

# The Effectiveness of Social Media Use for Local Governance Development

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This study aims to verify the potential of social media use for local governance development, to identify some of the limitations and make suggestions for interaction. The results indicate that although social media use can apply through various formats, they can generally only facilitate communication activities. There are no apparent activities to promote interaction and engagement. Several limitations involve regulations, organisations, personnel, coordination of municipality, effectiveness, confidence, and also the cost of social media for people. An 'easy-to-use' approach is the required solution in the context of government officials and people.

**Keywords:** *Social Media, Public Policy, Local Governance, Citizen Engagement, Co-Production, Digitalised Governance.*

## Introduction

Social media is regarded as a useful tool for active citizen participation, information sharing, communication and online relationships. Due to the need to continuously communicate with its citizens, many governments now employ social media tools to communicate and use assess public aspirations (Berthon, Pitt, Plangger & Shapiro 2012). However, in responding to the advance of technology, a lack of understanding and readiness to use social media is a challenge for the government, therefore, not only should the benefits of social media use be considered, but also how social media can increase public trust. The government should create a policy direction that ensures confidence, gains participation and fosters belief in development (Park et. al. 2015).

Moreover, social media also encourages governments using this development to include categories such as openness, transparency, citizen participation, policy effectiveness, managerial efficiency, cost-saving, good governance, public employee and citizen satisfaction (Criado, Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia 2013). Meanwhile, the government can also use social media tools to communicate with the public to restore public trust towards the

government. Public confidence can be a factor in facilitating participation in the social media provided by the government, through the outcomes resulting from such social media use (Han & Jia 2018). It may be that in order to gain government trust, usage of social media can increase the understanding of its characteristics (Hunt & Gentzkow 2017).

By using social media tools, the government can gain feedback from the public. However, social media, may be controlling government activities through the public. Lee and Kwak (2012) proposed a ‘stages of maturity’ model for open government as one of the impacts to arise from the development of social media. Moreover, social media can specifically assist in engaging with some segments of the community (Roshan, Warren & Carr 2016). Currently, the emergence of social media can offer both opportunities and challenges to local government, the opportunities being in enhanced communication and community engagement for local government. It can lead to communicating with citizens, involvement of stakeholders, improvements in planning and the delivery of local government services. Challenges consist of the difficulties ineffective use of social media (Avery & Graham 2013).

Thus, social media use can be one of the best choices for reinforcing local governance through engagement between municipalities and the people in local administrations, because social media itself promotes in a collaborative and participative manner (Bertot, Jaeger & Grimes 2010; Korthagen & Van Meerkerk 2015). Social media has the potential to provide a direct bridge between people and the government in real-time (Mergel 2016). It rapidly develops the spread of information while also encouraging transparency and accountability (da Cruz et al. 2016). Moreover, it can strengthen citizens in becoming partners in improving policy making, encouraging cooperation and collaboration. Furthermore, social media use can support local governance development since it can be used for mobilising the public, and increasing public engagement in local administrations (Waheduzzaman & As-Saber 2015).

This study aims to systematically analyse data regarding attitude, practical guidelines and the results of the use of social media to respond to the study objectives. The results outline the details of social media use in case studies in Thailand. Consequently, it reveals the success or failure of social media use for local governance development. Finally, the study aims to make conclusions about the success of social media use and recommend proposals that can be applied for supporting its use to enhance effectiveness in the development of local governance.

## **Theory**

As governments adopt social media tools, there might be an increase in their capacity for engagement (Zavattaro & Sementelli 2014). Furthermore, social media can build interactive features and increase citizen collaboration with the government. These changes mean that citizens are empowered by social media tools, especially as the local government is encouraged

to listen to public demands (Reddick, Chatfield & Ojo 2017). Furthermore, social media plays a role in engagement in civic action. It influences citizen engagement, such as public trust. Social media includes communication platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, which are used intensively by the government. The adoption of social media use introduces a collaborative nature between the government and citizens (Warren, Sulaiman & Jaafar 2014).

