

**Utilizing New Media to Enhance Citizen Participation and Government Responsiveness for
Better Governance**

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Introduction

The Internet, as we know has driven a dramatic change. The rapid development of new media has played an integral role in democratization and accelerating widespread communication across all institutions of the society. Especially in the political landscape, new media technologies have become the central form of communications with distinctly different properties than traditional mass media approaches. The 2008 U.S. presidential elections saw a drastic change, as President Obama utilized the power of social media to reach out to his voters, disseminate information and engage in conversations to win over them. Similarly in 2012 presidential elections, the use of social networking sites was increasingly widespread in political campaigns and among voters. For example, about 10 million tweets were posted during the first presidential debate and 20 million tweets were posted on the Election Day using the #election2012 hashtag, making it the most tweeted event in the U.S. political history (Zhang, Seltzer, & Bichard, 2013). In the current campaigns for the forthcoming 2016 presidential elections, the candidates are not just using Facebook and Twitter to generate traffic and drive the conversations, but are embracing and implementing varied social media strategies. Social network sites such as Snapchat, Instagram and Periscope are being relentlessly used as voters especially millennials have shifted their social media preferences to video and live streaming.

New media technologies and the rise of multiple social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and blogs) have strengthened connectivity and most importantly have changed individual's perception towards the usage of media. Using technology and new media platforms, we have seen how contemporary social movements utilize mediated technologies to connect, garner worldwide support and fight collectively against repressive issues. For movements like the political uprisings in the Arab World, Occupy Wall Street, Occupy Central, #BlackLivesMatter

and Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico, communications and specifically new media tools have played a central role in gathering support globally, disseminating information and mobilizing citizens on a massive scale. The power of internet and digital platforms have enabled citizens to change the regimes that have governed them.

The media environment is changing according to the needs of citizens. The fundamental changes are that the individuals want a voice and citizens demand accountability. All the new forms of information networks and new-age media tools not only influence social relationships, economy and science, but also governance. Hence it is imperative for governments to communicate clearly and consistently on a timely basis and to reach out to their stakeholders, i.e. citizens. Good governance signifies open, inclusive, accountable and effective public institutions (Bhargava, 2015). As much as citizens depend on governments for a well-functioning democratic nation, engaging citizens and civil society can complement the government's efforts to promote good governance. The involvement of citizens in the political process is an essential part of democracy, as they play an active media watchdog role. I would argue that citizen empowerment through mobilization, networking and advocacy is critical for participation in good governance process. In my opinion, governments across the nations are witnessing this new paradigm shift that society is equally dominated by the power of communities and groups, therefore strengthening the relationship between governments and citizens is of paramount importance.

New media has brought a progressive shift in the way governments around the world communicate and engage with citizen. Digital media platforms are seen as a cost-effective and convenient means to keep citizens well-informed, gather feedback and suggestions to absorb them into the policy-making process. The current Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, widely regarded as 'India's First Social Media Prime Minister', extensively uses Twitter and other social

media services to engage in diplomacy, build conversations, mobilize opinion and be more transparent with the citizens. Social media presents a huge opportunity for government-citizen engagement in real-time, enable transparency, humanize government agencies and build trust, if nurtured and used effectively. The real test of good governance is when citizens feel secure and trust governments to conduct public affairs in the best interests of society as a whole rather than for the privileged few (Weber, 2015). Keeping in mind the above, my research paper will address the use of internet and social media platforms by governments to mobilize and engage citizens to take part in decision-making and problem solving solutions. Additionally, as social media affords space for dialogue, the paper outlines in what ways are citizens tapping the potential of the online networks to facilitate shared governance and amplify their voices.

