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GOV 2.0: Exploring the Use of Web 2.0 Tools by Local Government in Southwestern Ontario

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GOV 2.0:

Exploring the Use of Web 2.0 Tools by
Local Government in Southwestern Ontario

MPA Research Report

Submitted to

The Local Government Program
Department of Political Science
The University of Western Ontario

Chandra Dougall
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Executive Summary

GOV 2.0: Exploring the Use of Web 2.0 Tools by Local Government in Southwestern Ontario

In recent years there has been a number of exciting developments in the world of communication technology which have slowly entered into the realm of local government. These developments have opened up new opportunities for interaction between citizens and local governments. Consequently, this has led to higher citizen expectations of what should be involved in citizen – government relationships. First used for personal reasons and eventually picked up by the private sector for business promotion, Web 2.0 has been met with much apprehension in the public sector. By April 2012 there were still under 200 municipalities in Ontario with an official online social media presence, which is well under half of the municipalities in Ontario. While this number may seem low, by comparison in April 2010 there were only 25 municipalities using social media.¹ One can imagine that this number will continue to grow as municipalities discover the communicative benefits of having an official online presence. Understandably, slowing this growth is a great sense of caution. This study demonstrates that this apprehension is not being mitigated from the beginning with social media policies. Instead, municipalities are jumping in and experimenting. This experimentation is providing the understanding and foundation that municipalities need for designing a social media policy. The experimentation helps answer the questions that municipalities want answered in order to properly take the step forward in citizen – government communications. These questions include, “Where do we begin? What do we say? Who will say it? Why do we need to say it this way? What are the

¹ Lisa Timoshenko and Jacqueline Demers, “Social Media Use Among Ontario Municipalities is Growing Fast,” *Redbrick Communications*, <http://www.redbrick.ca/resources.asp>.

commitments, and what are the risks?"² These are all important questions that must be answered in order to ensure social media is being used properly, and that the municipality is reaping all possible benefits available through this medium. Web 2.0 is a powerful tool, and when combined with the purpose and needs of local government there is little doubt that it could have a very strong impact on the relationship and interaction between citizens and their local government.

² Dan Michaluk and Brian Lambie. "Social Media and Municipalities: Risks and Rewards," *Redbrick Communications*, <http://www.redbrick.ca/resources.asp>.

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Chapter One: Literature Review

What is Web 2.0?

While there has been a significant amount of hesitation by local government with regard to using Web 2.0, the literature available on the topic is very positive. This suggests that, like many technological advancements, there is more objection to change than the technology itself. The purpose of this literature review is to ensure a clear understanding of what Web 2.0 is, and the effect that it can have on local government, specifically in the area of citizen engagement. The point most emphasised throughout virtually every piece of literature reviewed is the positive impact that social media can have on citizen engagement in local government. For example, George Kouroupis, head of Environmental Systems Research Institute Canada's Community Maps Program, which facilitates the sharing of geographic information between government organizations and the public, says that by combining Web 2.0 technology with local government practice, there are four main principles that may be achieved - innovation, transparency of process, collaboration, and citizen participation.³ This combination of Web 2.0 and government practice has led to the concept of Gov 2.0, which encapsulates the idea of local government organizations embracing the opportunities offered by Web 2.0 to be innovative, transparent and collaborate with their citizens.⁴

In order to understand the expectations that citizens have for governments to use Web 2.0 technologies, and ultimately the level of citizen engagement that is possible through its use, there is first a need to understand what Web 2.0 technologies are and how they can be used strategically to transform citizen-government relationships for the better. One of the most significant aspects of Web 2.0 is the multi-directionality of communication. According to Taewoo Nam, a Ph.D. candidate at the Rockefeller

³ George Kouroupis, "Mapping the Way to Gov 2.0," *Municipal World*, December 2011, 13.

⁴ *Ibid*, 13.

College of Public Administration and Policy whose research areas include inter-governmental collaboration, citizen participation and digital government, Web 2.0 offers greater opportunities for citizens to share opinions on topics relevant to their communities than what can be provided through voting, polls and surveys.⁵ This is something that was not present in Web 2.0's predecessor, Web 1.0. For example, before the advent of Web 2.0 technologies, which include social networking services, the sharing of multimedia between users, wikis, blogs or mini blogs such as Twitter, the only available option was to post information on a website, from one person or organization to another.⁶ This is a unidirectional flow of information, with no opportunities for the receiver to engage with the organization or information in any way. In other words, Web 1.0 could be summed up as passive content viewing.⁷ In addition, based on the passive, unidirectional flow of information, Web 1.0 created a type of hierarchy which places the information provider above the information receiver. This presents an issue as there is no opportunity for engagement with citizens. When information is flowing from a single source, in a single direction, there is little chance for the voices and opinions of citizens to be heard through an online medium. This issue will be further examined in *Methodology*, with the introduction of two theoretical frameworks which have been used to analyze the use of social media by local government organizations to engage citizens. These two frameworks are Sherry Arnstein's *Ladder of Citizen Participation* (1969), and the International Association for Public Participation's *Spectrum of Public Participation* (2007).

⁵ Taewoo Nam. "Suggesting frameworks of citizen-sourcing via Government 2.0.," *Government Information Quarterly* 29, (2012): 15.

⁶ Ibid, 12.

⁷ Kouroupis, 13.

The Four Principles

There are four principles that can be achieved through the use of Web 2.0 by local government. These are innovation, transparency, collaboration, and citizen participation.⁸ These are the benefits that are available to local government through the use of Web 2.0, but they are also principles that characterize social media. It is specifically the use of social media platforms that allow for local government to achieve these benefits. All of these principles stem from the fact that through social media, whether it is networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, or multimedia such as YouTube, citizens are able to engage with each other and their local government.⁹ This brings out the aspects of innovation, transparency, collaboration and participation. By striving for these principles, government agencies are able to reap the benefits of citizen engagement and use the information gathered to improve their policymaking and service provision.¹⁰ This has come to be known as crowd-sourcing, or in the case of government and citizen engagement, citizen-sourcing. It is defined as, “how government departments and agencies obtain the services they need to solve their mission delivery requirements and how those decisions are reached”.¹¹ Social media platforms facilitate this kind of citizen engagement through their multi-directional communication paths.

The Benefits of Citizen-sourcing

Citizen-sourcing is best described through the benefits it provides. The key purpose is to engage citizens. The act of engaging citizens draws on the collective knowledge of the public rather than a single source providing information. Through collective knowledge comes collective intelligence, as the thoughts and ideas of the

⁸ Ibid, 13.

⁹ Nam, 12.

¹⁰ Ibid, 12.

¹¹ Ibid, 12.

public can be included in policy making.¹² There are three overall benefits to citizen-sourcing. These are enhanced citizen engagement, the enrichment of citizen-government relationships, and the facilitation of policy implementation. With regard to citizen engagement, if people are engaged in a conversation with their local government then this is not only beneficial to the municipality, but also to the citizens, as citizen-sourcing is conducive to civic learning overall.¹³ For example, citizen-sourcing allows governments to tap into the vast collective intelligence that is made up of the public, or geographically dispersed semi-professionals. Often the problem solving power of a group can be more beneficial than the solutions of a single person. There is a great potential for citizens to learn through meaningful participation, as controversial and relevant ideas are easily discussed. Essentially, participation can “engage individuals in a process of learning from others, opening their minds to different and contested ideas, and reshap[e] their preferences through that learning”.¹⁴ Furthermore, Web 2.0 overcomes the spatial and temporal boundaries that are often inherent in traditional public participation such as public and council meetings.¹⁵ In other words, it is possible for citizens to learn through this medium as much as the government, making it beneficial to both parties.

Second, when citizen-sourcing is done properly as a result of thorough planning and strategy, there can be a strengthening of the citizen-government relationship. Social media allows for political empowerment. Through this medium, citizens tend to feel less alienated from the policy making process. This can be attributed to a shift away from one-to-many production and distribution. Citizens are now able to take an active role in producing and consuming the content. For example, the “collaborative mode enabled by

¹² Ibid, 12.

¹³ Ibid, 13.

¹⁴ Ibid, 13.

¹⁵ Ibid, 13.

Web 2.0 denies the traditional dichotomy of production vs. consumption by fueling *prosumerism*, which denotes an active role of an individual consumer who becomes more involved in the production process”.¹⁶ What this suggests is that social media, when used in the policy making process, allows for a sense of ownership of the product. Having a sense of ownership over the final product is a very powerful sentiment, particularly in a political arena.

Finally, because of the enhanced engagement and strengthened relationship between citizen and government, there is a greater chance of successful policy implementation. Based on the sense of ownership that comes from being a part of the process, citizens are more likely to support government decisions such as the adoption of new policies and initiatives. It has been suggested that even if the outcome is unsuccessful, the very fact that citizens were a part of the process and had the chance to participate means that they are happier.¹⁷ Each of these points are examples of the shift that is occurring from traditional government to citizen sourcing, and are elaborated upon in Figure 1.¹⁸ Essentially, it would seem that public wants to know that their voices were heard, and that the government is listening to what they have to say.

Paradigm Shift to Citizen-sourcing	
<i>Traditional Government</i>	<i>Citizen-sourcing</i>
<i>Information dissemination model</i>	<i>Information creation model</i>
<i>Service provision model</i>	<i>Service coproduction model</i>
<i>Solution purchase model</i>	<i>Solution creation model</i>
<i>Policy enforcement model</i>	<i>Policy making model</i>

Figure 1. Paradigm Shift to Citizen-sourcing

¹⁶ Ibid, 13.

¹⁷ Ibid, 13

¹⁸ Ibid, 18.

Practical Use of Web 2.0

On a more practical level, it is important to review how social media has actually been implemented, and the thoughts and concerns that are held by local government. Based on their role of everyday delivery of services and more direct contact with the public, the focus of this literature review from here on will be municipal. Described above is a very citizen-involved process, which begs the question, is citizen-sourcing happening regularly in municipal government? If citizens are sharing their thoughts and ideas, are governments actually using this information for policy creation, implementation, and improved service delivery? The literature reviewed suggests that government organizations are in fact implementing citizen-sourced ideas as shared via social media platforms. However, the available literature denoting these benefits is not Canadian, and references all levels of government.

