How e-government can promote communication and enhance citizen participation in government process

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Abstract

Government have longed for citizen participation in public affairs to help them create better policies and service that cater to them. For that matter, they needed to reach a great pool of citizens and it was never possible. The emergence of technological advances, particularly the internet has broken those barriers. E-government have made local and federal government accessible to all citizens no matter how far they were. Information that have taken days to reach citizens is now one click away. Citizens have become more knowledgeable, and can give their opinions in matters that will affect their life. The flux of information about government activity have triggered their willingness to participate in the process, thus creating greater citizen engagement.

For decades, citizens have complained about the apparent disconnect between the government and their constituents. The exponential growth of the population has only widened that gap throughout the years. With limited resources available to them, it has been difficult for governments to respond effectively to those needs. The ever-changing characteristics of today's society have made the task even more difficult. Therefore, public entities have been on a quest for efficiency in their process while offering services that correspond to the needs of their constituents. However, to have citizens input in the democratic process, government entities must keep them knowledgeable and dynamic. Technological advances have opened doors to many possibilities brought citizens within the government's reach. The private sectors have been using technology to reach customers globally, and the model has been proven efficient. With the same ingenuity, government and public organizations can gather substantial information about their citizenry, disseminate Information on government operations and enhance their participation in the democratic process.

In a world driven by data, technological advances can facilitate government decision making by building sound knowledge about the citizens. Through their platforms, government entities can gather relevant datasets about citizens which ultimately will allow them to better serve their constituents. They will offer services tailored to citizens' needs. The data will eventually help with assessing the services and project a better visualization of what works and what does not.

The Gift of Information

Throughout history, there has been a disconnect between citizens and their government. Most of the citizenry feel like the government is not worthy of their trust. The disconnect can be attributed to the lack of understanding of the complexity of governmental entities. Most importantly, they are not informed of government activities and how they benefit their interests.

The lack of transparency within the government has built a considerable bridge. E-government has the possibility of altering the perspective of the constituents on how they perceive their government. According to Navarro et al., (2014), "official town websites are highly visible manifestations of city developments and are used for collecting and paying money according to the regulations of city councils" (p. 661). They provide information about the initiative undertaken to benefit citizens' growth and development within society, while they add the conveniency of e-services. Local government websites are a great tool to disseminate information about government activities and other matters of interests to their constituents.

The internet and smartphones revolution have shrunk the world by offering interconnecting platforms never seen before in history. Through their website and social media platform, local governments can reach constituents wherever they might be. They can read, digest and comprehend all of the projects of their current localities.

Citizens as Consultants

Social media and government websites have created platform enabling their citizens to share their views and, more importantly communicate directly with their representatives. They can ask questions their representative and make their voices heard. This open channel had enabled citizens to be present and engage in their civic duties. It has also permitted citizens to have access to government reports, Information on activities, and policies. Those activities have created a bridge enabling citizens to participate in governmental affairs actively.

Representatives have a platform to discuss future bills and policy and have hands-on feedback about how their constituents feel about them. They can also use their platform to learn more about their constituents' demand to create more tailored services. It will save time and money on programs that would yield little to no support. Social media platforms and websites will allow the

government to gather information from citizens enabling them to streamline decision making processes and provide solutions that are more fitted to the problems they face.

Enhanced Citizen participation in Government process

E-Government will establish trust in the government and create a better relationship with their constituents. Throughout the years, there has been a great emphasis on government becoming more transparent to promote citizen participation and engagement within the government policy process. When we speak of citizen engagement we speak of effort to tackle different policy issue, work within the community to settle problem and collaboration with local institutions (Navarro et al., 2014). It is the sense of obligation that the citizens feel as being part of their community. Social media and government website disseminate information to citizens and give them a platform to be heard. They feel more acknowledgeable and connected to their government. This new-found acknowledgment will boost their participation in the civic process.

Greater citizen participation in Governmental affairs, will promote greater efficiency within government entities in service provision to the community. Jaeger and Bertot (2010) explain that the prominence of transparency comes from the idea that an informed citizenry can engage in political discourse and shape the government's future directions.

But we must keep in mind that any useful tool can also be disruptive if not used properly. Information provided by the government must be truthful and not bias in any shape or form. For constituents to form sound opinions and bring useful feedback, the available information must not be manipulated in a way that would cloud their judgment.

For technology to work and be beneficial to the citizenry, public service entities need to use the different platforms they have at their disposition and disseminate sound Information to the

public. It could be easy for certain entities to provide only Information they deem will not stir public outrage to remain in control of the rhetoric.

Conclusion

As society becomes more complex, the government must adapt their operation to offer relevant services. The emergence of technologies could allow the government to be more proactive and efficient in their interaction with their constituents. E-government can reach and engage with a broader audience than would have been possible with traditional channels. The new tool could allow government entities to communicate effectively with their constituency by promoting more transparency and inviting their constituents to have policy related conversation. This strategy would create greater citizen participation in the democratic process and offer tangible feedback on their overall performance.

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