

Status of Social Media Use by Select Federal Agencies: Opportunities & Challenges

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Background

Social media is nearly omnipresent among constituents

- The majority of most demographic groups report some social media use (Morris, Mueller, & Jones, 2014; Pew Research Center, 2018)

Engaging the public is legally required & beneficial

E-participation overcomes traditional constraints to participation such as time, access, communication issues & power dynamics

Public agency use of e-participation

- Federal Transparency & Open Government Directive to “harness new technologies” for public information
- Nearly all federal agencies use social media (GAO, 2011) but land management agency use unknown
- USDA & USDO I encourages the use of social media (USDA Office of Communication, 2011)
- Levels of social media participation range with goal toward legitimate participation & authentic engagement (Fig 1)

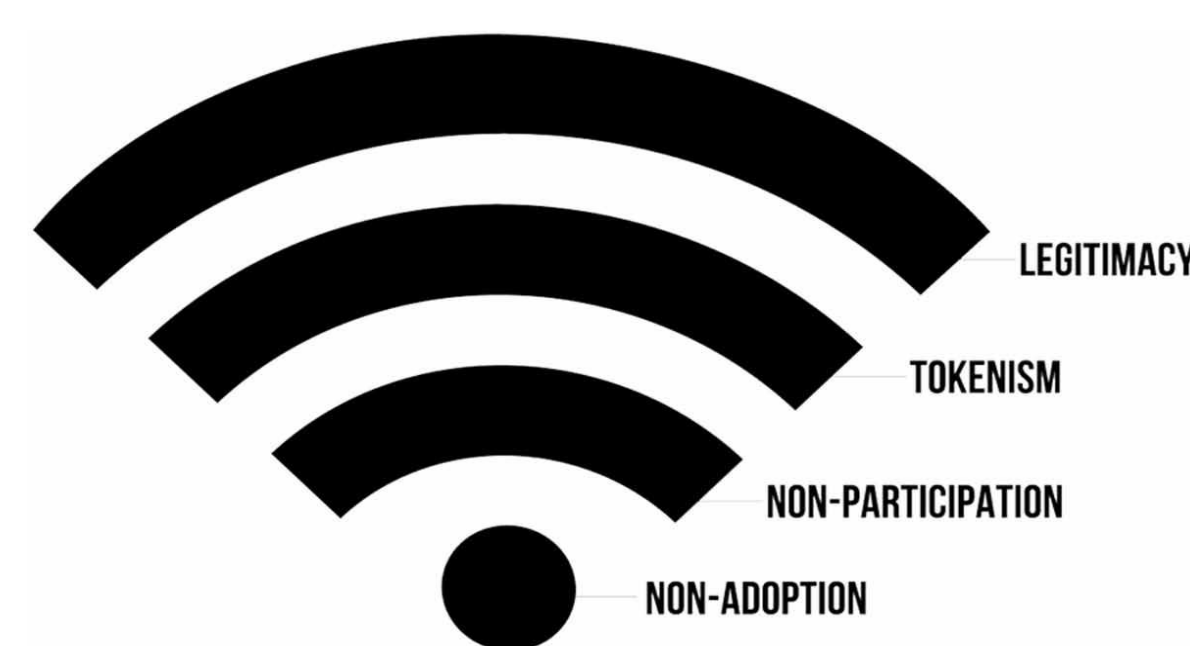


Fig. 1: Social media participation range, Toscano, 2017

Purpose: Understand & compare social media platform use within & across select federal agencies: USDO I Bureau of Land Management & USDA National Forest & Grassland units

Methods

Data collection

Online search & evaluation of USDA National Forests & Grasslands & USDO I Bureau of Land Management webpages & social media platforms, spring & fall 2017

Presence & level of participation on 5 platforms



Analysis

Descriptive % platform use overall & by region

Level of participation on each platform (# followers, views, etc.)

Results

National Forest/Grassland findings

- 90% on Facebook & Twitter
10% unofficial Facebook account
- 30% on YouTube (via FS channel)
- 20% on Instagram
- 60% use Flickr

BLM State Office Findings

- 100% (12/12) on Facebook & Twitter
- 92% on YouTube
- Only National office on Instagram, Tumblr, & Stellar Stories
- 92% use Flickr

Compared to U.S. public use of social media, National Forests/Grasslands & BLM offices have a

- > presence on Facebook & Twitter (public use = 68% & 24%, respectively, Pew, 2018)
- < presence on Instagram & YouTube (public use = 35% & 73%, respectively; Fig. 2)
- No recent public data on Flickr use available

