utilizing social media to gather information from the citizens.

The practical implications focus on recommendations for elected officials and municipal governments. While the study focused on municipal elected officials, it became apparent that the municipalities played a role in some of the social media decisions made.

Local governments need to be more receptive to their elected officials utilizing social media, as there appeared to be underlying fears regarding social media use by the elected officials and social media in general. This seemed to stem from an overarching theme of fear of the unknowns. It is critical to get ahead of the social media movement and utilize the city attorneys at the local government level in order to obtain a better understanding of the laws so that the elected officials are able to understand what they can and cannot do. This knowledge serves as the foundation for what both the city and elected officials choose to do with their social media pages. There is a desire and hunger for understanding social media better from the elected officials and local governments have the opportunity to give them the information they need in order to utilize social media more for open government community engagement. Rather than the elected officials going off and doing their own thing, local governments have the unique opportunity to potentially leverage their elected officials in creating a consistent message in an attempt to not only be more proactive but in order to correct misinformation, as well. There is potential for a single voice, while still allowing the elected officials to engage their constituents. This single voice, however, has more to with spreading accurate information and potential polling strategies, rather than sharing opinions.

The relationship between city managers and elected officials is a critical one in terms of online interactions and potential for effective social media engagements. There was a disconnect

when it came to clear social media strategies either implemented by the elected officials or known by the elected officials from a municipal standpoint. City managers either discouraged social media use for a variety of reasons, which resulted in limited or no use from the elected officials in many cases. The city managers did not appear to play a role when it came to those elected officials who heavily utilize social media. There is a desire among elected officials to engage and interact with their constituents, however there is a lack of time and expertise as many of the elected officials serve in a part-time capacity. Clarification on the roles and expectations of both the city manager and elected official need to be clarified and discussed in order to properly address concerns and a potential strategy. It is important for city staff to understand many of the elected officials are part-time positions and thus struggle to meet the demands of the citizens in terms of values found in the social media framework. There is room for city managers to take a more proactive approach in equipping elected officials to communicate and engage more effectively, by embracing social media rather than avoiding it. By informing elected officials of new laws, clarifying the Sunshine Law, providing training, and/or creating social media manuals, city managers may create work for themselves more on the front end. However, as social media continues to grow and expand, this may prove to be more effective in terms of mitigating issues and misinformation while achieving open government community engagement.

Elected officials have to recognize the value social media brings when it comes to citizen responses. Concerning citizens, there is still this stigma of those who shows up are the ones who care. However, citizens are showing up albeit it is online. As more and more citizens turn to social media as an engagement tool, elected officials need to recognize that is where some, not all, of their constituents reside. There is potential there for elected officials to be ahead of the

inaccurate information getting posted. There is potential there for more intentionality with posts that are made. This is where a strategy should be developed and local governments to step in and help, as time constraints were a huge factor regarding social media use, or lack thereof.

6.3 Study Limitations

This study was exploratory in nature in order to obtain a better understanding of the role and nature of social media within the context of elected official and citizen dynamic. While several themes emerged, statistically significant results cannot be assumed. This study aids in laying a foundation for future studies to be explored with a more quantitative focus.

The role of politics may aid in the responses and social media use, especially considering most of the respondents indicated a desire to run for elected office in the future.

Some of the individuals that responded to the original invitation to participate in the study but did not complete the interview expressed that their schedules were limited due to current campaigns, out for the summer, or in budget season. Other issues had to do with scheduling constraints and the time needed for the interviews.

While Florida contains a relatively diverse population and this study was more exploratory, opening up the sample nationally and internationally could have enhanced the study in order to obtain a better understanding of the concepts explored. While the sample was mostly diverse regarding the control variables, the sample was mostly Caucasian. Lastly, while feedback from the interviews was confidential it was not anonymous. Therefore, the author's role as an elected official and relationship with some of the respondents may have influenced some the responses the elected officials provided.

6.4 Future Research

This qualitative study served as a foundation for future research studies, especially in terms laying the groundwork for more quantitative studies. The propositions may serve as potential hypotheses for future studies. The qualitative study could be expanded to incorporate other factors, as well. Variables related to pay received as an elected official, municipal social media efforts, social media position employed at municipality, elected official's background experience and full-time job, and districts versus at-large elections could be explored as they pertain to social media efforts from the municipal elected officials. These ideas surfaced in the middle of data collection as may prove to play a factor regarding levels of open government community engagement. Future studies may explore how the results of open government community engagement levels relate to citizen trust in the government. Furthermore, the use of social media as more of a campaign strategy rather than true open government community engagement should be explored.

The theme of avoidance emerged within several different contexts. This concept should be fleshed out further in terms of complete avoidance of social media tools and avoidance within certain components of the social media framework. The potential for adding another rung to Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation is evident in terms of avoiding the two-way communication aspects social media provides.

Furthermore, research could be explored nationally and internationally. Other key stakeholders roles could be explored, as well, more specifically government employees, other elected official positions, and the citizens. There is potential for the modernization of Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation through a technology and/or social media lens. Additionally, there

is the potential to investigate the concept of avoidance and how it should be defined in terms of why specific social media elements are not utilized to their fullest potential.

Social media continues to grow and should be studied and explored further. Public administrators and governments have the potential to leverage a useful tool for their benefit if time is made to understand this ever-changing phenomenon. While there are risks involved with utilizing social media, the greater risk may be choosing not to utilize it at all.