New Governance

Michael Crozier, in his article, ‘Listening, learning, steering: new governance, communication and interactive policy formation’, describes that it has become a common practice to distinguish the term ‘governance’ from ‘government’. Previously, the two were used more or less synonymously referring to the formal and institutional processes of democratically constituted authority. However, now the term ‘governance’ is used to describe governing modes in which government is only one among several actors involved in governance. This is indicative of changing practices involving both governmental and non-governmental actors in governance processes. These processes rely on the interaction of multiple actors and their influence on each other rather than depending solely on the authority of the state. These processes can involve actors drawn from market and civil society institutions and associations as well as from government such that societal navigation may involve more than coordination by government alone. These new governance patterns can be understood as strategies to deal with the challenges posed by ever-

increasing societal diversity, dynamics and complexity. In this context, the involvement of both government and non-government actors becomes necessary to generate sufficient knowledge, authority and legitimacy to effectively respond to societal issues and mitigate the political crises. Interactive structures and processes are thus required to stimulate communication between the various actors involved. Hence ‘networked governance’ is applied to a host of interactive forms in contemporary governance including partnerships, collaborations and other multi-actor interdependencies relating to public decision-making, coordination and service delivery. The networked model of governance indicates a more multilateral mode of interaction (Crozier, 2008).

Effects of technology and citizen engagement on good governance

The emerging theory of change underlying citizen-led good governance efforts can be summarized as (Bhargava, 2015):

- Provision of information and capacity development support to citizens and civil society leads to increased citizens and civil society awareness, capability and willingness to participate. This enables the citizens and civil society to monitor government functioning, voice concerns and promote accountability
- Citizen and civil society voices and monitoring results are shared with authorities, media, and general public. This leads to increased public pressure on authorities to respond, change behavior and reduce corruption. Authorities’ response leads to improved governance outcomes and effective development

Driven by rising citizen expectations and the need for government innovation, social media has become a central component of e-government. Transparency and new forms of accountability have been highlighted as key elements of good governance. Transparency, participation and

collaboration bears the promise of improving policy performance – the historic focus of e-government – by creating shared understandings of current performance and generating pressure to improve, increasing the pool of applicable ideas, tapping into new sources of expertise, and building civic capacity. All these may ultimately turn out to be the key to concrete improvements in policy outcomes and the quality of public services. e-government initiatives can be found in almost all the modernization programs of Western democracies. In the 21st century, governments worldwide are under pressure to change and innovate the ways in which their bureaucracies relate to citizens. e-government has been defined as the use of ICTs and particularly the Internet, as a tool to achieve better government (Bonsón et al, 2012). The resulting evolution of the government-citizen relationship centers in large part on a reimagining of the concept of citizen coproduction, as this becomes both more relevant and viable with advances in technology. In such arrangements government treats the public not as customers but as partners, expanding the role of the citizen from one of mere passive consumption of public services to one of active involvement to jointly tackle social problems. In the resulting joint production, citizens contribute more resources in the form of time, expertise and effort to achieve an outcome, share more responsibility and manage more risk in return for greater control over resources and decisions (Linders, 2012). Whereas coproduction in the past was constrained by the limited ability of government to effectively coordinate citizen actions and the difficulty of ordinary citizens to self-organize, the advent of Internet's unique many-to-many interactivity and ubiquitous communications promises to enable coproduction on an unprecedented scale (Linders, 2012). Prominent examples range from Obama administration's 'Open Government Initiative' which emphasizes on just on transparency but also on participation and collaboration to the British Government's 'Big Society' program which aims to do more with less by dramatically decentralizing and devolving power to the 'nano' level, i.e.

into people's hands and Singapore's 'Government-with-You' e-government strategy that seeks to facilitate a collaborative government which co-creates and connects with the people (Linders, 2012). The focus on corruption as an economic issue has been part of an overall rise in global interest in transparency. Internationally, corruption has received greater attention since 1990s due to fears of increasing opportunities for illicit activity due to globalization. However, with the implementation of ICT-based initiatives through e-government, nations across Americas, Asia and Europe have all claimed successes in reducing corruption. For example, the use of e-government to cut corruption in Fiji has resulted in positive changes in public perception of government corruption and an increase in the responsiveness of government officials to citizen needs. Similarly, the Philippines Department of Budget and Management established an e-procurement system of government agencies to use to allow public bidding on government contracts to both prevent price fixing and allow public accountability (Bertot et al, 2010).

