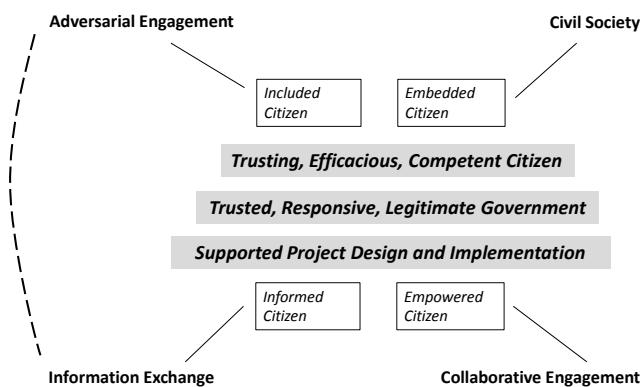


Identifying a Model for Effective Public Participation Using Social Media in Urban Infrastructure Projects

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1. The use of social media and other emergent technologies for public participation is an area only beginning to be explored through research.
 - a. General findings from this research include:
 - i. These technologies have the potential to permit greater government transparency and citizen access to government.
 - ii. Where technologies are used effectively, citizens are given specific tasks and clear instructions about how they should be involved and what the impact of their involvement will be. Governments have deployed technologies as part of a broader strategic process.
 - iii. Where technologies are not used effectively, governments have tended to use them for unidirectional information sharing only and have failed to establish clear expectations for how citizens can be involved or what the impact of that involvement might be.
2. The use of social media and other emergent technologies for public participation in the context of large-scale urban infrastructure projects is an area not studied very much, if at all, at least in the United States.
 - a. Based on an assessment of several cases, I can suggest a model for how social media can best be used in order to accomplish three objectives: (1) produce trusting, efficacious, and competent citizens, (2) produce trusted, responsive, and legitimate government, and (3) produce supported project design and implementation. See the figure below for a graphical representation of the model.

Model for Public Participation Using Social Media in Urban Infrastructure Projects



3. The model suggests four *forms of civic engagement* should be facilitated to have an effective social media public participation process. Note that these suggested forms of engagement are each equally important; providing one form of engagement is not sufficient and may likely present the achievement of objectives. More research needs to be conducted to further develop and refine this model. Examples will be provided later.
 - a. *Adversarial Engagement.* The social media space should provide equal opportunity, without censorship, to all positions and interests on the infrastructure project. The space should help produce the *included citizen*. The important principle is that every individual should feel as though his or her voice was expressed or at least had a fair opportunity to be expressed. Additionally, the social media page administrators should identify and share the multiple perspectives on the issue even if the stakeholders who maintain those perspectives do not join the social media space.
 - b. *Information Exchange.* The social media space should provide regular updates using text and visual media to communicate the status of project planning and implementation. The space should help produce the *informed citizen*. The important principle is that every individual should feel as though they have the opportunity to access and understand the full extent of the project.
 - c. *Civil Society.* The social media space should provide stakeholder interest groups and community organizations to share information related to or of potential concern to citizens and stakeholders who are interested in the infrastructure project. The space should recognize the *embedded citizen*, who maintains memberships and affiliations with a range of groups and organizations, including fraternal associations, faith-based organizations, and policy issue/interest/pressure groups. Permitting the range of groups to use the space can help citizens and stakeholders both contribute to a broader discussion and for project leaders and consultants to recognize the range of impact of the project.
 - d. *Collaborative Engagement.* The social media space should provide stakeholders and citizens with an equal opportunity to contribute ideas, raise questions, and have project leaders and consultants respond to those ideas and questions. The space should help produce the *empowered citizen*.
4. There are limited but useful examples. Several examples come from a larger set of infrastructure project cases through U.S. economic stimulus funding, or through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Others are independent urban projects. The first case highlighted appears to contain all of the components identified in the model. Two second cases contains some but not all of the elements. Not all stimulus funded projects used social media for public participation. Additional examples are available for presentation.
 - a. *Westside Subway Extension/Subway to the Sea*, Los Angeles, California. This is a controversial project still in the planning phase. The proposal is to extend the underground subway system in Los Angeles to reach from downtown to the Pacific coast of the United States. The proposed route is through the community of Beverly Hills, a wealthy enclave of the county. More precisely, the proposed route would require that a tunnel be dug under the front lawn of Beverly Hills High School. The Facebook page for the project is:
<https://www.facebook.com/WestsideSubwayExtension>. The project also uses Twitter.