Research conducted by Redbrick Communications, an organization which specializes in strategic communications counsel and public relations support, suggests that there are just under 200 municipalities in Ontario that have an official online presence through social media.¹⁹ This is a positive growth, as there is an increasing emphasis on the importance of citizen participation, yet at the same time there are declining levels of citizen engagement. Web 2.0 technologies, social media in particular, have the capacity to be used as a tool for citizen engagement.²⁰ Hesitation to join can have a negative effect on municipalities as realistically, they may not have a social media presence, but the public is already online talking about what is going on in their community. Based on the fact that citizens are already online having the discussions, the idea that municipalities should be engaged and a part of the conversation is a

¹⁹ Timoshenko and Demers, 1.

²⁰ Christopher Twichen and David Adams. *Increasing levels of public participation in planning using web 2.0 technology* (Birmingham: Birmingham City University, 2011): 1.

growing expectation.²¹ For example, if one was to observe the generation that is currently entering the workforce and being hired by all levels of government, social media is the way these new professionals work, interact and communicate. This creates a very strong cultural argument for the use of social media by local government.²² As a generation that has been accused of being politically apathetic, it would seem wise to engage with this segment of the population by communicating with them in a way that they are fluent and comfortable. For a government organization, however, this means a change from a highly formalized communication with the need for approval, editing, letters and slideshows, to instantaneous exchange. Understandably, this is being met with some resistance, as it is not a simple change in communication; it is a cultural change.²³ This resistance does not come as a surprise. The introduction of social media for use within government organizations is hardly the first time change has been resisted in this environment. Information, privacy and security management issues have always been cause for concern, the only difference today is the context.²⁴ The fundamental concern has not changed, “it’s new tools but the same issue: how to manage the challenges that social media raise regarding information management, privacy and security”.²⁵ The following are examples of questions that are being asked regarding a number of concerns within Ontario municipalities, and steps needed to aid in this cultural change.

Often, managers in municipalities who are unsure about the role that social media can play in citizen engagement have a range of valid concerns. For example, they want to know where to start, who will moderate the accounts, and what should be

²¹ Michaluk and Lambie, 1.

²² Toby Fyfe and Paul Crookall. *Social Media and Public Sector Policy Dilemmas*. (Toronto: Institute of Public Administration of Canada, 2010): 9.

²³ Ibid, 9.

²⁴ Ibid, 9.

²⁵ Ibid, 10.

said. This is coupled with concern about the cost factor and possible risks.²⁶ These are all important questions to ask, as they provide the basis for creating a strong social media strategy. However, based on the numbers provided by Redbrick Communications it would seem that municipal managers are slowly realizing the benefits of social media and looking for the answers. The most practical use for social media by local governments is the simple dissemination of information, from the municipality to the public. For example, it is no surprise that among the first municipal social media users were fire departments and emergency responders. Municipalities that take the time to build an audience, and create a strong online social media presence, are able to remain constantly connected to the public, and because of this, should an emergency event take place, the municipality is able to instantaneously reach their citizens with important information.²⁷ The second most popular municipal divisions to join social media were parks, recreation and culture. The use of social media allows for a larger number of people to be notified of festivals, concerts, and activities that are taking place in their municipality.²⁸ Social media is very important for this purpose, however this is still a demonstration of unidirectional information sharing and does not demonstrate how to take social media one step further to engage citizens.

The literature reviewed suggested that there are many concerns held by municipal managers, and these concerns tend to be similar across the board. For example, the question is often raised regarding what to post on a social media platform. The recommendation by Redbrick Communications in this case is that whatever is being posted, it is important to remain positive, helpful, productive, and not excessively promotional. In other words, it is suggested that the tone used by local government when using social media to communicate with citizens is the same as though the user

²⁶ Michaluk and Lambie, 1.

²⁷ Ibid, 1.

²⁸ Ibid, 2.

was speaking at a public event, or council. If it would not be said in these environments, it should not be posted online.²⁹ Managers also seem to be concerned about the time needed to use social media properly. Time wise, Facebook and Twitter are both very user-friendly, with it being possible to set up an account in mere minutes. When it comes to cost, these platforms are both free, and the vast majority of the public knows how to use them. This means that it is very easy for the intended audience to find and use, or interact with the information provided. To better demonstrate the kind of attention that social media needs, Redbrick provides an example: a single tier municipality with a population of 350,000, which remains unnamed in the literature, suggests that one staff member is dedicated to moderating the social media accounts for one hour a day.³⁰ It could be argued that this is not an excessive amount of time dedicated to a single form of communication. While it is clear that the time spent using social media in each municipality will vary based on a number of different variables, how it is used and the time spent doing it all depends on how the organization wants to benefit. Based on the questions raised by municipal managers, and the answers and example provided, it is evident that with minimal research the answers are readily available.

Strategy and Creating a Social Media Policy

It is important to note that Web 2.0 does not provide a one-size-fits-all approach.³¹ Being ignorant of this fact will set a municipality up for failure, as what one municipality needs will be entirely different from the wants and needs of another. Furthermore, there will most likely be a greater chance of success if the use of Web 2.0 is implemented in alignment with the strategic goals of the organization. This means

²⁹ Ibid, 2.

³⁰ Ibid, 2.

³¹ Meiger and Thaens, 113.

that “organizations that plan to use Web 2.0 technology need to focus on their own strategic orientations. In other words: organizations have to find ways to connect the core characteristics of Web 2.0 in an intelligent manner to the objectives of their own organizations”.³² This statement identifies a key theme that has been established throughout the literature review. There is a need for planning and strategizing to be done prior to utilizing Web 2.0 technology. Developing a strategy or plan in the form of a social media policy would appear to be the most practical way to ensure that social media initiatives are carried out as intended. Redbrick Communications suggests the need for three separate policies to be created, including: a general policy for all staff to follow, an official policy for use on behalf of the municipality, and finally a policy for elected officials. The general policy for staff is intended to address the possibility of social media posts made on an employee’s personal time that could negatively affect the reputation of the organization, and make clear that this type of post is grounds for disciplinary action. It must be clear to all employees that only those with specific permission are able to post on behalf of the municipality. The second policy should outline how social media can be used by those who do have permission to speak on behalf of the municipality. Finally, the policy recommended for elected officials is meant for use during council meetings to ensure that if this is allowed, everyone understands what is allowed and what is not.³³ The suggestion of the need for three social media policies is good advice; however, as discussed in the *Analysis* section, it is interesting to see how many municipalities with an official online social media presence even have a policy at all.

While it is not immediately known how many municipalities have social media policies in place, it is something that all municipalities using social media should

³² Ibid, 115.

³³ Michaluk and Labmie, 2.

seriously consider. For instance, “developing a social media policy is an important first step for government agencies that are considering the use of social media, and ultimately serves as a key enabler for responsibly and effectively leveraging social media tools”.³⁴ It is the best way to handle any procedural problems, such as what will be allowed to be posted through social media, and how to moderate posts by others.³⁵ Having an enforceable policy will help eliminate the grey areas between what is and is not acceptable for social media in each particular municipality.

Conclusion

Literature suggests that the establishment of a social media policy would help alleviate many concerns held by municipal managers as it would provide a clear framework of rules, roles and responsibilities tailored to the needs of each municipality. This suggests the possibility that the creation of a social media policy is needed to smooth the transition from a more formalized communication framework to the instantaneous framework associated with social media. The creation of policies is probably the most practical way for a local government to maintain control over the messages and information that is being shared, which suggests that policies will aid in the cultural transition that must be undertaken. Furthermore, the provision of a social media policy will also detail how the municipality wishes to utilize the Web 2.0 tools that have been chosen, and ensure through a set evaluation method that these objectives are being met. For example, if a municipality truly wishes to engage their citizens through social media, this would be stated alongside their methods of engagement. Overall, research indicates that using the tools of Web 2.0, such as social media, for citizen engagement can be very successful. The four elements of innovation, transparency of process, collaboration, and citizen participation can all be achieved

³⁴ Nam, 16.

³⁵ Ibid, 17.

through Web 2.0, however the real question is whether or not true citizen engagement can be achieved.

Chapter 2: Research Question

The issue to be examined is how local governments in Ontario are using Web 2.0 technologies. Specifically what will be explored is whether or not Web 2.0 technologies are being used by local government as a medium for citizen engagement. Research in the form of interviews into this issue uncovered whether or not the selected municipalities are using social media for citizen engagement. The literature review found that over the past two years there has been a sharp uptake in social media as a communication medium by local government; however progress remains hesitant in *how* municipalities are taking part as well as *how* municipalities are participating. This subject has been developed based on the information gathered and discussed in the literature review. The intent of this research was to explore the thoughts, feelings and ideas of a number of municipalities in South Western Ontario, and to discover the reasons for using or not using social media for citizen engagement purposes. Based on the literature review, it would appear that in many cases, municipalities are only starting to discover the benefits of what could be accomplished with Web 2.0 tools.

While conducting researching into the main issue, there were several sub-issues raised. For instance, while there has been a large increase in the number of municipalities with an official presence on social media platforms, this does not mean that these mediums are being actively used and moderated for citizen engagement purposes. Therefore, if a municipality has a social media presence, then there is a high probability that it is being used for strictly informational purposes. While Web 2.0 technology by nature promotes a participatory, collaborative platform for those who use it, does not mean that this function is always used. There is likelihood that social media is still used specifically for unidirectional information dissemination much like its predecessor, Web 1.0. This could stem from a number of factors, explored further in the

Analysis section, including lack of time and resources, or lack of training or strategy. It could also be due to a perceived need to do the next 'cool' thing, and sign up for social media accounts without a plan in place.