For citizens, the use of social media might increase collaboration amongst stakeholders. Social media can encourage them in participating in government programs and bridging the gap between government and society (Hepburn 2015). Social media can engage in public participation and collaboration for the government. There are various areas of citizen engagement through social media. Therefore, interaction will evolve, where social media might be used as a commitment by the government, organisations, citizens and the community. However, the challenge relates to the professional management of social media interactions. For instance, a lack of capacity or skill in initiating such engagement requires technological and professional media skill development. The move towards social media use requires positive attitude, staff preparedness, time availability and skill (Tursunbayeva, Franco & Pagliari 2017).

Furthermore, Dobos & Jenei (2013) debate the changing participation in engagement; there are two types of citizen engagement through instrumental and normative activities. The aim is to inform or to receive responses from the governance process. A more efficient way of meeting should use normative activities (King 2000). The form of engagement in local government has to find new methods and techniques through dialogue and interaction in social media. These are methods that can provide conditions for listening and participation in activities within the government-citizen relationship.

The use of social media in a public organisation provides benefits, including improved financial performance, participation and group decision-making capabilities (Nagle and Pope 2014). However, the practical use of social media in local government is to improve public trust through transparency (Mazali 2011). Social media can provide the government with an open relationship and the ability to inform and seek the public's opinion. As a group of technologies, social media allows public organisations to engage with citizens, other elements of its organisation and groups. Social media refers to a collection of active participants in creating, organising, editing, combining, sharing, commenting, rating and forming a social network through interacting and linking to each other (Criado, Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia 2013). The terms linkable, collaborative, traceable, searchable and open administration can be understood as the main features of the use of social media tools in a public organisation (Chun et. al. 2010). Furthermore, it can enable the government to achieve productivity through social network development.

Sobaci (2016) concluded that there are five main areas regarding the relationship between local government and social media; a) social media can affect organisations, functions, performance and contact with stakeholders of local government. b) Social media may be adopted by local government and local politicians. c) Social media has benefits and risks for both local government and the public. d) Social media can contribute to the improvement of public services, participation, and strengthen transparency. e) Social media transforms local politicians and local leadership. Therefore, local government can take advantage of this development to engage with people to participate in local government. Participation in social media has been increasing on a daily basis (Hall, 2013).

### **Methodology**

The qualitative methodology is applied since this research needs to get direct perspectives from those who continuously participate and have expertise working in local public administration over a longer period. This study aims to ensure that all information is validated and correct and that the study effectively responds to all research objectives in order to confirm expected results.

### **Data Collection and Analysis was by Interview and Focus Group. Key Informants Selected from Three Local Government Offices in Three Provinces Regarded as Having Best Practice in People's Participation and Promotion in the Northeast of Thailand**

Key informants represented executives and officers in local government and leaders of civil society organisations (CSO), including representatives of social media groups having extensive experience in working in local administration.

Data analysis was conducted in two steps. The first step focuses on the situation of social media use in the local administration of Thailand. This analysis assesses the details of social media use in the area of study then analyse the limitations and considerations of its use. The investigation aims to present how social media use can make changes to local government administrations as compared to the concepts of local governance.

The second step of analysis presents whether changes can promote local governance development and why. The study intends to identify issues and reasons which obstruct use in local governance development and propose suggestions to apply or solve the problems.

## **Findings**

The result show the details of the use of social media, support and restrictions regarding performance and critical awareness, which may have impacts on other areas. The details of the findings are as follows.