Social media and online collaboration platforms offer a number of advantages for fostering collective action, including the fact that it is much easier to discover and attract members of shared interests, exchange information, make group decisions at a larger scale, integrate individual contributions, supervise a group with less need for hierarchy and manage group logistics due to elimination of time and space constraints (Linders, 2012). These platforms are powerful means to enhance existing and foster new cultures of openness. For example, in the 2007 campaign for Prime Minister of Australia, The Australian media – much of which is owned by Rupert Murdoch, openly supported the Conservative party and its Prime Minister, going so far as to selectively report and distort the results of their own polls, particularly those of the major papers owned by Murdoch. As a result, blogs and other online social networks played a large part by providing contrasting views to balance the media coverage. Months of persistent efforts by bloggers and

citizen journalists in Australia to neutralize and counteract news media industry sin in political reporting left leaders of the journalism industry in an uneasy jittery mood. The mainstream media were pitted against diverse citizens online with control of discourse about a national election at stake. Based on the outcome of that election, online community apparently made a stronger case. Political movements now exist and sustain themselves through the capacities of the Internet to disseminate information (Bertot et al, 2010). The same sentiments about the power of social media are echoed by Rasha Abdulla and Clay Shirky in their respective articles, ‘The Revolution will be Tweeted’ and ‘The Political Power of Social Media’. Examples ranging from Manila protests which overthrew the Philippine president to Egyptian revolution in Tahrir Square, both these authors argue that with the availability of Internet and new media platforms, the networked population is gaining greater access to information and people are collaborating together across the globe to take collective action. Media landscape is increasingly becoming social, global, ubiquitous, and cheap and innovation is happening everywhere, which is a huge transformation, as stated in Clay Shirky’s Ted Talk video, ‘How Social Media can make History’. The video highlights the fact that the Internet gives the many-to-many pattern and is the new public space. This new public space does offer new hope for democracy because people are constantly engaging with each other and taking a proactive participatory role in the social, economic and political discussions that form the crux of any society. Today, citizens are more informed as there are numerous avenues available and such avenues are allowing them to communicate more freely and openly, thus promoting a more enlightened exchange of ideas. Shirky draws our attention to the China earthquake that occurred in 2008 and illustrates how ordinary citizens are playing an important role in sharing firsthand information with the mainstream press and real time, thereby leading way for amateur media to flourish. Despite Government’s attempts to disconnect citizens

from the global digital grid by banning access to social media sites, powering down cell towers and disconnecting Internet switching points in major cities during the political uprisings in the Arab world, citizens still found alternate means to disseminate their activism (Howard & Hussain, 2011). Gladwell, on the other hand critiques the power of social media and argues that social media platforms are built around weak ties and that people cannot build the type of social relationships necessary (strong ties) to bring real change (Gladwell, 2010). However, Gladwell's critics point that the combination of face-to-face relationships and social media networks is a potent and rapidly evolving force. People stay involved in these virtual spaces as they allow for interaction, deepens and complements face-to-face relationships and provides citizens a powerful sense of membership (Leighninger, 2011). In my opinion, for any movement to be successful, we need to deploy both online and offline strategies. Along with the digital strategies, it is equally necessary to build personal connections, trust and facilitate face-to-face interactions on the ground.

Dennis Linders in her article, 'From e-government to we-government: Defining a typology for citizen coproduction in the age of social media' defines three categories to investigate the evolving citizen-government relationship in the age of social media:

Citizen Sourcing (Citizens to Government): In citizen sourcing, the public helps government to be more responsive and effective. Government hold primary responsibility but citizens influence direction and outcomes, improve the government's situational awareness and may even help execute government services on a day-to-day basis. The new tools information age have empowered non-state actors with enhanced capabilities for self-organization and value creation. Political leaders increasingly utilize social media channels such as Facebook and Twitter to not only interact with the electorate during political campaigns but also to consult public while in office. For example, President Obama launched the innovative Change.gov site to ideate and