Secondly, if municipalities are using social media, there is the question of whether or not they have a communications policy specific to social media, or a section of an existing policy that deals specifically with how to use social media. For example, just because a municipality has an online presence through social media, it does not mean that social media is used consistently or with strategy and forethought. This stems from the fact that while social media has been used by municipalities for a number of years now, it is still new enough that there may not have been a formal policy created for its use. In addition, it is possible that based on the infancy of social media in many municipalities, there is still not a clear understanding of its intended use and goals. In other words, this phase could be described as a kind of preliminary assessment, with municipalities exploring options to see how they can best benefit from this new form of communication. It is for these reasons that the research will look at whether or not the municipalities interviewed have developed a social media policy, and furthermore, the focus and structure of that policy.

Another sub-issue raised was the difference between how upper and lower-tier municipalities use Web 2.0. How these two tiers of local government utilize social media will most likely be very different, based on the fact that they provide different levels of service to citizens. An upper-tier municipality with a social media presence is more likely to use social media for information sharing as it would not necessarily see a benefit from that two way communication between citizens and administration. Thus, an upper-tier municipality is less likely to focus on the citizen engagement element of social media and instead focus on information dissemination. Conversely a lower-tier municipality would be more likely to use social media as a means of citizen engagement in addition

to the information sharing aspect as there are more opportunities at the lower-tier to engage citizens.

In addition, there may be an observable difference in the use of social media between municipalities that are urban or rural, with larger or smaller populations. For example, it is possible that a smaller municipality would use social media much less than a larger municipality, claiming that they do not have the resources, such as staff and time, needed to use it properly. On that note, if a municipality has a large population, then perhaps they will be more likely to have an official social media presence based on the fact that they are more likely to have those resources that may be lacking in rural municipalities.

Finally, whether or not resources are available within the municipality, be it upper or lower-tier, population large or small, there is a matter of the attitude held in local government towards the use of social media. As discussed in the literature review, there are a wide variety of attitudes held by management, staff, council and the public, regarding how or even if social media should be used in local government. With this in mind, it will be interesting to observe the attitudes held by each municipality interviewed and the corresponding approach that is taken to social media. For example, which municipalities will show a more forward thinking, positive attitude towards the use of social media for citizen engagement? And conversely, which will demonstrate resistance to the idea of using social media? These final two issues will be very interesting when it comes to reviewing any available policies that municipalities use to guide their social media use. Reviewing the available policies will provide great insight into each respective municipality's fears and concerns of the medium, which will be evident through the various topics that are included.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Qualitative methods were selected to complete this research project in order to produce a selective collection of municipal profiles which showcase a detailed description of how social media is by the chosen municipalities. A controlled scale qualitative study allowed for a greater range of answers and reflections by interviewees. This provided greater depth of information and a broader picture of how social media is being used for citizen engagement. Information of this nature can lose much of its depth when quantified. Qualitative methods allow for a reflection on the unique features of each municipality.

This research project is composed of three main components. The primary research for this project was collected through conducting interviews with six municipalities. These interviews were reviewed for themes and patterns, and coupled with a policy review of each respective municipality's social media policy(s), as available. The policy analysis is strengthened by the use of these ethnographic methods, and finally analyzed through two frameworks of citizen engagement in order to ascertain whether or not the use of social media by local governments is truly facilitating citizen engagement. The following describes the process behind the methodology used in selection and evaluation.

Selection

In order to keep this research project manageable, while still achieving the goal of collecting detailed, firsthand information, six municipalities were chosen for interviews and policy review. The municipalities chosen were: The Municipality of South Huron, The City of London, The County of Dufferin, The City of Kitchener, The Municipality of Central Elgin, and one municipality which chose to remain anonymous, Municipality Y. These particular municipalities were selected through a combination of convenience and

purposive sampling. The convenience sampling element is apparent in the fact that units available through personal networking were sampled. Convenience samples should not be used to make any generalizing statements, however are appropriate for providing case by case material as a foundation for exploratory studies.³⁶ Thus, for the purposes of this research study, convenience sampling provided an appropriate method of selection, while at the same time providing a suitable cross section of municipalities to explore the use of social media for citizen engagement purposes.

Through purposive sampling, the choice of units is based on the judgment of the investigator that in some way the unit represents the population. As is often the case with purposive sampling, the units are chosen by the investigator based on characteristics that are already known. There is an assumption made that the units selected will also represent the population through their unknown characteristics. It is not possible to verify how accurately the samples represent the rest of the population, and therefore there must be a measure of skepticism in the final results.³⁷ For the purposes of this research in particular, the judgment used to select the six municipalities was based on the fact that they are all in South Western Ontario, assuring cultural, economic, and social similarities. These similarities make drawing comparisons and conclusions between the municipalities possible, and increase the validity of the findings. In addition, based on the cross section of municipalities and the previous knowledge of a number of characteristics, there was an element of purposive sampling within the selection. While there is a need for caution of any final results and the fact that social media is still a relatively new phenomenon in the municipal world, it could be argued that the majority of municipalities using social media platforms will be using them in a similar way.

³⁶ Elizabethann O'Sullivan, Garry R. Rassel, and Maureen Berner. *Research Methods for Public Administrators* (New York:Pearson Longman, 2008):147.

³⁷ Ibid, 147-148.

The Policy Analysis

Each municipality interviewed was asked if there was a social media policy in place in their organization. Regardless of the answer, the municipality would still be interviewed as each municipality is already using social media, and it is still important to understand how they are using it, and why they do not have a policy in place. Questions varied slightly depending on whether or not the organization had a policy or did not have a policy. If a municipality does not have a policy in place, this arguably says as much about how social media is being used as a municipality that does have one in place. The policies collected were analyzed based on their content. For example, what is included in the policy will provide a better understanding of each municipality's concerns regarding social media. The policy analysis element of the research project provides support to the information collected in the interviews as well as providing a clearer picture as to whether or not municipalities are using social media for citizen engagement.

The Interviews

The first step taken was to develop the interview administered to the municipalities. The municipalities were chosen so as to ensure that there were a variety of different tiers and sizes interviewed. After obtaining ethics approval, the interviews were conducted either in person or over the phone. Questions were designed to be open ended in order to allow room for answers to be as broad and detailed as possible, regarding the issues that each respondent felt were important to include. The interviews were integral to this research project, as while one can analyze a social media policy and review what a municipality is doing on social media, it is not possible to learn why certain decisions were made and understand more about the driving force behind each municipality's social media behaviour. This required discussing the social media choices

of each municipality with someone who was familiar with the needs and culture of each. Figure 2 lists the municipalities, and name and position of the interviewees chosen for this study:

Municipality	Name	Position
Municipality of South Huron	Roy Hardy	Chief Administrative Officer
City of London	Elaine Gamble	Director of Corporate Communications
Dufferin County	---	IT Manager
Municipality Y	---	IT Supervisor
Municipality of Central Elgin	Don Leitch	Chief Administrative Officer
City of Kitchener	Nicole Amaral	Marketing Associate/Online Specialist

Figure 2. Interviewees

Some interviewees preferred that they remained anonymous throughout the study, choosing to withhold their name and/or name of municipality. These municipalities have been labelled accordingly and will be referred to as in the chart for the remainder of the study, and as the Interviewee throughout the affected interviews. By interviewing such a wide cross section of municipalities it was possible to begin to see how social media is being used in local government, and what the associated costs and benefits are from a variety of points of view throughout municipal organizations.

Uncovering Themes and Patterns

In order to organize the information collected in the interviews, there were a number of initial themes that were looked for. These themes are listed in Figure 3.

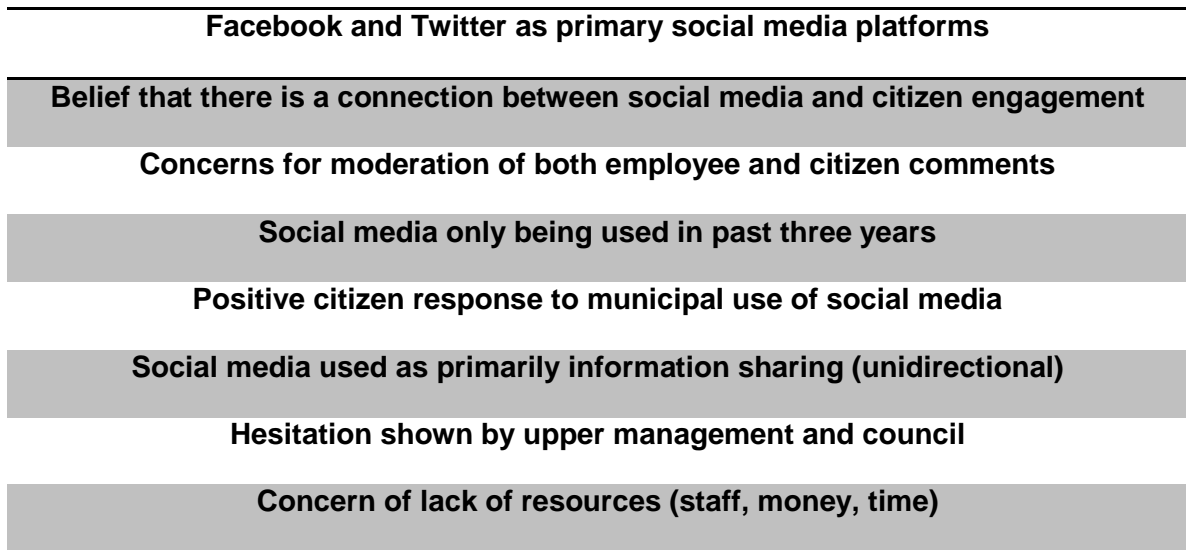


Figure 3. Anticipated Themes

The research also presented a number of unexpected themes, which will be further discussed in the *Analysis* stage.

Citizen Engagement Frameworks

While the interviews and policy analysis provide a strong foundation for understanding how local government is using social media for citizen engagement, it was ultimately the application of two citizen engagement frameworks which identified whether true citizen engagement is taking place. The two frameworks applied were the *IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation* (2007) by the International Association for Public Participation and Sherry Arnstein's *A Ladder of Citizen Participation* (1969). By applying these two frameworks to the information collected through the interviews and policy analysis, it was possible to better understand if and how citizen engagement is being facilitated through social media in municipal organizations. It is also important to note that the two frameworks used are diverse in their origins, resulting in very interesting analysis and conclusions.