### **The Use of Social Media**

#### ***General Usage***

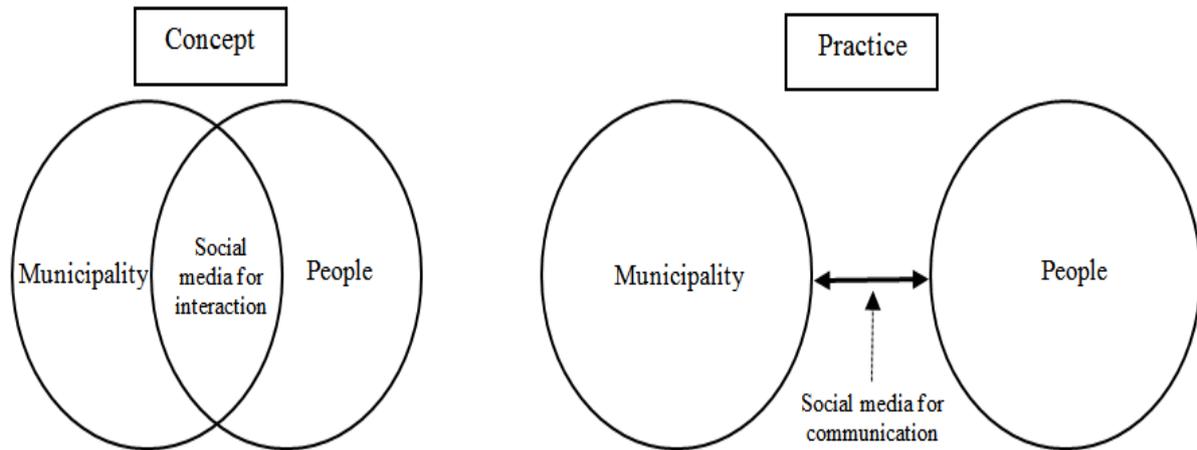
People in the research area use social media to contact municipalities, but not frequently. The majority of people, and the city use Line, followed by Facebook. There are two main types of social media use:

- (1) Communication with the city to obtain information, most people (95%) use social media such a way, via both Line and Facebook. This type of communication has various purposes. For example, when they require services from the municipality, they can use social media to obtain information and advice to prepare any documents before submitting them.
- (2) Make complaints and offer advice about the operations of the municipality; only about 5% of people had experience using social media for registering their complaint or providing suggestions. Everyone, that is 100% use Line. Facebook is not used so extensively. Line is used to communicate through various groups, especially executives and officials. The reason people did not use social media in their complaints, petitions, or recommendations to municipalities was due to being unaware of the use of social media in dealing with cities. Some did not know how to use social media to contact the municipality. For example, when they would like to make their complaint, they must follow several official steps. Sometimes it requires using official language; most users found this very difficult in everyday life, as they had no confidence in using social media. They were often unsure, so it was not easy to join this group of people. Consequently, many people lacked confidence in submitting complaints to the municipality through social media.

In conclusion, the social media use of this study cannot facilitate local governance development due to the way local governments are applying it; the result cannot create consultation and interaction between municipalities and other parties or create space for negotiations with the public (Andersson 2013). Furthermore, the public cannot use these tools to engage with municipalities, as many kinds of social media are unable to reach their goals. The goal of co-decision and co-production in local administration is not achieved due to a lack of two-way communication between the state and people (Eisenberg 2008 and Olmsted & Chan 2013). Online activities, which can develop co-consultations via social media rarely happen. The results of this study indicate that local governance development can only facilitate

communications, but cannot establish active interactions amongst all parties and municipalities (Zhang and Han 2015, Grydehoj and Nurdin 2016, Yetano and Royo 2017). The conclusion of the analysis is highlighted in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** The real practice of social media use



According to Coleman (2005), the purpose and use of the role of social media might be classified into three major areas: information and communication function and the function of co-action. This study compares the concept of social media’s services and the real-life practices of the municipality. The main criterion of analysis regards the quality of communication, efficiency of two-way communication and the facilities for citizen actions. This analysis will present the results of the ineffectiveness of social media summarised in Table 1 below:

**Table 1:** Functions of social media use for local governance in practice

Function	Practice	
	Concept	The results
Creating Communication	Social media can be ‘the bridge’ able to support and share information more effectively amongst parties	Social media can be ‘the effective bridge’
Creating Interaction	Social media can be the channel for supporting all parties to effectively consult and exchange ideas with each other	Social media cannot be used to construct any circuits for supporting this criterion
Creating co-action	Social media can create public spaces for all parties to work together as partners in administration	Social media cannot be used to produce any open spaces for everyone to use as partners in administration

## **Limitations and Considerations in Using Social Media**

This section discusses the limitations of using social media in the work of the municipality and the people. It attempts to highlight that significant issues or factors are facing social media to become a developmental tool for strengthening citizen engagement and local governance. This study divides the limitations and causes of the use of social media into 3 parts .

### **Limitations of Municipality**

(1) Data collected from social media cannot be implement in the local development plan or public policies for local development. Even if the city has used social media through the various applications mentioned above, it is still only possible to use it for communicating with people. It still cannot be used to allow people to participate in the presentation of useful information in policy formulation, decision making, policy setting or any local development planning. It is due to the regulations of central government not allowing a municipality to use data and information, sent by people through social media for conducting policies and plans. The city must still use data and information obtained from community and village meetings only.