collect inputs from citizens to set the agenda for his presidency in 2012. Such efforts can facilitate deep collaboration between citizens and government even anonymously to promote participation from those who would fear retribution. Similarly, India's External Affairs Minister – Sushma Swaraj uses Twitter promptly and regularly responds to distraught Indian citizens abroad or in conflict zones in Saudi Arabia based on their pleas for help on Twitter. Enclosed below is a snapshot, where she rescued 168 Indians trapped in Iraq by acting on a video that was tweeted to her. The institutional adoption of government-to-citizen online interactivity also opens up a powerful new problem-solving mechanism that invites everyday citizens to use their skills and expertise to solve government challenge. In doing so, governments can import innovation from social entrepreneurs and from experimentation outside of – but sponsored or enabled by the government. Earlier this year, the government of India announced a slew of incentives to promote a culture of entrepreneurship and boost digital entrepreneurship at the grassroots. Unveiling the 'Startup India Action Plan' announcement, the government has also urged the entrepreneurs to partner with government's efforts in India's developmental process.



Figure 1. Use of social media platform to serve people better (Source: Twitter [@SushmaSwaraj](https://twitter.com/SushmaSwaraj))

Government as a Platform (Government to Citizen): The near-zero marginal cost of digital data dissemination and computer-based services enables government to make its knowledge and IT infrastructure available to the public that paid for their development. In so doing, the state can help citizens improve their day-to-day productivity, decision-making and well-being. Governments can leverage the technology platforms and influence to foster greater public value. Governments across all nations are increasingly moving towards ‘open book government’, whereby requests for information regimes are replaced by proactive information dissemination and a presumption of open publication. The goal is to make open and public the inner workings and performance of government to empower citizens to hold their government to account (Linders, 2012). The current Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, widely regarded as ‘India’s First Social Media Prime Minister’ recently announced a million dollar project - ‘Digital India Initiative’. Digital India is a collective effort of the Indian Government to connect the diverse rural communities to the internet and provide them free access to basic online services. Additionally, initiative seeks to lay emphasis on e-governance, make government services available to citizens electronically and transform India into a digitally empowered society (Daily News & Analysis, 2015). On being elected as India’s Prime Minister in 2014, Modi and his government have been effectively using technology to improve governance and check the menace of corruption. Twitter in particular has become the primary source of information about government plans and schemes. The Government has launched e-NAM — the e-trading platform for National Agriculture Market to facilitate the farmers by giving them a choice in selling their produce on an e-platform. This project aims to bring transparency, efficiency, accountability and policymakers will have a better idea of real-time availability of crops, which will help in the smooth movement of crops from surplus to deficit areas (The Logical Indian, 2016). Additionally, the Government has launched

MyGov platform – a first of its kind participatory governance initiative involving the common citizen at large for a healthy exchange of ideas and discussions contributing towards the social and economic transformation of India. The Government states that the platform has been able to provide the citizens a voice in the governance process of the country and create grounds for the citizens to become stakeholders not only in policy formulation and recommendation stage but also during implementation through actionable tasks. Currently efforts are also underway to make all government services available on mobile phones in the next five years, under the new project or app called ‘UMANG’ (Unified Mobile App for New-age Governance), so that citizens do not have to visit offices, making it much easier for them to get their work done efficiently and conveniently. The app will integrate almost 200 government services such as passport services, land records, income tax, e-Post and women safety among other services and will be available in English and regional languages (Huffington Post, 2016).



Figure 2. MyGov platform, an open discussion platform on country's development (Source: [MyGov website](#))

Do it Yourself Government (Citizen to Citizen): The ease by which wired citizens can effectively self-organize in today's times has opened up new opportunities for citizen-to-citizen coproduction, potentially presenting a substitute for traditional government responsibilities. The