IAP2 *Spectrum of Public Participation* (2007)

The International Association for Public Participation is an, “Association of members who seek to promote and improve the practice of public participation in relation to individuals, governments, institutions, and other entities that affect the public interest in Canada and around the world”.³⁸ The Association conducts activities such as providing assistance to organizations who wish to improve their public participation, and advocating for public participation internationally.³⁹ The Association’s *Spectrum of Public Participation* provides a visual of five different levels of public participation, or ‘public impact’.⁴⁰ In other words, public impact means the impact that the public’s participation has on the organizational outcome or initiative that is being introduced. The *Spectrum* includes, from least to greatest impact, Informing, Consulting, Involving, Collaboration and Empowerment. The *Spectrum* also provides examples of what the organization’s public participation goal and promise to the public is for each increasing level of public participation. Examples of the techniques that can be used are also included to demonstrate how an organization would go about delivering each level of public participation. The full *Spectrum of Public Participation* can be found in Figure 4.⁴¹

The *Spectrum* was created in 2007, and while social media was available for use, it was not included. This is not surprising as there are still legitimate concerns about its use in local government today, as demonstrated both in the *Literature Review and Analysis*. Had social media been included in the *Spectrum*, it would most likely be at the higher level of public impact, under Collaboration. This assumption is based on the fact that when social media is used properly as a tool for citizen engagement, there

³⁸ IAP2 Canada. “IAP2 Canada,” *International Association for Public Participation*, <http://iap2canada.ca/about>.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ IAP2 Canada. “IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation,” *International Association for Public Participation*, <http://iap2canada.ca/Default.aspx?pagelid=1020549>.

⁴¹ Ibid.

is an opportunity for collaboration through partnering with citizens in the decision making process, as well as empowerment through giving citizens the power of making the final decision. These are two possible scenarios that can be realized through social media, and fall at the high end of the public impact according to the IAP2 Spectrum. However, it must be acknowledged that while it is an example of a technique or tool, tools must be used properly to obtain the desired outcome.

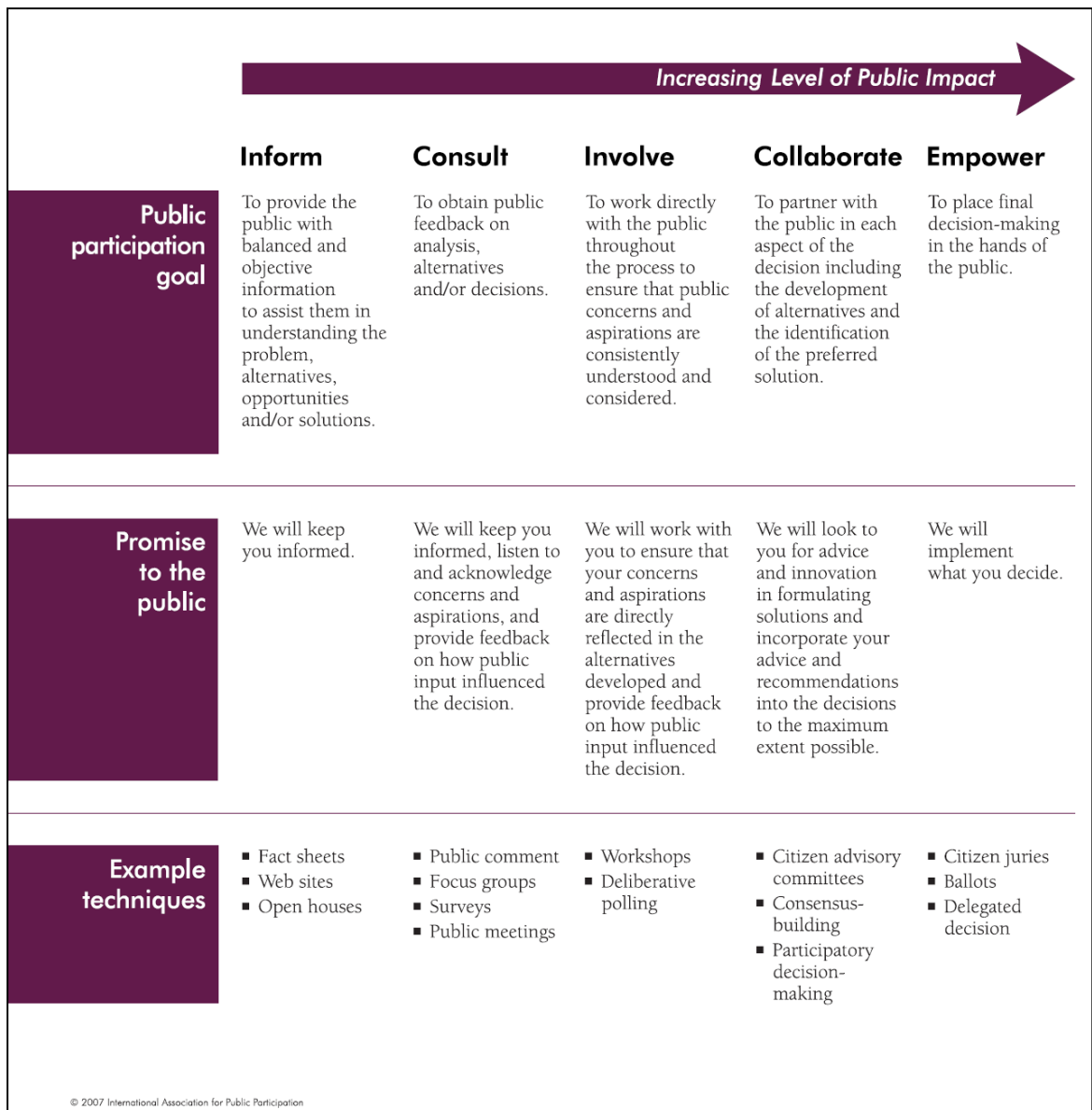


Figure 4. IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

Sherry Arnstein's *A Ladder of Citizen Participation* (1969)

In 1969 Sherry Arnstein published *A Ladder of Citizen Participation* within which she discusses eight levels of participation.⁴² It is a very simple framework made up of a ladder consisting of eight rungs, as demonstrated in Figure 5.

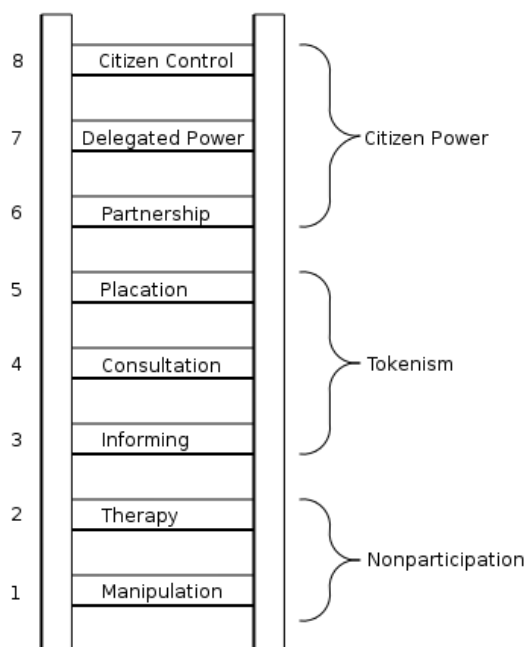


Figure 5. Sherry R. Arnstein, "A Ladder of Citizen Participation"

The bottom two rungs, Manipulation and Therapy, are representative of Nonparticipation. When these two methods are used, the goal is not to enable participation by the public. Instead, it enables those who are in power to 'educate' the participants. Rungs three, four and five are examples of Tokenism. These are Informing, Consultation and Placation. When Informing and Consultation are used by those in power, there is a chance that the public will be heard; however there is no way to ensure any follow through. Placation also falls under Tokenism, as the public can advise power holders, but power holders remain the final decision makers. The lowest

⁴² Sherry R. Arnstein, "A Ladder of Citizen Participation," *A Ladder of Citizen Participation*, 6. <http://lithgow-schmidt.dk/sherry-arnstein/ladder-of-citizen-participation.html>.

rung of Citizen Power is rung six. Rung six is Partnership, which enables citizen to engage with power holders through negotiation. Rung seven and eight, Delegated Power and Citizen Control, mean that the power has tipped in favour of the citizens and the public either has the majority of decision making seats, or is in full power of the process.⁴³ As necessary, each of these rungs are discussed further throughout the analysis with examples from interviews and policies as they are raised.

⁴³ Ibid.

Chapter 4: Analysis

In order to analyze each case to the fullest extent possible, the municipalities interviewed will be presented as Municipal Profiles. Each profile is comprised of an interview summary in order to communicate not only the basic information collected, but also allow for a better idea of each municipality's distinct perspective. In addition, there is information provided about each municipality's status in terms of whether or not there is a social media policy in place. If a particular municipality has a policy in place, the different aspects of the policy are discussed within their profile. As each municipality is unique, and because of the open ended line of questioning, there were a number of times throughout the interview process that interesting anecdotes or extra information was provided by the interviewee, so the amount of information for each municipality varies. At the conclusion of the Municipal Profiles, the common themes found throughout are discussed and finally an analysis of these themes in relation to the two citizen participation frameworks is applied.

