

Perceptions of social media usage to engage citizens: a qualitative study of Czech Republic municipalities

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Abstract: Information communication technology has altered the relationship between government and citizens in terms of intensity as well as method. Social media has been used due to its socially interactive nature by the government to attract citizens. This study aims to explore the perception of administrators from small and medium-sized municipal governments in the Czech Republic regarding the utilization of social media platforms for the purpose of engaging and communicating with citizens. The study used a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach. The data collection process involved 21 semi-structured interviews and the engagement in 16 hours of online dialogue by the researchers. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. The findings indicate that numerous municipalities are currently in the initial learning phase of employing social media and have yet to fully comprehend its potential. Administrators conveyed a sense of skepticism towards social media and technology at large, alongside a sense of ambiguity regarding the optimal strategies for effectively harnessing these platforms. The predominant approach adopted by most municipalities involves relying heavily on Facebook as their primary platform for disseminating information. However, they encounter difficulties in effectively leveraging other potentially beneficial websites and communication channels. In general, the research emphasizes the necessity of providing training and education to effectively incorporate social media into the communication strategies employed by local governments.

Keywords: small local governments, municipality, social media, citizen engagement, qualitative research

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Introduction

Due to the diverse interests and increasing complexity, the participation of citizens has become crucial for contemporary planning. Citizen engagement and participation are beneficial due to promoting transparent, fair, and inclusive

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decision-making processes (Pandeya, 2015). The traditional participation methods are fading due to the rise and extended attention towards digital tools, mainly social media (Kleinhans et al., 2015). The multidirectional and interactive feature of social media makes it an effective tool for the e-participation and engagement of citizens. Social media has significantly impacted how humans communicate and continue their daily routines over the past twenty-five years. According to Kwon et al. (2021), most citizens increasingly utilize social networks to socialize, interact with other users, and express their ideas and thoughts. As an outcome, social media has developed into an opportunity for citizens to express themselves freely. The increasing prevalence of social networking sites has expanded the opportunities for individuals to interact with their co-workers, colleagues, friends, and families (Cheung et al., 2015; Kapoor et al., 2018; Dwivedi et al., 2018).

In the words of Richey et al. (2018), social media platforms offer users the opportunity to engage with a global community and generate content, both within and beyond their existing networks. Social media is also feasible for enthusiasts to establish virtual communities and exchange their interests, for politicians and renowned personalities to engage with voters during election campaigns (Mallipeddi et al., 2021). Social media also benefits the entrepreneurs to collaborate with customers in the process of developing novel products (Namisango et al., 2021). The focus of this study relates to the public sector, which promotes the common welfare of the community and its members. Thus, individuals must be able to interact with public sector entities within their respective communities effectively. Public management in numerous countries is primarily centered on citizen engagement. Piqueiras et al. (2020) claim that citizen engagement is predicated on the notion that government agencies can enhance service delivery by fostering greater collaboration and engagement with the public. This assertion is supported by a substantial amount of scientific evidence, as demonstrated by the works of Blanco-Mancilla (2013), Albanna & Heeks et al. (2019). Based on Piqueiras et al. (2020), public sector organizations may improve the positive behavior of all citizens by actively listening to and engaging with them. The idea of involving citizens in the decision-making process is widely acknowledged as a valuable tool for governments across the globe. Providing responsive and efficient service delivery to meet citizen expectations enables the government to fulfill its social contract with its citizens. Fung (2006) suggests that the prevalent belief is that active participation in such activities enables the populace to influence governmental decision-making processes and promote more receptive public service delivery. Bourgon (2017) claims that the growing demand for government agencies to provide responsive, efficient, and satisfactory service delivery to citizens, particularly in fulfilling the social contract between the government and its people, underscores the significance of this issue. The issue of citizens' distrust in the government is primarily rooted in anecdotal evidence stemming from their interactions with various government agencies. Examples of inadequate service delivery and complete breakdowns frequently result in unfavorable perceptions of the government and its affiliated institutions among the populace.

Despite the potential benefits of social media usage for engagement and e-participation, literature shows little empirical evidence on the engagement and participation supported by digitalized technology (Lin & Kant, 2021). Fewer studies have attempted to investigate the extent to which social media and traditional participation methods support the inclusive participation of citizens. A gap exists in the literature on the influence of local policies and contexts of various institutions on social media use for engagement. Therefore, this research study explores the perception of administrators of municipalities in the Czech Republic.