(2) The effectiveness of communication has not been in doubt. The study found that, although social media can help to increasingly rapid communication between the municipality and people, especially complaint management, later consequences of such communication may be delayed. It is due to the regulations of regulatory agencies of the municipality and the monitoring organisations. It requires both the authority of internal and external agency to operate and as a result, the municipalities' problem solving is not able to respond to the needs as quickly as people would expect.

(3) Communication is only available between specific groups, missions, and individuals only. The municipality cannot thoroughly use social media with people in the area. The limitation of using a line application is that it only allows communication between members within a group. It provides an excellent way for people to communicate in the same group, but it is not possible for people who are not members of a particular group, or that have government officials as members. The management of the municipality are members of a group. As a result, many people will lack the opportunity to communicate, express their complaints or needs, or propose ideas that will be beneficial to create local development within the municipality.

(4) The attitude of government officials. Officially, procedures, e rules, relevant laws, and the city's management structure divided into departments or agencies. The town's communication system is also a bureaucratic system that results in complicated steps and tasks. It results in officials having to spend a lot of time and effort in performing general duties as part of the daily routine. If social media can open up opportunities for people to submit complaints more

conveniently, then it will enable municipal officials to have more time to undertake their duties. These results will increase the number of missions able to be conducted by officials, which have to manage each working day in the same way.

Complicated and complex internal procedures may also affect the efficiency of the municipal administration. Some complaints may not be the responsibility of the municipality's authority. Some duties are undertaken and implemented by external agencies. As a result, municipal officials need to focus on coordinating with external agencies. It will increase the range of the scope of their work and impact on their attitudes regarding the use of social media in the administration of the municipality. Consequently, officials may not cooperate in bringing social media use into the city.

### ***Limitations of People***

For most people, the use of social media in dealing with cities is difficult and rarely convenient. The public cannot use social media to communicate with the city directly, as compared to communication using other platforms, which is the result of personal and external factors.

### ***Personal Factors***

(1) Some people do not use social media regularly, which may depend on their jobs, this is especially the case with farmers who mostly reside in rural areas. Another group consists of labourers who work in urban areas. They must regularly go to work away from home. This may only result in the use of social media on rare occasions because they have to work outdoors, without internet access. They have no time to use social media when compared to people living and working in urban areas, or those who work in government agencies or private company offices in the city who will have more time to access social media.

Due to the limitations of certain occupations, they will only have time to use social media during their leisure time. Due to the limitations of time to use social media, the majority may apply to just monitoring the information from the municipality, rather than sharing or exchanging their data with the city. This is detrimental, especially for making complaints or making proposals for developing local plans and policies.

(2) People's as a result of delays in resolving complaints about public utilities therefore people may become disinterested and may not believe in using social media to contact government agencies, even when it is convenient. However, as the study suggests, delays in solving complaints made to the municipality are the result of both internal and external factors concerning the city itself. These factors result in bad experiences in using social media due to the people's belief that the results are no different when employing social media or traditional

methods. As a result, in improving civic engagement the development of social media may face significant barriers to implementation.

(3) People do not want to participate in municipal administration due to a lack of interest in their information, and not being utilised in the planning. A significant obstacle regards the rules of relevant government agencies, especially those that do not allow legitimate use of data and information sourced from social media. This may be despite the information being necessary for the implementation of public policy or the municipality's local development plan . Regulation by central government does not allow the use of data collected by this method. The only legitimate way is through community meetings.

(4) People do not understand how to use social media to communicate with the municipality, so they do not know how to incorporate it for sending complaints. They still depend on the traditional complaint method, especially if they do not know how to use social media as a platform for submitting claims. This has a significant impact on the use of social media because people lack confidence in the complaint making method. The public cannot write detailed descriptions of their claims because they are afraid to fill in incorrect information. This issue is another important factor that will cause people to be no longer interested in using social media because they are more confident in using the old method.