The Municipality of South Huron

Population: 9,945 ⁴⁴

Interviewee: Roy Hardy, Chief Administrative Officer

Social media platform(s) used in South Huron: Facebook and Twitter

Number of years using social media: Approximately two years

Social media policy: No

A number of broad themes were identified during the interview with South Huron. As anticipated social media is a relatively new venture, using common social media platforms. It is only in the past year that it has been used in a greater and more regular capacity. Hardy says this came with the hiring of a, "younger, more social media literate

⁴⁴ Statistics Canada. "2011 Census Profile: South Huron, Ontario". Statistics Canada. <http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2011/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CSD&Code1=3540005&Geo2=CD&Code2=3540&Data=Count&SearchText=south%20huron&SearchType=Begin&SearchPR=01&B1=All&Custom=&TABID=1>.

individual”.⁴⁵ While it is now being used more consistently, this use is largely to the benefit of the Community Services Department, where there is a direct interaction between the municipality and residents in terms of trying to increase enrolment to classes provided at the recreation center, or share information about local events.⁴⁶

While social media is being used, South Huron does not have a social media policy in place. This is a theme predicted by the literature review, and according to Hardy, can be contributed to the fact that there is a lack of the required time and resources in South Huron. While social media has been used for two years, because South Huron is a smaller municipality the creation of such a policy is not seen as a priority. At the same time, however, even though there is no official policy in place, Hardy states that social media is “a tool we don’t know enough about, there was a feeling that we should experiment”.⁴⁷ The issue of communications in general is something that is becoming increasingly important in South Huron and there is an identified need to coordinate this kind of interaction as well as provide the needed support from policy. Hardy says that this kind of coordination, backed up by policy, would provide council with a sense of comfort knowing that social media, as a tool, is being used appropriately for the organization. Currently, the general policy guideline that has been verbally communicated to the staff member in charge of using social media is that its use needs to be in line with South Huron’s Code of Conduct.⁴⁸

The need for coordination is one of the reasons why there is currently research being conducted into best practices by other organizations regarding social media use. The Summer Student and the Clerk have been tasked with looking at social media policies in place or being developed in other municipalities, as well as the literature that

⁴⁵ Roy Hardy, interview by author, May 28, 2012.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

is available from government and non-profit organizations. Hardy also noted that there has been a discussion with a London company regarding South Huron's use of social media, suggesting that there is an element of consultation taking place. The hope is that by doing this research prior to the development of the policy, South Huron will achieve a social media policy in line with what other municipalities are doing.⁴⁹ Extensive research into best practices in addition to working with a consultant suggests South Huron is actively trying to discover how social media can best be used.

Throughout the interview there were a number of concerns and obstacles addressed. First, there was an issue identified with the actual internet infrastructure. When social media was first used on a regular basis, there was a very large increase in internet usage, and Hardy says that the internet provider's immediate reaction was to shut it down on the grounds that it was being used for personal use. Hardy calls this experience a lesson, as it was a "typical bureaucratic response".⁵⁰ This reaction coincides with other general concerns by staff and management. Social media is the introduction of a tool which can be used for personal reasons, which Hardy likened to the introduction of email and the internet and the fear that time would not be spent productively. Hardy notes that while this may be a concern, what people do not realize is that within the Municipality there are people, positions, departments, and groups whose interaction with citizens is facilitated by social media, particularly Community Services.⁵¹ Overall, it is with staff whose work is focused on direct service to the community that social media has been best received. On the other hand, Hardy says that older staff throughout the organization approach social media more slowly and carefully.⁵²

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

Other concerns included staff communicating directly with citizens versus the traditional method of communications being approved by management.⁵³ Hardy also mentioned the expectation that citizens may develop for instant replies to any input or inquiries based on the continued use of social media.⁵⁴ This is especially important as South Huron now has more regular content, which means an uptake in interaction. Hardy says these are the types of things that will be considered in the development of the social media policy.⁵⁵

South Huron has no one specific target group for interacting with social media. Hardy notes that while social media attracts younger people, there is an additional need to retain them.⁵⁶ In addition, as internet usage increases across demographics, seniors are also included in the target group. However, older generations are taking up social media at a slower pace. Hardy says,

I see [social media] as a major tool now and in the future. It will be like many new tools. It will take some time for the older population to get into it, but at some point in time, it will make more connections between people...For the senior population, it is a way of being mobile without being mobile, and belonging to a larger and wider community.⁵⁷

This certainly speaks to the inclusivity of social media in the local government context, as well as the numerous opportunities that are presented for people to become engaged.

When asked about whether or not Hardy felt that there is a connection between social media and increased citizen engagement, Hardy replied with an enthusiastic, “For sure, no doubt about it!”⁵⁸ Based on the wide audience that South Huron is reaching, or intends to reach, through social media, and the dedicated staff member who moderates

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

each account, there is definitely a high level of interaction taking place. However, there are no examples at this time of South Huron implementing citizen decisions based on feedback received through social media. This could easily change as Hardy suggests that South Huron will expand social media use in the future, acknowledging that South Huron has, “only just scratched the surface in terms of what the potential is”.⁵⁹ For example, the goal is that eventually there are more areas within the organization using social media, rather than primarily Community Services.⁶⁰

The City of London

Population: 366,150⁶¹

Interviewee: Elaine Gamble, Director of Corporate Communications

Social media platform(s) used in The City of London: Corporate Facebook page, as well as separate pages for a number of groups, corporate Twitter, YouTube Channel

Number of years using social media: Approximately three years

Social media policy: Draft

The City of London began using social media as it was seen as an opportunity to communicate with a wider audience of people. While having a number of social media platforms in use for three years, at the time of the interview there was no social media policy in place, two draft policies were awaiting approval. Gamble stated that,

*“When we first started using social media in 2009, it was easier to go ahead and start using them and get some experience using them than it was to ask for permission first...because there was so much unknown about them, and I think there was a lot of fear that they were going to be misused, or would not be effective.”*⁶²

The intent was to become familiar with using social media, and have that knowledge to develop policy using experience.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Statistics Canada. “2011 Census Profile: London, Ontario”. Statistics Canada. <http://www.recensement2006.ca/census-recensement/2011/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CSD&Code1=3539036&Geo2=CD&Code2=3539&Data=Count&SearchText=London&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=All&Custom=&TABID=1>.

⁶² Elaine Gamble, interview by author, May 28, 2012.

While there has not been any official policy, there was a Terms of Use for moderators which had been developed with the City's legal staff. This means that moderators are able to identify what content is inappropriate for corporate accounts. Mainly issues are dealt with on a case by case basis and discussed internally within the department. Overall, Gamble says that there have been few issues where posts by citizens have needed to be removed. These few have included posts which contained swear words, attacks against other people, and promotional posts from private businesses. In order to ensure that the City's image is maintained, social media accounts are monitored on a daily basis.⁶³

Gamble wanted to make it clear that the policies awaiting approval were specifically designed for social media moderators, and do not include employee's personal use of social media. Personal use in the workplace is its own separate policy.⁶⁴ The two draft policies were provided. One, entitled *Social Media*, had the purpose of identifying responsibilities for the authorization, establishment and administration of corporate social media sites. It applies to all City of London employees authorized to act as Social Media Moderators, and is effective both during and outside work hours.⁶⁵ It includes the responsibilities of managers and moderators, and outlines what constitutes inappropriate content and the protocol for moderators.⁶⁶ The second policy, *Social Media Moderator Guidelines*, is intended "to provide Social Media Moderators guidance on the administration of social media sites they have been authorized to establish and maintain".⁶⁷ This policy includes the required criteria for adopting new social media for the City, standards for posting content to social media, and dialogue principles such as

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ City of London, "Social Media (draft)", *Administrative Policies and Directives*, (2012): 1.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 2-3.

⁶⁷ City of London. "Social Media Moderator Guidelines (draft)", *Administrative Polices and Directives*, (2012): 1.

ensuring that all information is accurate.⁶⁸ Both policies are very clear in purpose, and provide very good guidelines for Social Media Moderators within the City.

When the City started using social media there was a fear that the sites would be misused, or that there would be legal issues or people slandering other people, and it is evident that these concerns have been incorporated into the draft policies. Another initial concern was that social media was a passing fad. With regard to this concern, Gamble notes that social media “will continue to grow, it’s not going anywhere”.⁶⁹ Other than these initial concerns, Gamble says that there have not been many issues raised by staff regarding the use of social media since it started.⁷⁰

Currently all social media is moderated from the Communications Department. Because the policies were still in draft form and there is nothing saying which departments may have a social media account and how to use it, Gamble says that before the City’s social media expands into specific departmental pages, there needs to be policies and guidelines in place.⁷¹ This will help ensure that there is some control over any social media accounts that are created.

Gamble says staff in the Communications Department feels social media is a useful tool. In the experimentation stage Gamble says that it has been a matter of seeing how many followers could be gained, and from there it was built into every day communications activities. For example, whenever a news release is sent out to the press and posted to the website, the next step has naturally become to post it to Facebook and Twitter.⁷² Gamble says that while web based tools are often seen as being impersonal, the outcome of the City using social media has actually been to make

⁶⁸ Ibid, 2-3.

⁶⁹ Elaine Gamble, interview by author, May 28, 2012.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

the City seem more personable.⁷³ This stems from the fact that when people use the City's social media pages and a moderator replies, there is that realization that there is an actual person listening and paying attention to them. Gamble thinks that there has often been a sense of surprise by citizens that anyone actually responds. This is why, for those who know the City is on social media, the response has been great.⁷⁴

However, there are those who are not aware of the City of London's social media presence Gamble states that,

*Every conference and every gathering and every meeting I go to with citizens, out of ten things I might hear, five is that the City should use social media. Which is frustrating, because we are, and for some reason people just assume that we are not.*⁷⁵

Gamble notes that the number of followers on the City's social media seems rather low with approximately 7000 'likes' on Facebook and approximately 3000 followers on Twitter. While these numbers could be higher, she says that in comparison these numbers are higher than other organizations in the City, such as popular local news outlets.⁷⁶

An issue Gamble raised in connection to citizen engagement in the interview was the views held by City Councillors. She noted that there are a number of councillors who are not interested in social media, for work or personal use. According to Gamble, if there were ten thousand people on Twitter and Facebook who said they were against an issue, Council would not be concerned. Conversely, if there were a hundred people in the gallery or if the councillors received a thousand emails regarding an issue, then they would care. Some Council members feel that any mobilization that originates through social media is not an accurate reflection of the population's opinion.⁷⁷ This raises an

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

interesting problem for citizen engagement through social media if Council doesn't believe that social media is important. However, when questioned about whether or not the City had implemented any citizen decisions based on feedback received through social media, Gamble cited an example that happened in 2009 regarding a decision about whether or not a local theme park should be shut down. Gamble said that a citizen started a Facebook group in opposition to shutting down the park, and there were soon 20,000 followers. She said that this movement through social media put a lot of pressure on Council to reconsider, and the park stayed open. However, Gamble notes that this is the only example of implementing citizen decisions that she can think of.⁷⁸ It is important to note that in this case the social media mobilization was generated by citizens, and not an act of the City citizen-sourcing. It does, however, still demonstrate the power social media can have.