1. Research aims and questions

The primary aim of this research is to explore administrators' perceptions to understand the social media use to engage citizens. Secondly, this research aims to analyze citizen engagement across various municipalities in the Czech Republic to investigate how municipal councils facilitate and improve engagements with residents.

The following research questions (RQ) guide this study:

RQ1: *How do administrators use social media platforms to gain interest and citizen engagement potentially?*

RQ2: *What is the main reason for using social media platforms for local government in the Czech Republic?*

RQ3: *What are the challenges and future issues associated with using social media platforms for civic engagement?*

2. Literature review

Social media has altered the interactions between citizens and government by changing the nature and intensity of public participation (Mukhtarov et al., 2018). Social media is known to enhance collaborative planning practices and the participation and engagement of citizens (Cullen-Lester et al., 2017). Social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and other SNSs are open, web-based, and user-friendly applications used to interact and exchange content and conversation (Lin, 2018). Social media is a more accessible method of participation because citizens can use it for communication anytime, anywhere, by using their mobile phones. Due to its vast use and engaging features, scholars argue that social media helps augment public engagement. Researchers also argue that participation via social media and digital tools can overcome constraints linked with traditional participation methods, increasing inclusive, deliberative democracy, planning success, and public trust (Lin & Kant, 2021). Apart from the benefits of social media and its role in enhancing citizen engagement, some scholars also argue that social media could create new digital divides and social exclusion for some groups (Park, 2011; Meshi & Ellithorpe, 2021). To avoid this division, recent studies suggest a

hybrid method combining offline and online participation is necessary to promote a more inclusive planning process (Piccorelli & Stivers, 2019).

Digital media and its use for citizen engagement have attracted the attention of various scholars and researchers for the past two decades. Studies suggest that accessibility of citizens to public affairs information through the Internet may enhance citizen's knowledge and awareness and heighten their interest in political and community affairs (Pasek et al., 2009). A meta-analysis published in 2009 showed that the use of the Internet had a positive impact on public engagement and relationships (Boulianne, 2009). With the arrival of social media, online interaction among citizens has changed, and citizens can now form personalized public engagement, which does not require any organizational resources (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Different social network sites (SNS) help maintain an extensive network of social ties and record previous interactions, which has positive implications for maintaining interpersonal trust and social capital (Ellison et al., 2011). Citizen engagement is essential in public service communication strategies that effectively manage citizens through appropriate engagement methods and improve society's quality of life. It involves listening to citizens' concerns and developing effective strategies to improve government efficiency. Piqueiras et al. (2020) added that it could increase the positive behavior of citizens. The positive effects of citizen engagement are summarized by Li et al., (2022), who conclude that citizen engagement can enable the government's drive to deliver smart cities as it enables governments to get citizens to buy-in into the vision of developing highly connected, energy efficient, and environmentally friendly modern cities. The biggest problem is that the government must prepare forms of citizen engagements that must be realistic for interested people and include two-way communication. However, Woodford, M. R., & Preston, S. (2013) still think it is impossible to engage a mass of people and even citizens by authorities. Studies by Feeney & Porumbescu (2021) and Warren, A. M., Sulaiman, A., and Jaafar, N. I. (2014) have shown that using social media can benefit public authorities as well as help enhance the online engagement of citizens. For instance, by using it to increase transparency, local governments can provide their citizens with more accurate information (Lappas et al., 2022).

The increasing number of local governments using social media is also expected to affect citizen engagement positively. These include the increasing interest of citizens in public work and the two-way communication with their local officials. However, despite the positive effects of social media, studies have shown that it only encourages some forms of citizen engagement (Piqueiras et al., 2020).

In addition, studies show that social media's potential to improve public service quality is immense. This is because it can help the government and its citizens work together to develop practical ideas. A study on social media's effects on citizen engagement revealed that local government's efforts to increase their involvement in social media did not result in more significant commitment Haro-de-Rosario et al., (2018). It was shown that there has not been a determination of whether activity on social media positively or negatively influences citizens' engagement. This

