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Social Media for Government: Theory and Practice

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Social Media for Government: Theory and Practice

Abstract

Book review of *Social Media for Government: Theory and Practice*, by Staci M. Zavattaro and Thomas A. Bryer

Keywords

social media, book review, digital marketing, public relations, government

Book Title

Social Media for Government: Theory and Practice

Editors

Staci M. Zavattaro and Thomas A. Bryer

Publisher

Routledge: New York, NY.

Publish year

2016

Additional Information

Hard cover, \$43.00, ISBN: 978-104987-0456-4

Summary

This book will help the reader apply social media skills to a government setting. It uniquely blends practitioner and academic perspectives to establish theory and then describes practical applications for social media engagement. While many books provide an either-or approach of instructing on how to write social media posts or how to manage a large social media presence, this book tastefully accomplishes both, although it does lean more heavily on the administrative perspective.

The daunting task of running a municipality social media presence is divided into two perspectives: internal and external relations. Internal relations considers such factors as how to remain in compliance with the Federal Trade Commission, how to organize social media accounts across government departments, and how to build a consistent, yet lively, community brand. External relations considers crisis and emergency management, relationship building, and development of social media campaigns.

The book very thoroughly compares successes and failures in community involvement in social media and social media campaign development, while taking a more academic and theoretical approach to place branding, public disclosure, the role of social media in the Public Commons, and record management. While government is referenced in its title, it can be helpful for agricultural communicators, especially individuals running social media accounts for land-grant university or larger agricultural company with multiple departments.

Review

Social Media for Government gives an excellent birds-eye perspective of social media management and is a worthwhile read. It takes an atypical approach from most books on social media by focusing on how to coordinate stakeholders and social media accounts, rather than discussing how to craft a “likable” social media post. This aspect is what makes it a must-read for social media managers and a breath of fresh air amidst social media literature.

The book walks the talk of coordinating diverse stakeholders and perspectives as it tactfully balances academic, business, regulatory, and communication practitioner perspectives. It contains several hundred academic journal citations, yet reads so smoothly even someone from outside of academia would likely develop a new interest in research. Some chapters thoroughly describe the theory, methods, and results of only one study, while others provide a practitioner’s experience in applying the concepts of the study’s finding in practical life, and others discuss the business reality of data confidentiality and advertisement disclosures. Because there is an assumption the reader is already fairly familiar with social media, the conversation takes a professional-to-professional approach, digging deeply into each topic.

Another welcome approach of *Social Media for Government* is the consideration of social media use outside of product marketing, an area other books on social media often neglect. In the first chapter, the reader must weigh the costs and benefits of social media for the public good as issues such as transparency, community development, individual freedom, and business legalities are considered. The authors then consider uses of social media beyond product promotion, such as nonprofit fundraising campaigns, situational awareness during emergencies, relationship building by law enforcement, government transparency, and crime solving.

Considering social media through the lens of government can benefit readers working in the private sector. Tightening regulations and positional hierarchy in government remind the private sector of the need for documentation and written social media protocols. While the private sector often considers how social media can be utilized for product promotion, *Social Media for Government* reminds readers of the importance of social media for relationship building and transparency. Additionally, several topics, such as branding, social media campaigns, and consistency across government/business departments, are frequently discussed in both the public and private sector.

There are few weaknesses with this book, as it brings a fresh perspective on how to be a social media manager across multiple departments and social media accounts. Occasionally, the descriptions of research methodologies can become tedious, but in many ways these sections of the book are valuable for reminding readers of an academic social media approach. When reading *Social Media for Government*, it is important to not anticipate a list of best practices for specific social media platforms, nor detailed instructions on how to provide the most popular content. Rather, *Social Media for Government* delves into a greater philosophy of social media management. It calls into question the very purpose of social media in government, and in so doing encourages the reader to develop a holistic, meaningful social media foundation equipped to meet citizens' needs and expectations. Because this book takes a "big picture" approach, it introduces philosophies towards social media management that may transcend time more than many books on social media.

Who Should Read This Book

Social Media for Government is a good read for individuals holding positions of social media leadership in both the public or private sector. It provides strategies for collaboration and big-picture thinking, while challenging readers to rethink the very purpose of their social media accounts. While *Social Media for Government* is written for an agricultural audience, agricultural communicators coordinating multiple social media accounts, perhaps for a land-grant university or large agricultural company, may find its approach to brand consistency helpful. Additionally, both government and agricultural social media platforms may have similarly diverse audiences—ranging from individuals seeking entertainment to beneficiaries of services to industry professionals seeking real-time updates on news.

Perhaps a specific application of this book could be in the classroom. It is a rare find for academic and practical applications to be so intertwined, and class discussions would benefit from the deeper questions this book proposes of the purpose of social media in public life. For students looking to transition from practical application to academic research, this book could introduce theoretical concepts and provides a wealth of citations at the end of each chapter. Additionally, it may be especially helpful for students who are familiar with social media best practices from personal accounts but are unfamiliar with coordinating larger social media campaigns. Paired with a book discussing best practices for generating popular content, *Social Media for Government*

could offer a valuable big-picture perspective in a new media course.

Brittany Bowman is an agricultural communications master's student at Oklahoma State University. Her research includes Extension communication and agritourism Facebook marketing.