Overall, Gamble believes that social media in local government represents a fundamental shift in communications, and is a vital tool in how governments build relationships with citizens.⁷⁹ When asked about whether the City would eventually expand the use of social media, she responded that the City is, "always looking at new tools to know what is out there, what is changing, what is evolving, and where we should have a presence and where we shouldn't".⁸⁰ One of the most important pieces of information that she shared is that if a municipality is going to use social media, they key word is social. It must be used properly, the municipality must be willing to monitor it and see what people are saying, and respond where appropriate.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

The County of Dufferin

Population: 56,881 ⁸²

Interviewee: IT Manager

Social media platform(s) used in the County of Dufferin: Facebook and Twitter

Number of years using social media: Approximately three years

Social media policy: Draft

Dufferin County does not yet have a social media policy in place, but there is one in development. The Interviewee suggested that municipal governments and small municipalities in particular, take a long time to get policies together, while it is larger municipalities that have time and staff resources to implement new ideas. This was supported by suggesting “if a policy isn’t specifically needed to address an issue, typically we don’t have one”.⁸³ In the case of the County, the policy is being drafted in anticipation of social media starting to be used more often

Dufferin’s draft policy provides, “a clear understanding for employees of the expectations of the County of Dufferin when using Social Media during work hours and on their own time”.⁸⁴ The policy applies to all staff as well as volunteers. It clarifies that the Corporate Services Department is the centralized authority on what social media is used, what types of information can be shared online, personal use of social media and keeping work and personal online presence separate, and the personal use of social media during work hours.⁸⁵ One interesting aspect of the policy is the provision of examples for acceptable use. Examples of an acceptable ‘tweet’ using a County-sanctioned Twitter account are very structured, with only road closures, emergency messages and waste management updates included.⁸⁶

⁸² Statistics Canada. “2011 Census Profile: Dufferin, Ontario”. Statistics Canada. <http://www.recensement2006.ca/census-recensement/2011/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CD&Code1=3522&Geo2=PR&Code2=35&Data=Count&SearchText=Dufferin&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=All&Custom=&TABID=1>.

⁸³ IT Manager, interview by author, May 24, 2012.

⁸⁴ County of Dufferin, “Use of Social Media (draft)” *Policy and Procedure Manual*, 1.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 2-3.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 3

Social media for Dufferin County consists of a corporate Facebook account as well as a Facebook account for their strategic plan. At the time of the interview there were also three Twitter accounts, one for Roads, Emergency Management and Waste Management. The accounts are moderated by one person in each department. The Interviewee said that overall social media has been found to be a very useful tool, and in terms of moderation there have not been very many issues.⁸⁷ Each department that has a Twitter account is very “straight forward” in their use.⁸⁸ This is reflected in the examples provided for acceptable ‘tweets’ from the County accounts. According to the Interviewee, Twitter has the most followers, but does not seem to require a lot of moderation. The Facebook page does not have the same amount of traffic as Twitter, and the Interviewee attributes this to the fact that not only have they not used Facebook as much as Twitter, they are an upper-tier so there is less direct contact with citizens. It was suggested that this may change in the future as the County just assumed waste management from the lower tier.⁸⁹

According to the Interviewee there were a number of staff who used Twitter personally and pressed for its use by the County and it “just started one day and it took off”.⁹⁰ However there are still a number of staff members who do not understand the value. The Interviewee says that overall, social media being used by the County was well received, and while some staff are indifferent, there are others who are proud of the fact that there are open channels of communication with the residents. These channels could become even better as the County’s website is redone, and social media is advertised on the front page to help drive traffic.⁹¹

⁸⁷ IT Manager, interview by author, May 24, 2012.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

The Interviewee believes social media is an opportunity for heightened citizen engagement, and that it is a big possibility in the upcoming year as the County takes over waste management from the lower tiers.⁹² Potentially, this engagement will come from the use of surveys to collect citizen input throughout the process. Right now, however, there are no examples of the County implementing citizen decisions based on feedback received through social media. Overall, the Interviewee believes that eventually there will be more interaction in Dufferin County as well as in other municipalities, but there are still some barriers to be removed.⁹³

Municipality Y

Population: Approximately 90,500⁹⁴

Interviewee: IT Supervisor

Social media platform(s) used in Municipality Y: Facebook and Twitter

Number of years using social media: Approximately three years

Social media policy: Draft

Currently this Municipality is looking at further developing the use of social media tools, which have been used for approximately three years, in order to take advantage of what they offer. The major push to start using social media has come in the past year, and started with a change in Mayor and Council. The Interviewee says that the Municipality went from a “non-techie mayor to a very forward thinking one”.⁹⁵ According to the Interviewee, the Municipality does not currently have a wide use of social media. Only Facebook and Twitter are used and these are used to share information.⁹⁶ There is a social media policy in development, but it was not shared to review. The Interviewee says that it will focus on how employees will use social media for the Municipality. Based on the limited use of social media as well as the lack of policy, it was noted there

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Approximation based on Statistics Canada 2011 Census Profile for Municipality X

⁹⁵ IT Supervisor, interview by author, May 29, 2012.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

was no steady moderation of the accounts the Municipality currently has.⁹⁷ The element of hesitation was clear as the Interviewee explained,

*We've seen that across municipalities where it's 'let's get going with this tool everyone is using', but then how do we monitor the situation? How do we ensure we are using the tool to the best of its ability...[and] not let the conversation go stale?*⁹⁸

The concern that the conversation will 'go stale' appears to be very common. In each case, it is directly connected to the moderation of municipal media accounts. In the case of this Municipality, the interviewee says that while there is no formal moderation, it is understood that rules must be formed to protect the Municipality, even saying that, "You can't just jump in without a plan".⁹⁹ This is something that the social media policy will help guide, especially since there are plans in the near future for an expansion of this municipality's social media use.¹⁰⁰

An issue noted by the Interviewee stemming from the lack of a formal policy is the use of social media by employees. There have been a number of tweets by employees that have come across as critical or negative about the Municipality. Also, while some employees feel restricted in their use of social media by the Municipality, there is a need to emphasize the permanency of comments that are posted in the name of the Municipality, or by employees regarding the Municipality.¹⁰¹ The Interviewee notes three sides to the concern of how employees use social media. First, there is the view that it becomes an added job duty. Second, there is the issue of other employees who do not see the value in social media wondering why a certain employee, "gets to sit on Facebook all day".¹⁰² Finally, the Interviewee stated there are some employees who

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

do not want to be involved with social media for fear of being criticized by the public for being a Municipal employee on Facebook.¹⁰³

Right now the primary use of social media for the Municipality is as an information tool. The first use was for emergency management and for winter road maintenance such as road conditions and closed highways. The Interviewee feels that there is a connection between social media and increased community engagement on “certain levels”, and that it is becoming increasingly important.¹⁰⁴ Again, there is a hint of apprehension regarding how beneficial it is for local government use. He notes that the citizen response to the Municipality using social media has been fast adoption through Twitter followers. As the use of social media in the Municipality is still relatively new, there has not been an evaluation of any changes in citizen engagement. The Interviewee did, however, mention a high profile event that was going to happen in the Municipality that had received a considerable amount of negative social media attention. While this was not a municipal run event, because of the reflection on the Municipality, the Mayor did get involved based on the feedback provided on social media by citizens.¹⁰⁵

One piece of advice provided by the Interviewee regarding social media is that while it is,

*A very valuable tool...to get information out to the public, it is certainly not a cure all. A few organizations forget that there is nothing wrong with having a big billboard somewhere on a busy corner to disperse information too. [Social media is] a great tool for government to take advantage of but with some heed and some warning.*¹⁰⁶

This advice suggests there is no need to rush into using social media, but at the same time acknowledges the benefits to local governments using it.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

City of Kitchener

*Population: 219,153*¹⁰⁷

Interviewee: Nicole Amaral, Communications and Marketing Associate/Online Specialist
Social media platform(s) used in the City of Kitchener: Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, YouTube

Number of years using social media: Approximately six years

Social media policy: Yes

Of all the interviews conducted, the City of Kitchener was the most advanced in terms of the variety and strategic use of social media within the organization. Kitchener has had a social media policy in place, within their *Online Communications Strategy*, since 2009.¹⁰⁸ This document is currently under review in order to measure the effectiveness of the social media used, as well as considering new social media platforms which have debuted since the strategy was developed in order to expand and move forward with social media.¹⁰⁹ The current policy is focused on protecting the City's reputation and ensuring that there is consistency in how the Corporation and employees communicate with all public stakeholders through social media and networking sites.¹¹⁰ It also includes expectations of the policies and procedures that employees must follow surrounding corporate and personal use of social media sites in relation to the City.¹¹¹ Also outlined are which social media tools are acceptable for use by the City, and how they will be monitored, the importance of timely, effective and accurate information and responses, ensuring appropriate records management and retention, and finally ensuring appropriate protection of the privacy of those who interact with the City via

¹⁰⁷ Statistics Canada. "2011 Census Profile: Kitchener, Ontario". Statistics Canada. <http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2011/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CSD&Code1=3530013&Geo2=CD&Code2=3530&Data=Count&SearchText=kitchener&SearchType=Begin&SearchPR=01&B1=All&Custom=&TABID=1>

¹⁰⁸ City of Kitchener. "Online Communications Strategy," *City of Kitchener* (2009): 63-72.

¹⁰⁹ Nicole Amaral, interview by author, June 5, 2012.

¹¹⁰ City of Kitchener. "Online Communications Strategy," *City of Kitchener* (2009): 5.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, 16.

social media and networking tools.¹¹² Detailed instructions on how employees should use each tool are also included.