research's results align with those of the authors mentioned above. For instance, if a public administration has a high activity on social media; it does not necessarily mean that citizens will become more engaged. According to Mergel (2013), public administrators publish and share content to provoke a reaction from society. Neuman (2014) found it difficult to know whether citizens find information on social media useful; this author also added some helpful advice for creating valuable content that generates interactivity. Bentley et al. (2021) believes that social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter give rise to different levels of engagement as well as organic reach, which is the number of unique people who see a post in a news feed or on the corporate website, including people who see it from a story shared by a friend when they like, comment, or even share a post as well as answer a question or respond to event. In this research, our mission is not concentrated on specific platforms however, this study aims to get to know why administrators in municipalities use it and for which purpose. It has also been asserted that Facebook is ideal for organizations to build relationships with fans, share, and convey emotions (Kim et al., 2014). Since Facebook is becoming more like a marketplace platform, there is still potential for engaging people from small local governments with events, information, and interesting facts. As Bonson (2019) added, governments started to use social media, from distributing propaganda to transparent communication and engagement with the local public. However, recent literature has primarily investigated the influencing factors of citizen engagement under all normal circumstances. In the recent statistics provided by the Czech Statistical Office (2022), there has been much potential in using social media properly for municipalities. Facebook is the most used platform so far in the Czech Republic, according to the Czech Statistical Office (2022). However, there needs to be more data about social media usage for municipalities.

3. Research methodology

This study used qualitative research design since the study aimed to get direct perspectives of those who use social media to engage citizens across various municipalities of the Czech Republic. Qualitative research design is appropriate when a researcher aims to gather non-numeric data such as perspectives, and experiences encapsulated in verbal narratives (Fossety et al., 2002). The study used a phenomenological approach to gain insight into the understanding and experience of individuals using social media to engage citizens. The phenomenological approach best fits this study due to its exploratory nature. A random sampling technique was used to select 21 participants for the study. A semi-structured interview was used to collect data by conducting the interviews through different mediums, including telephone, Zoom, and face-to-face. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Thematic analysis is a flexible method that provides a rich account of information without the need for any epistemological perception (Terry et al., 2017 p. 25). The main goal of thematic analysis is to develop a story from relevant texts of interest (Neuendorf, K.A.2018) The end of relevant results of

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specific thematic analyses will highlight the most salient "constellations" of meanings present in the texts added (Joffe, 2012). The steps followed for the data analysis included Becoming familiar with the data, generating codes, looking for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming the themes, and writing up (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Microsoft Excel and NVIVO were used for coding and themes (Welsh, 2002). Ethical guidelines were followed by using pseudonyms to represent the participants and keeping their personal information confidential. The data was kept in a password-secured folder and used solely for this research.

4. Research results and analysis

Twenty-one participants (16 women and 5 men) working with municipalities in different provinces of the Czech Republic participated in this study. The age ranged between 30-50 years old. The education level is middle, primarily high school, with a rare but unique concentration in communication and public relations. Only three were IT professionals or SMMs (social media managers), fully aware of the best times and material to post on various platforms to increase citizen participation. Table 1 shows the demographic data of the participants. The interviews were conducted through telephone or online meetings by MS Teams from July 2022 to September 2022. The conduction reviews took three months because, during summertime, not everyone from the selected participants was in the office.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the participants

| Demographics | | | Role in municipality | Duration of Interview |
|---------------|-----|--------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Assigned Code | Age | Gender | | |
| V-01 | 48 | Male | IT specialist | 20 minutes |
| V-02 | 35 | Female | administrator | 30 minutes |
| V-03 | 38 | Female | administrator | 45 minutes |
| V-04 | 51 | Female | administrator | 45 minutes |
| V-05 | 39 | Male | administrator | 34 minutes |
| V-06 | 40 | Female | administrator | 18 minutes |
| V-07 | 42 | Female | PR specialist | 28 minutes |
| V-08 | 56 | Female | Administrator | 22 minutes |
| V-09 | 35 | Female | Administrator | 24 minutes |
| V-10 | 43 | Female | Administrator | 24 minutes |
| V-11 | 32 | Male | Administrator | 24 minutes |
| V-12 | 33 | Female | administrator | 43 minutes |
| V-13 | 41 | Female | Externalist | 23 minutes |
| V-14 | 52 | Female | PR specialist | 18 minutes |
| V-15 | 30 | Female | administrator | 33minutes |
| V-16 | 37 | Male | administrator | 46 minutes |
| V-17 | 41 | Male | administrator | 36 minutes |

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| Demographics | | | Role in municipality | Duration of Interview |
|---------------|-----|--------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Assigned Code | Age | Gender | | |
| V-18 | 49 | Female | administrator | 29 minutes |
| V-19 | 42 | Female | PR manager | 18 minutes |
| V-20 | 37 | Female | administrator | 24 minutes |
| V-21 | 46 | Female | administrator | 32 minutes |

Qualitative Results

While the data was detailed and analyzed, four themes were divided into groups and identified within the database. The themes and subthemes are outlined in (Table 2).