Information Age has reduced citizens' reliance on formal, professionalized institutions of collective action – political parties, interest groups and mass media etc., as instantaneous, many-to-many communication and ubiquitous information flow makes it far easier for citizens to coordinate and enable collaborative decision-making (Linders, 2012). Social media also provides an alternative to government censored media as well as alternative channels of redress for citizen complaints. For example, in China, social media provided a platform for whistleblowers on the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) epidemic in 2003: raising awareness of contaminated milk and aggregating lists of children names killed during the Sichuan Earthquake due to rampant building code violations. Similarly, ipaidabribe.com offers a venue for citizens to exchange information on corrupt officials in India, generating a treasure trove of data on bribery in the aggregate to support evidence-based arguments for improvements in governance. These citizen-organized activities can offer spur official action to correct government failure (Linders, 2012). Another prominent example in India, which inspired many to take action, be it individuals, communities and especially the Government of various states is the TV reality show *Satyamev Jayate* (Truth Alone Triumphs), which aired first on 2012 and has been continuing since then. The show highlights stories of social issues in India such as female foeticide, child sexual abuse, medical malpractice, alcohol abuse, political corruption and women's rights among other injustices with an intent to bring about social awareness and change. Till date, the show has generated billions of responses, tweets and discussions in the public sphere, as the show documents real accounts of citizens' stories and connects with the common mass of India. The show has helped citizens realize their own potential of being agents of social change and governments across the states have been impelled to take action for the betterment of its citizens. Increasing global economic integration has reduced the power of national governments while granting other economic and political actors

access to the world stage. According to Manuel Castells (2008), the decreased ability of nationally based political systems to manage the world's problems on a global scale has induced the rise of a global civic society. In this global civic society, Castells emphasizes the rise of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) since 1990s with a global or international frame of reference in their action and goals. NGOs and other civil society groups are not only stakeholders in governance, but also a driving force behind greater international cooperation through the active mobilization of public support for international agreements. By persuading governments to impose stricter legal sanctions to mitigate threats to democracy and human rights, NGOs play a key watchdog role and continues to be the most trusted third party organizations (2015 Edelman Trust Barometer). NGOs in India have also served to provide a platform to the most vulnerable sections of society. The Rural Employment Guarantee Act and the draft Right to Food Act are a clear testament of some successful attempts by non-profit organizations to uphold human rights and enhance living standards. Castells further states that the global civic society now has the technological means to exist independently from political intuitions and from the mass media.

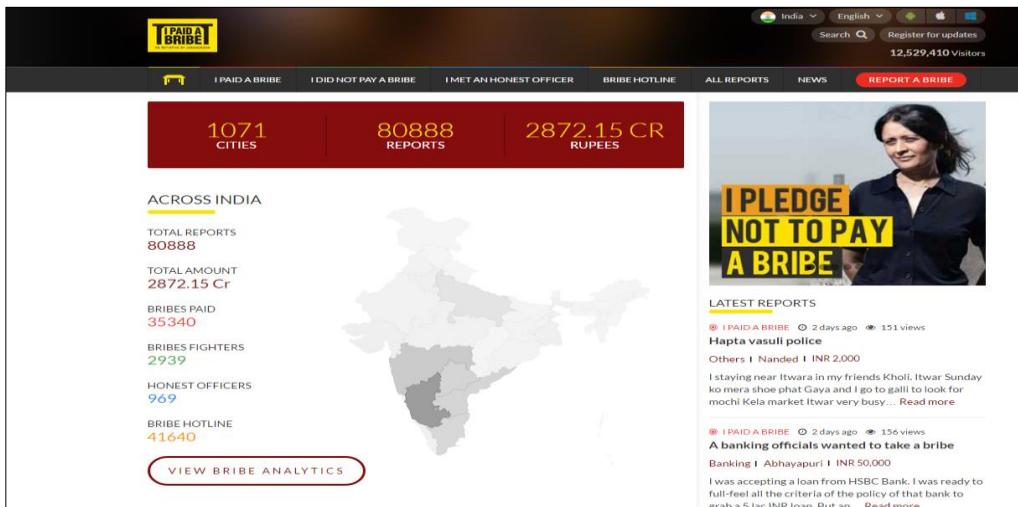


Figure 3. An illustration of bribe analytics in India (Source: ipaidabribe.com website)