APPENDIX A: LETTER TO MUNICIPAL ELECTED OFFICIALS

Dear Elected Official,

My name is Sarah Stoeckel and I am currently a University of Central Florida doctoral student. In addition to conducting research in social media as part of my studies, I am also a fellow municipal elected official, serving on Titusville City Council. My study focuses on social media use by municipal elected officials and I would love your help. I am interviewing various municipal elected officials on whether or not they utilize social media to engage with their citizens, and if so, I am looking at how. My goal is to add to the literature on this topic in order to develop common themes and assist other municipal elected officials on best practices regarding this ever-changing communication method. I would be happy to share with you the findings at the conclusion of my study. Please let me know if you are interested at your earliest convenience. Thank you so much.

Sarah Stoeckel

Titusville City Councilmember

PhD Candidate

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR SOCIAL MEDIA USERS

Control variable questions:

1) What is your age?

2) What is your gender?

3) What is your race?

4) What is your highest degree obtained?

5) What is your political affiliation?

General Questions:

1) How long have you been in office?

2) Are you currently up for re-election or plan to run again for the same or another elected position?

3) Have you held another elected position before? If so, how long?

4) Is this your first term in office?

5) What are your personal feelings about social media?

6) What social media platforms are you currently using and why?

7) Do you utilize your personal page, a political page, or both to engage with citizens?

8) What is your main objective with your social media sites?

9) Do you use social media to inform on facts, share your opinion, or ask for the opinions of others primarily?

10) How are you using social media?

11) Have you noticed any trends with age, gender, or race?

12) Do you want to use social media and/or do you feel you need to? Does your municipality encourage or discourage your social media usage?

13) Are you doing other things outside of social media to help engage citizens that may not use social media?

14) Do you have any concerns with the Sunshine Law? Do you believe this is influencing your social media use or lack thereof?

15) Do you have any rules posted on your social media sites? Do you have any goals for your social media usage?

16) Does anyone else help manage your social media sites besides you? If so, please explain.

Transparency:

1) How do you choose what to publish? How do you decide what to share and what not to share?

2) Do you post about controversial matters?

3) Do you have sponsored posts? Do you reach out more to those who engage you or do you attempt to reach those not engaged?

4) If you use Twitter, what is your main objective for using it?

5) Do you use social media more for broadcasting information or gathering information?

Participation:

1) Do you believe your social media use has helped citizens become more aware of what is happening within your municipality?

2) Do you believe your social media use has either directly or indirectly caused confusion or perpetuated misinformation?

3) Have you encountered any negative experiences?

4) Have you ever blocked people or deleted comments?

5) Have there been any moments you regretted using social media?

6) Have you found those outside your jurisdiction participating in your posts?

7) Concerning participation, which social media site do you utilize most for this?

8) Are the ones participating online the ones that show up to your council/commission meetings?

Collaboration:

1) Do you engage in dialogue regarding controversial matters?

2) Has citizen response online influenced your decision-making at a council/commission meeting?

3) In what ways have you seen collaboration take place online?

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR NON-SOCIAL MEDIA USERS

Control variable questions:

6) What is your age?

7) What is your gender?

8) What is your race?

9) What is your highest degree obtained?

10) What is your political affiliation?

General Questions:

17) How long have you been in office?

18) Are you currently up for re-election or plan to run again for the same or another elected position?

19) Have you held another elected position before? If so, how long?

20) Is this your first term in office?

21) What are your personal feelings about social media?

22) Does your municipality encourage or discourage social media usage from elected officials?

23) Are you doing other things outside of social media to help engage citizens that may not use social media?

24) Do you have any concerns with the Sunshine Law? Do you believe this is influencing your social media use or lack thereof?

Participation:

9) Have you encountered any negative experiences?

APPENDIX D: APPROVAL FORM INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board
Office of Research & Commercialization
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276
www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html

Determination of Exempt Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1**
FWA00000351, IRB00001138

To: **Sarah Stoeckel**

Date: **May 10, 2018**

Dear Researcher:

On 05/10/2018, the IRB reviewed the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review:	Exempt Determination, Category 3
Project Title:	Social Media Usage by Municipal Elected Officials for Open Government Community Engagement
Investigator:	Sarah Stoeckel
IRB Number:	SBE-18-13994
Funding Agency:	
Grant Title:	
Research ID:	N/A

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator Manual.

This letter is signed by:

Renea Carver

Signature applied by Renea C Carver on 05/10/2018 11:11:22 AM EDT

Designated Reviewer

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APPENDIX E: EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH

University of
**Central
Florida**

EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH

Title of Project: SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE BY MUNICIPAL ELECTED OFFICIALS FOR OPEN GOVERNMENT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Principal Investigator: *Sarah Stoeckel*

Faculty Supervisor: *Dr. Thomas Bryer*

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Whether you take part is up to you.

The purpose of this research is to discover how the use of social media assists or detracts in the relationship between municipal elected officials and citizens.

You are being asked to participate in a phone or face-to-face interview. Questions will be used to discover common themes related to social media usage relating to areas of transparency, participation, and collaboration. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

By participating in the interview, you are consenting to the interview being recorded audibly. Your responses are confidential and will not be revealed without your consent; only aggregate results will be made available and the recordings will be destroyed within a year. You have the right to withdraw consent at anytime without consequence. You do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. There are no anticipated risks in completing the interview. There are potential benefits for municipal elected officials and municipalities regarding their social media efforts. The final results will be made available to you, should you wish.

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints, please contact me below:

Sarah Stoeckel
Graduate Student
College of Health and Public Affairs
321-543-9799
stoeckels@knights.ucf.edu

IRB contact about your rights in the study or to report a complaint: Research at the University of Central Florida involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (UCF IRB). This research has been determined to be exempted from IRB review unless changes are made. For information about the rights of people who take part in research, please contact: Institutional Review Board, University of Central Florida, Office of Research & Commercialization, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246 or by telephone at (407) 823-2901.

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