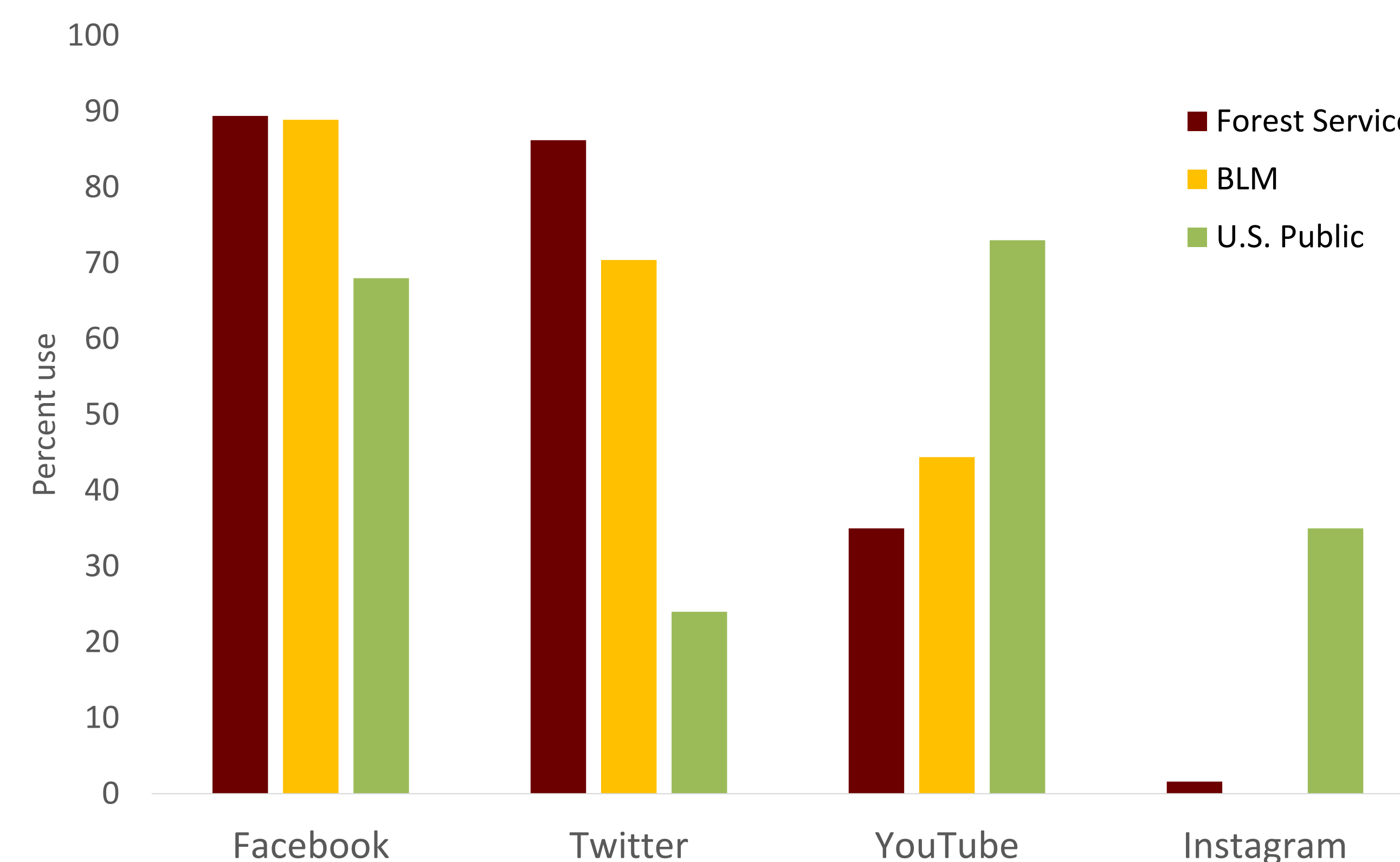


Fig. 2: Percent National Forest & Grassland (n=120) & Bureau of Land Management offices (n=27) social media platform use compared to public platform use (Pew, 2018).

Across Forests/Grasslands, most...

Facebook likes: Olympic National Forest R6 (range: 92 to 98,684)

Twitter followers: San Bernadino National Forest, R5 (range: 69 to 22,700)

National Office
Facebook followers: 130,940
Twitter followers: 132,202
Instagram followers: 54,868
YouTube Subscribers: 11,838

Across BLM state offices, most ...

Facebook likes: Oregon/Washington (range: 6,185 to 23,046)

Twitter followers: Oregon/Washington (range: 702 to 13,000)

National Office
Facebook followers: 53,433
Twitter followers: 26,500
Instagram followers: 298,000
YouTube Subscribers: 2,519

Opportunities & Challenges

Opportunities

- Maximize presence on Facebook with dynamic & timely content that fosters engagement & legitimacy
- Monitor social media platform use to remain relevant: Instagram adapttaion from Flickr
- Foster ‘best in show’ opportunities for successful engagement practices; move beyond information to engagement
- Set clear e-participation goals & expectations to optimize satisfaction & process understanding (Bryson, Quick, Slotterback, & Crosby 2013; Jaeger, Bertot & Shilton, 2012)
- Use best practices with Instagram & YouTube
- Integrate into public engagement strategy to minimize constraints (Pflughoeft & Schneider, 2017)

Challenges

- Quickly evolving social media landscape (Mergel, 2013)
- Understanding role & responsibilities of partners in e-participation & social media landscape
- Fiscal & staff resources to effectively staff social media platforms (TRB, 2012; AASHTO, 2015; Schneider et al. 2018)
- Administrative posting responsibilities & checks
- Identity: Agency vs Region/State or Mgmt Unit

Future research

- Assess how social media used & its effectiveness relate to engagement purpose & participation goals
- Conduct sentiment/content analysis of social media platform posts & identify influencers
- Identify user perspectives of legitimacy & ways to increase