- i. The social media space provides for adversarial engagement by allowing stakeholders to post views from all perspectives (build as planned, build but move the tunnel, or don't build), and the space administrators post links to social media spaces created by the advocates and opponents of the project, including to YouTube videos created on each side of the debate. Outcome: *included citizen*.
- ii. Space administrators post regular updates on the planning process. Outcome: *informed citizen*.
- iii. The space is open for any and all to join and post, thus permitting various other interest groups and community organizations to share ideas and suggest common concerns. Outcome: *embedded citizen*.
- iv. Space administrators openly respond to citizen queries, suggesting resources for further exploration or simply providing the facts to address the concern. Outcome: *empowered citizen*.

- b. *Tucson Modern Streetcar*, Tucson, Arizona. Tucson's Modern Streetcar is fixed-guideway electric rail system that will connect major activity centers. Tucson's 3.9-mile streetcar route connects major activity centers: The University of Arizona, Arizona Health Sciences Center, Main Gate Square, 4th Avenue Business District, Congress Shopping and Entertainment District, Downtown Tucson, and the Downtown redevelopment area west of I-10, including the Mercado District. The Facebook page for the project is: <https://www.facebook.com/TucsonStreetcar>.
 - i. The social media space does not prohibit diverse perspectives from being shared but neither are such perspectives encouraged. It is possible that some citizens are excluded.
 - ii. Space administrators post regular updates on implementation of the project. Outcome: *informed citizen*.
 - iii. The space is open for any and all to join and post, thus permitting various other interest groups and community organizations to share ideas and suggest common concerns. Outcome: *embedded citizen*.
 - iv. Space administrators do not seem to response to expressed citizen concerns and inquiries on a consistent basis. Indeed, it appears they choose to ignore particularly critical comments. Thus, some citizens may be disempowered.

5. There are other examples of the use of social media for public participation outside of the context of urban infrastructure projects. These examples suggest practices to pursue and practices to avoid.
 - a. *Use of mobile devices to report urban problems*. The City of Los Angeles empowers citizens to take pictures of urban problems and submit them to the city, tagged with geographic data so officials can respond to the issue (e.g. road repair, sidewalk damage, graffiti). This tool might be applied to infrastructure projects by allowing citizens to capture images during construction of what they perceive to be causes for concern or merely the subject of questions.
 - b. *Rewarding citizens for good ideas*. The city of Manor, Texas has established a set of tools to allow citizens to submit ideas for improving the city, to vote and comment on the ideas of others, and to receive awards for ideas that are popular and/or

implemented. Prizes include such things as meals at local restaurants or movie tickets. The tool can be applied in infrastructure planning for ideas that are incorporated into final design and construction.

- c. *Ill Defined Expectations.* A common occurrence across social media spaces for public participation is that expectations are ill defined, and transparency is not universally applied. We see these examples in urban governments in the United States as well as within the Obama administration. The lesson is to clearly state the purpose and objectives of social media for public participation.

6. Summary thoughts and principles

- a. Be strategic in design and implementation of a social media public participation process.
- b. Use available technologies but do not force technologies; every tool has strengths and weaknesses.
- c. Be open to learn about technologies and how to improve their use for public participation from citizens.
- d. Promote civility and reduce timidity.
- e. Be a full participant in discussions, and do not censor any perspectives.