According to Amaral, most staff members are very supportive of the City's use of social media, though there are those who are unfamiliar or have had a bad experience with it and are consequently less supportive.¹¹³ Overall, the biggest concern raised by staff and management regarding the City's use of social media was the risk of negative or inappropriate posts by either staff or citizens, and the possibility of legal or privacy issues. Based on these concerns, Kitchener developed their *Online Communications Strategy* by creating a team of staff from a number of different departments and conducted research over a period of eight months.¹¹⁴ Recommendations were developed from this research, and the strategy was then created which was presented to senior management and council. An existing staff person was designated to manage the social media, and the position was called Marketing and Communications Associate/Online Specialist. Social media is used in a centralized format in order to control the message, and reduce risks which could reflect poorly on the City.¹¹⁵ Kitchener provides an example of a municipality which has thoroughly considered not only how to use social media on a regular basis, but developed a strategy behind its use.

Social media has also been very well received from a citizen perspective. Amaral notes that the increasing number of followers of the City's social media reflects that people are interested in connecting through this channel for information.¹¹⁶ To further back up the belief that citizens are happy with how Kitchener is using social media, a recent poll demonstrated that 88 per cent of respondents on Facebook and 87 percent of followers on Twitter found Kitchener's social media content to be either

¹¹² Ibid, 16.

¹¹³ Nicole Amaral, interview by author, June 5, 2012.

¹¹⁴ City of Kitchener. "Online Communications Strategy," *City of Kitchener* (2009): 5.

¹¹⁵ Nicole Amaral, interview by author, June 5, 2012..

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

relevant or very relevant. 86 percent of Facebook and 83 percent of Twitter respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied with the frequency at which information is being posted. The poll went on to ask what type of content that followers liked to see on each social media platform, ranging from offers, coupons, contests, promotions, road and facility closures, new releases, by laws, public consultation, events and employment opportunities.¹¹⁷ Overall, when asked whether she had noticed any changes in citizen engagement due to social media, Amaral said,

In my opinion, I find people more willing to share their opinion or suggestions on social media. People use social media to let other people know what matters to them. They share with us what's important to them and how our decisions affect their lives. Before social media, providing feedback to a municipality consumed more time. Feedback traditionally came via phone, mail, email or in person. Now, citizens or stakeholders can easily provide feedback or ask questions by simply using their mobile device or computer at any time of day – even outside business hours.¹¹⁸

Evidently citizens in Kitchener have been making use of the City's social media offerings, and Amaral went on to share that citizen engagement through social media has in fact influenced decisions made by the City, though in addition to other forms of traditional forms of communication.¹¹⁹ This suggest that social media is viewed by Council to be an acceptable form of participation from citizens.

The Municipality of Central Elgin

Population: 12,743¹²⁰

Interviewee: Don Leitch, Chief Administrative Officer

Social media platform(s) used in the Municipality of Central Elgin: Facebook and Twitter

Number of years using social media: Approximately two years

Social media policy: Yes

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Statistics Canada. "Census Profile 2011: Central Elgin, Ontario". Statistics Canada.

<http://www.recensement2006.ca/census-recensement/2011/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CSD&Code1=3534020&Geo2=CD&Code2=3534&Data=Count&SearchText=Central%20Elgin&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=All&Custom=&TABID=1>.

Central Elgin began using social media after hearing a number of positive reviews regarding its use for citizen engagement purposes. Leitch notes that social media has a positive advantage over using a website as the message is shared through citizen's newsfeed rather than relying on them to visit the website.¹²¹ Lietch says that social media is mainly used for sharing information. For example, there was a bomb scare in a village within Central Elgin, which turned out to be a geocache. While this is an extreme example, Lietch says that information such as this increases followers.¹²²

The use of social media has been approved by Council as an experiment, however there is an informal social media policy posted on the Central Elgin Facebook page. The policy clarifies to users that the content provided on the Facebook page is, "for the purpose of sharing event, municipal news and program information only", and that any messages considered to be inappropriate will be deleted, outlines what constitutes an inappropriate message, and that the Municipality will do it's best to monitor the page.¹²³ This policy appears to cover what is posted on Facebook by citizens rather than how it will be used by the Municipality, and there is no policy covering similar use on Twitter.

One of the concerns cited by staff and management was that social media was a 'fun' thing, and not something that the Municipality should be participating in. The argument against this concern was that there were other corporations that were already successfully utilizing this tool, and this concern has since been dismissed. A secondary concern was how to manage the content, specifically managing employees in the case there was misinformation posted.¹²⁴ Based on the small size of the Municipality, Leitch

¹²¹ Don Leitch, interview by author, June 4, 2012.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Municipality of Central Elgin. "Facebook Policy," *Municipality of Central Elgin* http://www.facebook.com/#!/pages/Municipality-of-Central-Elgin/129242773784854?sk=app_4949752878.

¹²⁴ Don Leitch, interview by author, June 4, 2012.

does all posting and moderating on both Facebook and Twitter, which essentially means that there is no chance of an employee posting something considered inappropriate. While Leitch is the staff member doing all of the moderating, staff has an overall positive view of the use of social media by Central Elgin.¹²⁵ Leitch notes that a few welcomed its use as a tool to get the message out, and a few of them have 'liked' the Facebook page or follow on Twitter. Citizens have also reacted positively to the use of social media by the Municipality. Leitch believes that engagement has increased, as while the numbers of followers are very low, it is to be expected based on the population. Leitch says that citizens often ask questions, and 'like' photographs that are posted on the social media accounts. While citizens are relatively active on Central Elgin's social media, there are no examples of citizen decisions being implemented based on input received through social media.¹²⁶

While Leitch believes that social media is a good tool for local governments to share information, and allow citizens to respond back, there are no plans to expand its use in the future. However, Leitch said, "Two years from now it could be something totally different than Facebook...so certainly changing if Facebook dies out and there is something better or new".¹²⁷ This suggests that there are no immediate plans to branch out; however there is flexibility and a desire to keep up with what citizens are using.

Themes and Patterns

These six Municipal Profiles, collected from a variety of municipalities and various levels of staff, have provided an idea of how social media is viewed from within local government. While the opinions and anecdotes are unique to each municipality, a number of common themes have emerged. It is interesting to

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

observe through analysis how each municipality has a number of elements that are very similar. However, at the same time each is using social media to a different extent. Overall, the themes that presented themselves are as discussed in the *Research Question* section. However, they do not align with the paradigm shift discussed in the *Literature Review* from traditional government to citizen-sourcing.

The Importance of having a Social Media Policy

While not every municipality has a policy in place, those that do not were in the process of creating one. It is interesting that some municipalities interviewed started using social media as an experiment to see how it could best be used before putting a policy in place. While social media use came before policy, the logic behind this was often to observe the impact that social media could have on the municipality as how it could best be used. Experimentation with social media provided that policies could be better formed and shared with management, staff and council as appropriate in each municipality.

Social Media being used for the Past Two to Three Years

With the City of Kitchener being the exception as they have used social media for six years now, other municipalities have created their social media accounts over the past two to three years. Reasons for creating a social media presence varied, though most cited that it was a convenient way to share information with citizens, and reach a demographic that is harder to reach through traditional forms of media.

Social Media as an Informative Tool

In almost every municipality interviewed, it was evident that social media was used only to communicate information. This is not surprising, as social media is very convenient for this type of communication. However, as discussed in the literature review, this is primarily a unidirectional flow of information. This is not necessarily a bad thing, as citizens are becoming more informed. However, there is an opportunity being missed for citizen engagement as social media allows users to respond, and provide input when posts are made.

Citizen-sourcing

Citizen-sourcing refers to crowd-sourcing, as discussed to in the *Literature Review*, but from the Gov 2.0 perspective. It is the use of social media tools to overcome traditional barriers to bringing the public together to obtain their knowledge and opinions and was identified as an important aspect in the literature review. Few examples of citizen-sourcing were discovered during the interview process. There were a couple instances of surveys and polls being distributed, however these provide provided a limited opportunity for response. It appears that municipalities use social media as a forum for citizens to ask questions and voice concerns, rather than actively citizen-sourcing for knowledge, opinion and input.

Lack of Resources, Population, Upper vs. Lower Tier

One issue that was identified in the literature and reflected in the interviews was that the smaller municipalities cited a lack of time and resources as a reason for not having a policy. The topic of size was mentioned frequently. For example, South Huron said the reason they did not have a social media policy was because the municipality was small and there was a lack of time and resources. In Dufferin,

it was stated that a social media policy was not immediately needed as the upper-tier status of the municipality did not result in a large volume of interaction with citizens. And finally, Central Elgin attributed their informal social media policy to the small size of the municipality. There is a pattern of the small and medium sized municipalities within the spectrum of the study to have no policy or an extremely informal policy, while the very large municipalities, such as Kitchener and London, have very detailed, thorough policies.

Common Concerns

The concerns raised in the literature included the impact that social media will have in the municipality, such as who will moderate the accounts, what should be said, and are there any risks. These were all raised in the interviews at one point or another, as being the concerns of management, staff or council. A concern that arose but was not addressed in the literature reviewed was the possible fear of other staff members perceiving the designated moderator as 'getting' to be on social media all day, and being unproductive or not doing assigned work.

The policies reviewed addressed the above concerns. Municipal employers are nervous about employees or citizens posting opinions that reflect negatively on the municipality. The content of the available policies suggest that municipalities are very aware and thus cautious of the risks associated with using such a public form of communication. This is demonstrated by the stringent rules around who can post, what can be posted, and reserving the right to remove posts by citizens deemed inappropriate. From the point of view of the employee, this raises the question – can the use of social media outside work hours be ascribed standards? This is something that is addressed in a number of the policies

reviewed, which state that disciplinary action will be taken for employees who post information that could be perceived as negative about the municipality.

Overcoming Bureaucratic Stereotypes

The bureaucratic stereotype was a recurring theme. South Huron is trying to overcome the traditional need to confirm all information prior to posting. This is an example of the difference between traditional staff roles in a bureaucracy and the new methods of communication imposed by social media. In other words, social media brings into question the level of autonomous decision making that staff and management are comfortable with. South Huron was also faced with the reaction of their internet provider believing the increase in internet usage was for personal reasons. In the City of London, citizens assume that social media is not in use. Staff in Central Elgin had to convince Council that social media was a valuable tool. These examples represent the contrast between the perception that bureaucracies are ridged and inflexible, and the fluid, instantaneous nature of social media. This stereotype represents the cultural change that local government must undergo to participate fully in social media, and explains the pattern of experimentation before implementing a policy.

