Chapter 7
Enhancing E–Transparency in Public Governance Through Social Media

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ABSTRACT

This chapter is a discussion on e-transparency. It is motivated by the trend where e-governance fails to significantly distinguish itself from the traditional governance, through embracing its secretive and prolonged nature of decision making. Both service delivery, and process and event models provided a basic background on enhancing transparency in governance activities. The emphasis is to make citizens the centre of governance processes. Moreover, key areas where citizen participation is desired, are discussed. The discussion integrates the role of ICTs is maximising participation. The later section of this chapter focuses on addressing contemporary challenges of e-transparency, in governance activities. Collectively, the modern society must embrace e-transparency, in ensuring that citizens decide their fate.

BACKGROUND

Authors propose different factors defining governance in the public sector. The study by Weiss & Steiner (2006) considers the rule of law, accountability, and transparency as key to quality governance. Moreover, the International Federation for Accountants (2013) advocates a strong commitment to integrity, ethical values, the rule of law, openness, and stakeholders’ engagement in the governance process. On the other hand, the Collaboration on International ICT Policy in East and Southern Africa
(2015) and Lubua (2014) cite accountability, citizen empowerment and transparency (in government operations) as important pillars of good governance. Collectively, transparency is acknowledged by many studies, as key in ensuring good governance, and the ultimate objective is to ensure the execution of government operation, in favour of citizens.

Generally, transparency provides the required level of openness to government operations. This is through allowing the scrutinisation of the basis used in decision making (Lubua & Maharaj, 2014). Internally, key strategic decisions and operations must receive a collective approval from its stakeholders (Berggren & Bernshteyn, 2007). Moreover, the operation system must acknowledge the role of external stakeholders in approving the quality of governance through allowing feedbacks, while operating under transparent environment (Weiss & Steiner, 2006; Acosta, 2013). As the result of this scrutinisation, decision makers act with an understanding that they are viewed by the public. Hence, transparency becomes an agent for enforcing the sense of accountability and the rule of law among actors (International Federation for Accountants, 2013; Boyoung & Jinwoo, 2001).

While many government institutions acknowledge the importance of transparency in operations, the status of its implementation remains to be a concern. For example, the study by Gideon & Alouis (2013) reports low transparency in revenue collections and expenditure in the African context. Based on the scale by the Transparency International of 2015, many African countries receive a very low approval from their citizens on the issue of transparency in decision making (Transparency International, 2015). Arguably the received approval relates to the perceived level of corruption in respective countries. This observation is supported by several other studies (e.g. Ukah, 2009; Berggren & Bernshteyn, 2007; International Federation for Accountants, 2013). Countries which allow public organisations to operate in closed doors provide the room for leaders to exercise their authority unethically, and enrich themselves with natural resources illegally (Acosta, 2013).

On the other hand, the use of social media and web 2.0 related tools, offer a platform for elevating the level of transparency in governance. Social media allow stakeholders to communicate information across different platforms in a more convenient manner (Lubua & Maharaj, 2014; Banday & Mattoo, 2013). The exchange of information is characterised by efficiency, because multiple users can access and communicate the same information at the same time, more reliably (Darwish & Lakhtaria, 2011). Advanced tools supported by social media technologies facilitate live interactions between communicating individuals through text messages, audio, images and even video files (Darwish & Lakhtaria, 2011; Bidabad, Amirostovar, & Sherafati, 2017). Moreover, social media in support of other web 2.0 related tools allow the deployment of online survey tools, which are used in soliciting opinions from stakeholders of governance.
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