### ***External Factors***

The study found that when most people use social media to communicate with the municipality, they do so through Wi-Fi signals as it is the cheapest method. However, although there are some free Wi-Fi hot spots in each community or small parish, there are insufficient for the use of the general public. The result is that people cannot comfortably use the internet because when they need to complain or contact the municipality, they cannot access free Wi-Fi, or sometimes the free Wi-Fi signal is not strong enough for use. Consequently, they have to use their private internet signal at their own cost.

The fact is that there are not enough free Wi-Fi hotspots in the local community. This is another crucial factor that makes the use of social media unpopular as people do not want to spend money to communicate with the municipality on social media. They can see that there are still other channels that they can use for submitting complaints or offer opinions, e.g., through community leaders. They realise that there is no need to pay for using social media when it is in the 'public interest' as these services must be provided by the municipality on an inclusive basis. Details of this result are provided in table 2 below:

**Table 2:** Limitations of social media use

Users	Limits	Impacts
Municipalities	Regulation	1. Cannot use social media in local public policies and planning processes
		2. Delays of responding to complaints sent through social media
	Organisation	1. Limits of accessibility by people and members of other groups
		Personnel
	Coordination	1. Complexity of administration within organisations and external organisations
People	Effectiveness of use	1. Cannot support use by some groups who have different working areas
		2. The results which are responses to complaints do not differ when compared to other methods
		3. People do not want to engage in the public policy process since their demands cannot be approved when submitted through social media
	Confidence in use	1. Lack of understanding of use in interacting with the municipality
	Cost of use	1. People do not want to use social media for public interest

## Discussion

Firstly, some individuals can communicate effectively with the municipality as they know the methods to use these tools, while some individuals such as the elderly farmers and laborers may find it more challenging. Reasons include the limitations of their careers and the complexity of use. There are groups of individuals who still have no confidence in its use, so they avoid contact or to use another tool instead. Therefore, they cannot access the benefits of social media use, while at the same time the municipality is unable to have interactions with these groups. These cases present the inefficiencies of coverage, indicating that there are some issues of social media use that require development to ensure that all people in society can access and receive benefits from interactions with the municipality through use of social media (King, Pan & Roberts 2017).

### *The Ability of the Municipality to Respond to Complaints*

At times this does not resolve the problem as expected by the public as in some cases claims are not the direct responsibility of the municipality but of external agencies. These cases require

much time and proper coordination, depending on the discretion of the foreign organisations. The municipality cannot control and intervene in the decision-making processes of these organisations. They are often delayed consequently, people misunderstand the efficiency of social media use because they did not help them to receive more rapid services and complaint management. This can decrease people's confidence in the use of social media (Warren, Sulaiman & Jaafar. 2014). The desire to use this tool is reduced because, compared to other forms of contact, social media cannot improve results, which sometimes will cause them to stop contacting the municipality. This can be a limitation in using social media to strengthen local governance (Gao & Lee. 2017).

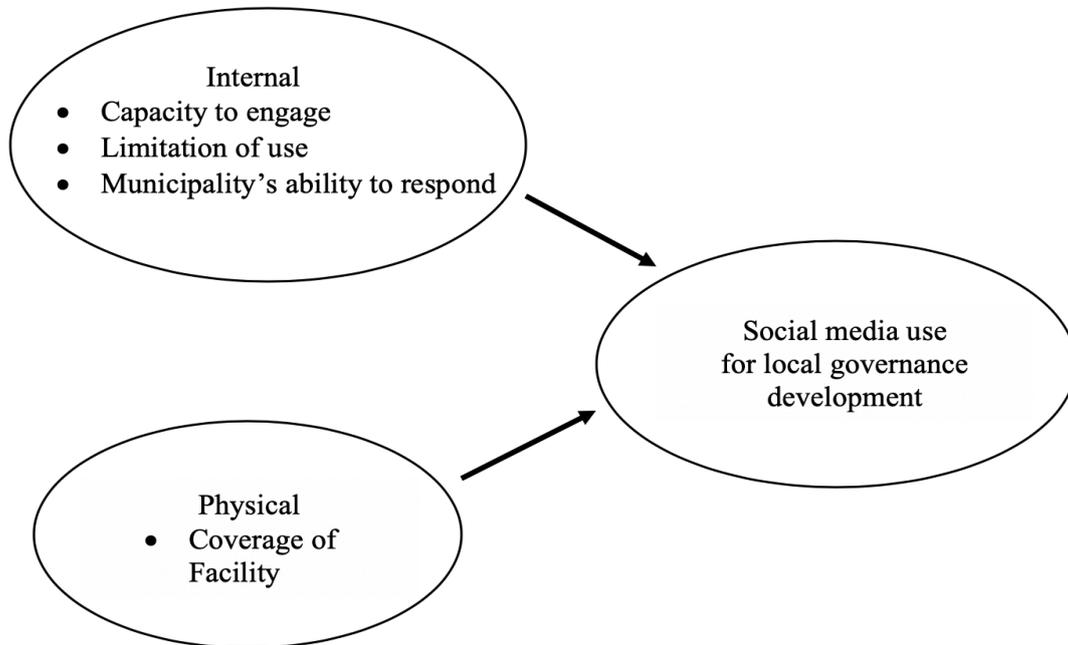
### ***The Ability to Access and Use Social Media***