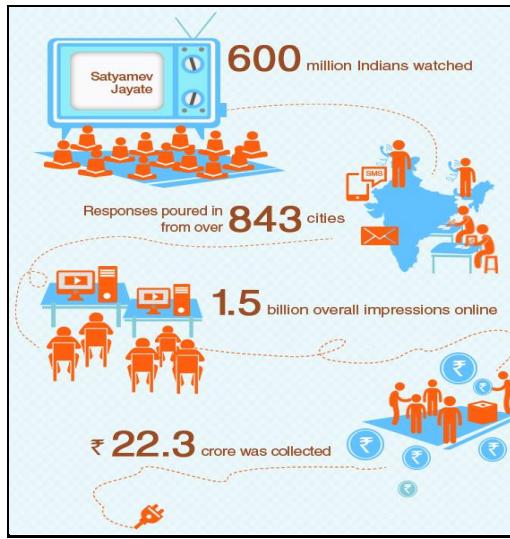


Figure 4. Impact of Satyamev Jayate (Source: Satyamevjayate website)

Challenges and Opportunities

The combination of e-government, social media, web-enabled technologies, mobile technologies, transparency policy initiatives and citizens desire for open and transparent government are fomenting a new age of opportunity that has the potential to create open, transparent, efficient, effective and user-centered ICT-enabled services. Moreover governments, organizations and citizen groups are increasingly linking investment, governance and support to the creation of more open and transparent government (Bertot et al 2010). However, technology access and digital literacy continues to be a concern. Although 98% of American households now have access to some form of high-speed broadband, tens of millions of people are still on the sidelines of the digital revolution (New York Times, 2013). Additionally, persistent digital inequality caused by the inability to afford Internet service, lack of interest or a lack of computer literacy is also deepening racial and economic disparities in the US (New York Times, 2013). There is a need for users to be able to understand and use the technologies through which transparency tools are available. Digital literacy divide is still prevalent in India between the rural

and urban population and is one of the major reason for e-governance failure. Overall Internet penetration in India remains low, at just 30% of the population compared with roughly 50% in China and 87% in the US (Wall Street Journal, 2015). The current government has recently announced digital literacy drive in rural India as many of the households still do not have access to computers. Additionally, the government has come out with a vision to make at least one family member digitally literate and has rolled out basic learning and training courses to uplift the rural segment of the population. All the initiatives outlined above aims to build better infrastructure, delivery of government services and digital empowerment of people, thereby ensuring the broadest ability to participate in e-government services and resources.

Another real challenge for government is behavioral change, opening up the culture within government structures and in the behavior of its officials. Unless government understands the possibilities of social media, educates and allow their officials to use social media in their working environments, opportunities for real engagement, innovation, change and transparency may be lost. Narendra Modi, the second most followed political leader on Twitter after President Barack Obama have been consistently advocating politicians to use social media as a tool of communication, disseminate more information related to government programs and schemes and most importantly connect with the citizens directly to hear their views and redress their grievances.

Conclusion

Citizen participation is considered a valuable element of democratic citizenship and democratic decision-making. Such participation has positive effects on the quality of democracy and over recent times many countries have gained experience with referendums, citizen forums, citizen juries, collaborative governance, participatory budgeting and other models in which citizens have a more direct say. In addition to citizens playing a participatory role in ensuring good

governance, citizen journalism is reshaping media and democracy as well. Using Facebook, Twitter, microblogs and other social media platforms, citizen journalists are playing a crucial role of being newsgatherers and providing real-time updates especially where mainstream media is strongly influenced or controlled by the state or those in power. There is a consensus that citizen-led programs can complement state-led efforts and improve overall effectiveness of governance programs.

Open Government is more than just making government more open and transparent. It is about rebalancing the “governance” and power structure between government institutions, civil society, the private sector and citizens (World Bank, 2014). The essential trust between the government and those governed will only further develop if the culture of openness permeates through governance structures while simultaneously building technical and social capabilities to essentially implement e-government transparency initiatives. As discussed above, new technologies are powerful enablers to strengthen existing transparency and social accountability mechanisms that empower citizens and traditionally excluded groups. However, technologies by themselves are not transformational; they need to be closely embedded into the different local socio-political context and amplify existing social accountability and governance processes (World Bank, 2014).

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