Table 2. Themes and subthemes

| Theme | Sub-themes | Frequency | Representative Statements |
|-----------------|-------------------|-----------|---|
| Reason of use | Promo | 10 | “As we see, everybody has social media and most of the municipalities use it for promotion. “It is big competition, and we need to be trendy, it is part of our business. „To be active (Participant V-01). |
| | Brand | 13 | Our city represents our brand, but we are creating it by overserves. “Also, as you can see in bigger cities, their brand looks good. But social media needs to be used because just to have it for the brand (Participant V-02). |
| | Political reasons | 11 | People want to know a lot about candidates in elections, so social media is the best platform where to share all their information. Also, they do not like information but videos of them and sharing their daily habits of that person, it engages more people, we tried that, and it was viral. (Participant V-11). |
| | Competition | 15 | “We use it because our competitors use it. “We do not have any chance to not use it. It is really necessary to use platforms like this in nowadays world.” (added participant IV-07) |
| Type of Message | Announcement | 13 | „When there were COVID most of our announcement was through Facebook. And people asking questions, it was times when we realized there is potential in those platforms. (Participant 15). |

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| Theme | Sub-themes | Frequency | Representative Statements |
|------------------|---------------------------------|------------------|--|
| | Mayo information | 8 | „Sometimes Mayo comes and says what we must post. “It is mostly about reconstructions, streets, or even when he needs to say something to people “(Participant V-10). |
| | Program/ Calendar of Activities | 11 | It is still hard for us to use it, but we use it as a calendar with events, like kids’ day, holiday, summertime even Christmas or Mikulas and Cert. (Participant V-03). To our city also citizens inform what will be happening and then we share it. We share a lot of information. (Participant V-14). |
| | Press releases | 10 | When there was a fire in our city, all the news was taking pictures from Facebook, so at that time we knew Facebook worked. Also, in Covid. We share everything on Facebook. (Participant V-19). |
| | Other types of information | 13 | Covid information, crossroad reconstructions, road reconstructions, and museum reconstructions, are information for people not only from our city. (Participant V-01). |
| Activity | Activity of the Municipality | 14 | The events we are involved in include many such as Christmas, Easter, summer opening days, museum, cinema, and kids’ events to name a few. (participant V-18) |
| Drawbacks | Hate | 16 | „It is sad but would go like this. Every day we see hate on our page. It is not okay, and we are saying to our mayo to do something with it. „It is also negative comments, which also doesn’t look good on our page. „People are crazy, but they really like to post and hate. (Participant V-20). |
| | Disinformation | 9 | „It happened to us that another created profile was called same as our city and people were there and just talked. We must start to ask them to delete it. But later we realized to have our profile official and let them talk in another profile. Now I think people already know how it works but it was days when people were disappointed and trusted |

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| Theme | Sub-themes | Frequency | Representative Statements |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------|--|
| | | | information about the city which was not true. Sometimes they call us if that information is true. (Participant V-05). |
| | Fake news | 11 | We have some experience with fake news. Those were small kids who posted something, and it was like fire in the city, they were caught by the police. “(Participant V-10). |
| | Fake profiles | 15 | We have problems with fake profiles. Someone told us that we post a lot on our page, but we did not know what we post so much, and then we found out it was fake. “It also cost some money to buy the profile, but nobody can do anything (Participant V-09). |
| | Future | 12 | I am not sure what future will feel like with social media. “„Changes are every day, like I mean in daily basis. “Everything is now, and many social media is changing quickly. Also, I must say it is most for younger generation, and we do not know how to use it properly. „, Look, I am just administration lady and they told me to do social media, but how? Nobody said it. “So, I post whatever I want but sometimes I have some hard times what and when to post. „, We do not know how it works. We do what everybody is doing (Participant V-12). Another participant added: Well, social media is for young and who knows because to me it seems more like marketplace not like people searching (Participant V-04). |
| Challenges | Lack of Special education support | 9 | One of the biggest challenges is our technology education based on using social media and other information platforms is missing and it leads to not having proper communication. (Participant V-08). |
| | Lack of social media specialist | 7 | “We lack young people with command on technology use and advance knowledge who would help municipalities with technologies” (Participant V-19). |