Expanding Social Media Presence

A willingness to expand social media use has been demonstrated by each municipality. The extent of expansion plans varied, for example on one end of the spectrum Central Elgin has no immediate plans to expand but is flexible based on future trends, while Kitchener is conducting a review of their *Online Communications Policy* and considering what new tools have been released that would be beneficial to the City to use. Also within the theme of expanding social

media presence is the fact that many of the municipalities interviewed were very aware that while social media was being used, it was not being used to its highest potential.

Citizen Engagement

Citizen engagement is something that can be achieved through the collaboration of local government and Web 2.0 technologies. As noted above, the interviews demonstrated a heavy reliance on information sharing rather than citizen-sourcing. Of the six interviews conducted, three municipalities said that there were examples of citizen feedback through social media being implemented, however these are not strong cases. Each municipality that had an example, Municipality Y, Kitchener and London, said that citizens using social media had shared opinions which were taken into account during decision making by the municipality, or applied pressure to council over a controversial issue. In each of these cases, there was only one example that could be provided, and the pressure came from the creation of social media mobilization by a citizen rather than the municipality citizen-sourcing.

When asked whether or not there is a connection between social media and increased community engagement, every interviewee replied that they believe there is. A number of interviewees also shared that one of the benefits of social media is reaching a wider demographic or reaching people who often would not otherwise be engaged. The majority of interviews also suggested that citizens have responded positively to the municipality using social media, and that there have been noticeable changes regarding citizen engagement due to social media. For example, this positive change could be represented by an increase in the number of 'followers' or 'friends' on municipal social media accounts, people

asking questions, or people 'liking' items on Facebook. These are all examples provided by interviewees as examples of increased citizen engagement; however do not fall under high levels of engagement by the Arnstein or IAP2 definition.

Citizen Participation Frameworks

Arnstein's "A Ladder of Citizen Participation"

A review of the prominent themes found throughout the interviews suggests that the level of citizen engagement that is actually taking place according to Arnstein's *Ladder* lays somewhere in the realm of Tokenism, described by Arnstein as Informing, Consultation and Placation. Arnstein states that,

*Informing citizens of their rights, responsibilities, and options can be the most important first step toward legitimate citizen participation. However, too frequently the emphasis is placed on a one-way flow of information – from officials to citizens – with no channel provided for feedback and no power for negotiation.*¹²⁸

Social media does provide a channel for feedback. However, for citizen feedback to be legitimate, it must be considered so by the policy-makers. Otherwise the process is tokenistic. Based on the six interviews conducted, local governments do not follow through with citizen feedback provided through social media, as there is not the same value applied to social media as public meetings or traditional mediums.

Those municipalities which do use social media polls, surveys, and ask questions of the citizens, would fall under Consultation on Arnstein's *Ladder*. Consultation is another step towards full participation by citizens, however again, there is no guarantee that citizen opinions and ideas will be taken into account. Arnstein says that what citizens end up having done is "participated in

¹²⁸ Arnstein, <http://lithgow-schmidt.dk/sherry-arnstein/ladder-of-citizen-participation.html>.

participation”.¹²⁹ This is demonstrated by the use of social media by the municipalities to ask questions and conduct surveys, coupled with the lack of implementation of citizen ideas.

Placation is when citizens have some degree of influence; however the power holders still retain the right to make final decisions.¹³⁰ Because they do not have the right to make final decisions, placation is still considered tokenism.¹³¹ This was demonstrated in the examples provided in interviews in how citizen activity on social media was considered before making a decision, or how an overwhelming reaction to an issue communicated through social media pressured council to make a certain decision. Often social media reactions take place in addition to other forms of participation, such as going to council meetings or other forms of media such as calling council members or writing letters.

The next level up the ladder is partnership, which enters into citizen power. Throughout all of the interviews conducted, there were no examples of partnership, delegated power, or citizen control provided.¹³²

IAP2 Spectrum of Citizen Participation

Based on the use of social media in the municipalities interviewed, and the number of comments made in the interviews regarding the connection between social media and citizen engagement, it is important to consider how many times social media is used to simply inform citizens. It would seem that according to the *IAP2 Spectrum of Citizen Participation*, the goal of the municipalities demonstrated by their current use of social media is to inform, or “provide the public with balanced and objective information

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions".¹³³ There were many examples provided by interviewees which suggested that social media was a convenient way to share important information while possibly reaching a new demographic. While Web 2.0 tools are being used, they are being used with the intent of getting information out into the public without necessarily asking for feedback, input or opinions.

The next step towards citizen empowerment on the IAP2 *Spectrum* is to consult, or "to obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions". The promise to the public by the organization is to keep citizens, "informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision".¹³⁴ This was demonstrated by the majority of the municipalities interviewed, as it was often mentioned that there is a need to moderate social media accounts in order to keep the conversation going, and let people know that comments and questions will be replied to. This addresses keeping citizens informed and acknowledging concerns. Progress stops in terms of providing feedback on how the public input influenced any decisions being made. While the interviews did produce a couple examples of citizens pressuring council on important issues, these were not a consistent occurrence.

Because of the two way nature of social media, and as long as municipal social media accounts are moderated and have someone responding to queries by the public, this would suggest that according to the IAP2 *Spectrum*, the municipalities interviewed use social media to *Inform* and/or *Consult*. There were no examples of municipalities reaching the levels of *Involve*, *Collaborate* or *Empower*, though these are all possibilities that can be reached by using Web 2.0 tools. For example, based on the *Literature Review* as well as the interviews, realistically it would seem that future use of Web 2.0.

¹³³ "IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation," *International Association for Public Participation*, <http://iap2canada.ca/Default.aspx?pageId=1020549>.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

tools in local government could possibly fall under Collaborate. This assumption is made taking into consideration the ease of two way information sharing with Web 2.0. tools, and thus the ability to citizen-source and collaborate easily on policy creation and service provision.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In terms of where municipalities in Southwestern Ontario stand when it comes to using Web 2.0 tools for citizen engagement, interpretation of the interviews and policies through Arnstein's *Ladder of Citizen Participation* and the IAP2 *Spectrum of Public Administration* was very revealing. First, it would appear that local government is not using social media for citizen engagement to the extent that the literature review would suggest. The overall tone of the literature reviewed was that government organizations are basing policymaking and service provision on input from the public through Web 2.0 tools, and that citizens were actively engaged and empowered through this relationship. My research suggests otherwise. Policy making and service provision is not currently based on input from citizens through social media in the municipalities interviewed. There is no citizen creation, or policy coproduction.¹³⁵ One could argue that as government policy is culture - driven, perhaps local government in Southwestern Ontario is not ready for the culture shift that is required from the traditional bureaucratic government structure to citizen-sourcing. In every case observed, and according to both theoretical frameworks used, citizens have little to no power when it comes to their input being consistently considered when it is provided through Web 2.0 tools. Municipalities, and perhaps council in particular, are still looking for people to fill the council chambers.

If social media is to be used for citizen engagement, governments must make the appropriate adjustments towards the required culture shift.¹³⁶ To be truly effective, full involvement of all parties is required based on the unilateral functions of Web 2.0. As mentioned in the interviews, the concerns surrounding social media are not new or unique. They are the same concerns raised whenever a new communication medium is

¹³⁵ Nam, 14.

¹³⁶ Fyfe and Crookall, 9.

introduced, whether it is the internet, email, or social media. The introduction into local government culture is cautious. This apprehension is demonstrated not only by management, but by staff and council. Citizens, on the other hand, were widely perceived by those interviewed as being in favour of their municipality using social media. Case in point, the example from the City of London, where there are requests by citizens that London use social media, when they already have been for some time now. It would seem that while local governments are slow to make the necessary culture changes, these same changes are found to be surprising by citizens, who are accustomed to the traditional ridged bureaucratic structure. Based on the interviews and perceived lack of resources such as time and staff in smaller municipalities, as well as the practice of using social media to share information, the consistent implementation of the principles of Gov 2.0 in Southwestern Ontario and the associated citizen engagement possibilities, is not yet occurring.

One point that is emphasized in the interviews is that there is no one way for municipalities to approach social media. Each municipality interviewed was at a different stage of using Web 2.0 tools. While some municipalities appear very fluent in their use, using a variety of tools strategically every day, other municipalities are clearly still experimenting and assessing how to best tailor their social media usage to their own wants and needs, as well as the wants and needs of the citizens. It is a matter of each municipality experimenting to discover what they need, how they can use it, and the resources needed to succeed. If this happens, the four principles of Gov 2.0 - innovation, transparency, collaboration, and participation - will slowly be incorporated into local government.

One thing that all municipalities would benefit from is a social media policy, or policies. Ideally the social media policy would form part of an overarching communications policy. This calls into question the development of policy based on the

impacts of technological change. As history tends to repeat itself with the advent of each technological innovation, and the observed reluctance of local government to use new tools immediately, there is a need for policy development to become more flexible. There is no question that the tools of Web 2.0 offer a wide range of benefits to local government, and with the proper policy development and a shift to a more flexible policy culture, local government organizations would be able to utilize these tools faster. In addition, communicative tools will continue to develop and flexible policy means that as the next tools are introduced, local government will be able to put them to use right away.

Overall, the results suggest that while local governments are using social media, and citizens are interacting with their municipality through this medium by asking questions and 'following' to keep up to date on the most recent information, true citizen engagement – and thus empowerment – is not being realized, as per Arnstein's and IAP2's definition. Based on the interviews conducted, there is a wide spectrum of progress in the use of Web 2.0 tools demonstrated in municipalities in Southwestern Ontario. Some municipalities are actively maintaining and widening their social media presence, while others recognize the benefits but are still experimenting. Missing in each scenario, however, is the citizen being able to take ownership of the political process in their community through social media. However, this study has presented that like other communication mediums that have been introduced to local government, barriers are eventually broken down as the communicative benefits become apparent.

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