As public internet access is not sufficient for public use, people are unable to use social media to communicate their complaints and it is necessary to rely on community leaders to make complaints or use other complaint channels provided by the municipality. This will impact cost of use and lead to deciding on a particular tool. If the use of social media will increase their prices, some will always reject their application. This is another limitation that can reduce people's interest in using social media to interact with the municipality, which will impact the results of local governance development (Chong et al. 2016).

### ***Limitations of Use in the Public Policy Process***

Limitations of Use in the Public Policy Process is another limitation of social media use for local governance development. The study found that although social media can support people by providing a channel to create public participation in policy and regional development planning, it will not allow them to participate or engage in the municipality's decision making process (Mossberger, Wu & Crawford 2013). Therefore, they lack confidence in whether their demands will consider the city's policies and plans. They can use social media as a tool for expressing their ideas or needs to the municipality, but subsequently they have no further role or authority and depend on the city to make decisions (Cook, Wright & Andersson. 2017). This is an additional factor that limits the effectiveness of social media use in local governance. Even though people can express their ideas or needs to the municipality via social media, they have insufficient power to push their proposals forward to the decision-makers. This is an essential factor in truly establishing local governance. Details of this discussion included in figure 2.

**Figure 2.** Remarks for improving social media use



## Conclusion

The design for using social media needs to take into account ease of use, and whether it is appropriate to the local context. In the past, the state has often adopted new technologies. The public has always used them, but certain techniques may be complicated and challenging to use, causing officials and people not to incorporate them in their daily use. This has often led to failures and loss of budget in including new technologies to be applied in bureaucracy and society (Iazzolino & Stremlau 2017).

Development of social media use by the municipality needs to take into account the mission's constant improvement, and the responsibilities of government officials who work in the city. The process needs to design to improve administration and regulations within the municipality to facilitate the performance of government officials to change as a result of the use of social media (Dabbagh & Kitsantas 2013). It must not be used to force government officials to have more missions, and must be able to apply social media to lighten the work. Social media use has to be a tool that allows government officials to see that it can facilitate their work and make it more effective. If social media can be applied in the municipality following the above guidelines, it will result in government officials accepting its use, help to increase their morale and ultimately will lead to an increase in the municipality's efficiency (Lachlan et. al. 2016).



It is imperative to design 'easy-to-use' solutions in the context of the work of the municipality's government officials . This is a critical factor that will result in the use of social media in the development of local government organisations and strengthen confidence. The success of social media use does not originate from tools, technology or applications. The most crucial factor is the acceptance and intention of use by municipal officials and the public (Medaglia & and Zheng. 2017; Sinclair, Peirson-Smith & Borchers. 2017).

Finally, social media use should not neglect the dimension of relationships in the community. The study found that even though social media is a handy tool in developing strengths in the workplace and communicating with people in the city, it is essential to focus on its use as a substitute for traditional management, as it may have the effect of destroying people's strength in the community. Therefore, caution should be exercised in promoting the use of social media for communication and collaboration between the municipality and people. It may be necessary to define 'scope of use' that will not create a destructive relationship for community members (Omar, Stockdale & Scheepers 2015). This may affect the lives of urban residents in the municipality, because it may cause the public to have to interact with each other and lead to new forms of social problems, or the formation of unwanted societies (Hokayem & Kairouz. 2015) which will harm those residing in the area in the years to come .

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