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| Theme | Sub-themes | Frequency | Representative Statements |
|-------|--------------------------------------|-----------|---|
| | | | I think it must be someone like social media specialist because their role allows them to follow communication processes and strategic decisions, according to strategy they might be able to interact with citizens and satisfy their information needs, without wasting time, they already know how to communicate to gain interaction, but in our case that person is missing, which is pity (Participant V-11). |
| | Scarce knowledge of social media use | 11 | “it is like we do not know how to use the social media platforms effectively, so we use it rarely and not regularly, responding to people seem waste of time so we get back to other works...so I think if we know how to use social media platforms effectively, we can make use of it to engage people (Participant V-20) |
| | Trust issues | 13 | I feel like those social media will not last. It is just for the younger generation and I do not know what to post and when and how. It is very new for us, and we know people need information but if I post there is discussion which is always hated and not very nice comments. So, we do not want to use social media that often (Participant V-21) |

Theme 1: Reason of use

This theme refers to the reasons for using social media by the municipalities. During the interviews, administrators described the meaning of their experiences and the reason for using social media as a communication channel. Administrators work a continuous process of negotiating their role in the organization and the reason for propagation. From the interviews, they compete with another municipality. That is also one of the primary contexts why the municipalities use social media as a communication platform. The response indicates that there is a psychological reason to use social media for municipalities, which must be mentioned. In the interviews, it emerges that the reason for using social media is the effectiveness of digital participative tools. This happens also when the interviewee is the only PR professional working for the institution. Everybody agrees that they mostly use social media for informative purposes as a part of their communication strategy. The primary and evident problem they seem to be in the competence struggles. There

have been participants who are seeing problems in competence struggle; they need to know if someone is taking care of platforms. Administrators (*Lanskroun, 10 005 inhabitants*) answered, *“We do not know who the leader of social media content is.”* Another reported that there has been a report from Mayo giving competence to employees unrelated to this form of propagation.

Another answer was from *848 inhabitants*) *“We must post something, but we do not know what to post because we are confused about who will do it. Sometimes, I post at random times my colleagues do it.”* For example, in *Kuřim (11 263 inhabitants)*, the number of people taking care of social media is changing. Participant said. *“A person taking care of social media is someone who is that day at work, nobody else.”* The participants shared different reasons for using social media to engage citizens, such as brand, political reasons, and promotion, and to compete with their competitors who are already using social media for citizen participation. The participants were also asked how they use social media for civic engagement. Participant V-19 stated, *“Our city uses social media to share information, which we also have online. We use it on the computer and usually two times a week. Sometimes, just one time a week.* The participants also shared that they are not regular users of social media for citizen engagement because they are not aware of social media use for this purpose. Respondent V-11 stated, *“Using social media daily is impossible for us because we do not have the skills to use it. It is difficult for us to share something unimportant, but we usually share what people send us. It is daily what we share “.*

Theme 2: Type of message

This theme refers to the type of message conveyed using social media platforms by municipalities. The analysis showed that participants use it for announcements such as COVID-19 precautionary announcements, Mayo information, various activities and calendar-related activities like holiday information, and various other types of information. The participants believed that social media provided a platform to deal with information and make important information and announcements reachable to the citizens via social media. Participant V-10 also shared, *“Our city is based on our Mayo decision, so when he says to post something, we must post something that we think is important. We use it one time a week from our laptop or a normal computer. But there are many mistakes what we are doing. We do not have a mentor who will tell us what to do, so it is for us like a test. “*

Theme 3: Activity

The activity was a theme that emerged after the analysis that defined various activities planned and conducted using social media platforms. These include information and updates on Christmas, Easter, summer openings, and various others.

Theme 4: Drawbacks

This theme refers to the drawbacks of using social media by municipalities. Various sub-themes emerged under this theme, including hate, disinformation /misinformation, fake news, fake profiles, and uncertainty of the future. The participants shared their experiences of hate through dislikes, negative comments, misinformation through fake profiles, and fake news that abruptly spreads through

social media platforms. Some participants shared their uncertainty about the future of social media use; others shared the negative impacts of social media use that need to be stopped and the constantly changing online world that could impact users in various ways. Other participants shared: Negativity is a critical component of all posts which we share.” “It is daily.” “Sometimes citizens just tell us that some information about the event was on the page, which we know is irrelevant.”

Theme 5: Challenges

This theme refers to the challenges faced by municipalities in using social media for civic engagement. Four sub-themes emerged under a theme: a lack of special support education, social media specialists, scarce knowledge of social media use, and trust issues. A high percentage of municipality administrators reported needing help with informational technologies in general. For example, one of the participants responded that *their technology education based on using social media and other information platforms needs to be included, and it leads to needing proper communication*. Another participant added that the big problem is that they do not know how to use informational platforms nowadays. There has been a lack of technical support that explains how social media is used and why this platform is essential as a communication channel. Participants also added that they use the platform not regularly but occasionally. Participants also added that they use the platform but most occasionally. Also, there has been a lack of young people who would help municipalities with technologies as (Zábřeh na Moravě, 13 646 inhabitants) added, *“There are missing young employees who would support cities in technologies.”* Administrators seem to be too wide, but they understand the importance of their role for the organizations in which they have visibility inside and outside the municipality. The administrator of Jeseník (11 204 inhabitants) *“I think it must be someone like a social media specialist because their role allows them to follow communication processes and strategic decisions; according to strategy, they might be able to interact with citizens and satisfy their information needs, without wasting time, they already know how to communicate to gain interaction, but in our case that person is missing, which is a pity.”*

Participants also added that there had been a big problem with funding. Another answer came out: *“We would like to get information about how to use social media properly, but we are missing some manual. We are posting randomly, but most of the time, we do not respond because it is a waste of time; we usually move to another activity at work. “These answers seem like the employees dare to know how to use platforms, but nobody is teaching them. One of the participants from Sušice (10 820 inhabitants) described the inside practices as terrible. “I must say that our inside organization is not very structured.” Another administrator of a different municipality says: Přebouč (9 971) Well, our main reason why we do not properly use social media to communicate is that we are not aware of posting something there. Because we do not see any potential and engagement at all.”* During interviews, social media administrators discussed the significance of their work experience and perceptions of the platforms' trustworthiness. Specifically, they view platform trust as the most significant issue. Many participants view social media platforms as

unreliable information sources, as inappropriate comments frequently accompany them. It is evident from the interview that, in most cases, they do not regard the function of the social media administrator as crucial to communicating with citizens. Participant V-10 shared: *“I think it is not a serious platform for sharing information; if someone wants to know anything about the city, go to our website. “We do not trust these platforms, even though we know the young generation uses them often.”*

5. Discussions

Social media is known to have the potential and ability to promote citizen engagement (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; Smith & Gallicano, 2015).). This study aimed to explore administrators' perceptions in Czech Republic municipalities about using social media for civic engagement. The findings of this study deliver contrasting conclusions. First, the general perception of the administrators was that social media use is necessary for civic engagement. Nevertheless, they did not have the skills and time to manage social media profiles. The study's findings showed that most government administrations used social media channels such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and not so likely TikTok to interact with their citizens. They post news about events, social activities, and job opportunities most of the time every week. Most administrators shared that they do not use social media regularly but occasionally. It is difficult for them to convey their message to each citizen in person, so social media seems to be the optimal way to interact with the citizens. Social media use has been increasing every day because it is a big platform to communicate with the target audience and make them engage in civic responsibilities. Government officials also take people's opinions through social media on any important social issue and make strategies to tackle it accordingly. The year 2023 brings more platforms that compare with each other, and the potential of each platform is growing. Online engagement has grown commonplace with the invention of social media. According to (Mishaal Abu., 2015), the public can readily communicate on social media platforms. It is a successful channel for government officials to communicate with the public. Since social media platforms have become essential for citizen engagement and involvement, governments are keeping pace with them and are using them correctly and effectively. Cummings (2017) responds that social media has many benefits, including two-way communication that enables citizens to comment on government actions. Researchers are increasingly explaining the significance of social media for governance and outlining its advantages and disadvantages. Because some of the requested replies do not have official accounts, small local governments have made serious errors in their social media usage. Verma, Kumar, and Ilavarasan (2017) state that numerous government departments lack social media accounts to inform the public of their operations and lack an appropriate strategy to meet their present and future needs. Government authorities can easily learn the potential needs and wants of the public through their feedback, for example, from sentiment analysis, which might also be interesting. However, this research highlights several drawbacks of using social media in small local

governments. Authorities express significant skepticism towards platforms due to several perceived drawbacks. One concern is the uncertainty surrounding the future trajectory of these platforms. Additionally, the rapidly evolving nature of these platforms, which undergo frequent changes daily, further contributes to authorities' reservations. Consequently, authorities do not view these platforms as credible sources of information, lacking the necessary level of seriousness typically associated with informational pages. Organizing the online content in a manner that incorporates high-quality written material and pertinent information regarding the municipality is advisable to foster citizen engagement through organic means. Our suggestion would be to include a conclusion in your posts and videos, provide more frequent updates about events, and adhere to the principles of dialogic communication theory by incorporating high-quality visuals, videos, and informative content and maintaining consistency. In future studies, we would recommend concentrating more on the drawbacks of social media and investigating it through social media usage. In accordance with the findings of Lovari and Valentini (2020), it seems that social media management is mainly delegated to communication and public relations agencies. However, it is noteworthy that this function is broadly combined and integrated into the organizational framework. These dynamics significantly affect the trust-based relationships between these communicators and the citizens they serve. In a fundamentally transformed socio-communicative environment, public sector organizations must forge new connections with people to win their confidence (Bessieres, 2018; Chadwick, 2013). According to Warren et al. (2014), there is a reason why municipalities do not know how to use social media often; they are most of the time aware of the failure of "public trust," which means trust in public sector organizations. It can have serious consequences, e.g., ungovernable complaints, damaged reputations, and civic disaffection. Investigating how trust works in the daily relationship between citizens and institutions/municipalities through social media would be interesting. Social media administrators deliberately employ strategies to enhance citizen trust, effectively manage relationships, and provide numerous calls to action. These distinct instruments address two operational dimensions. This pertains to the technical solutions associated with social media features or content-related strategies. The second factor pertains to organizational dynamics involving internal interactions among social media administrators, municipal offices, and politicians. Participants know the lack of specific investigations to explore and measure citizens' trust in social media. Very few municipalities have adopted a specific strategy to collect social media analytics. Public sector communication has become increasingly important in many Western democracies because of its intrinsic connection to all concurrent societal, political, organizational, technological, and individual changes (Luoma-aho et al., 2019). Public sector organizations urgently need to develop new relationships with individuals to gain their trust in a fundamentally altered socio-communicative setting (Bessieres, 2018; Chadwick, 2013). The presence of social networks in local government is considered as a sign of modernity and responsiveness and shows a form of interactive participant (Mergel, 2014). However,

our findings do not align with this study. The participants in this study perceived social media as a non-serious platform that has less to do with actual information sharing and public engagement. The participants also stated the lack of experience and knowledge of social media use for civic engagement. The participants emphasized on the need for knowledge and media use expert to define the strategies and facilitation of two-way communication between the local government and citizens to avoid the hate received through social media platforms. Social media is often considered a platform to revolutionized citizen participation, however Skoric et al. (2015) argue that social media cannot be said to have revolutionary impact of civic engagement. Social media presence in the government practices is mandatory to avoid other parties from supplanting the local government about interaction and interaction (Agostino, 2013). Indeed, the findings of this study showed that citizen engagement through social media with the municipalities of the Czech Republic is quite low. About the use and challenges of social media for citizen's engagement, our analysis showed that local government lack the knowledge and expertise to use social media to publish information and interact with the public.

6. Conclusions and future research directions

The present study focused on the role of social media in small local governments in the Czech Republic. The primary purpose of this paper is to investigate administrators' importance and view of communication platforms and their potential, as well as the struggle of using them to enhance citizen engagement and publicity on social media platforms. Exploring the public official's perception helped find drawbacks, reasons, and challenges of using social media for public engagement. Moreover, this study provided valuable information to investigate better the complex dynamics of the IT world, mainly social media marketing. This study has several limitations due to the decision to use a convenient sample for the analysis, the limited number of interviews, and the fact that it refers to the specific context of questions. The study results suggest that engagement is a phenomenon with elements of the personal, information, attentive, and social forms. It must be studied more closely. The threats and weaknesses of using social media by selected administrators are real. It must be said that proper content and strategy must be critical elements for municipalities to gain more engaged citizens and avoid the fears that life brings us, such as harming well-being or disinformation and fake news. The findings of the present study open questions that may be of interest to researchers to discuss how different is the information given on social media than the ones given through traditional methods? The second question how the challenges of social media use for civic engagement can be mitigated to have positive citizen participatory behavior. It would also be interesting to conduct more detailed and in-depth qualitative studies rather than quantitative to analyze the perception of both citizens and government personnel to determine more precisely the status of participation in government affairs through social media.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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