A critical examination of social media adoption in government: Introducing omnipresence

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ABSTRACT

As government agencies at every level are adopting social media tools, scholarship is emerging that indicates dialogic potentials meant to increase citizen engagement might not be met. With that premise, we take a critical examination of the way social media can increase capacity for engagement rather encourage collaboration, depending upon the way the tools are constructed. To do so, we expand Lippmann's notion of the phantom public to introduce the theoretical constructs of Omnipresent Citizens and Omnipresent Administrators. These people are everywhere but nowhere and embody characteristics of accessibility, desire to participate, and the possibility of remaining anonymous. Each has implications for citizen participation.

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1. Introduction

In November 2012, J.D. Longmont created a petition on the White House's We the People website to have the government build a Death Star by 2016. The Death Star is a fictional space station/weapons system from the popular "Star Wars" movie franchise. Longmont (2012) argued that the government's efforts toward building this piece of equipment would create jobs in construction, engineering, and space exploration, as well as strengthen national defense. Garnering more than 34,400 signatures, the petition required an official White House response. In a humorous yet sharp reply, Office of Management and Budget Chief of Science and Space Branch Paul Shawcross explained that the U.S. government does not endorse blowing up planets. More seriously, Shawcross (2012) detailed the United States' existing space program, which includes partnerships with other countries to operate the International Space Station, as well as the Mars missions.

This example of public participation grabbed headlines because of its humor. This consequence, however, was that the White House changed its policies regarding responding to petitions on We the People (petitions.whitehouse.gov). Originally, a petition garnering 5000 signatures would elicit a response. That number jumped to 25,000 before climbing again to 100,000 after the Death Star incident (Farrington, 2013). Capacity for interaction, rather than meaningful collaboration, is climbing with technology expansion.

Government organizations at all levels are rapidly embracing social media platforms such as the crowdsourcing We the People site as mechanisms to increase citizen engagement and collaboration. This is in part due to President Obama's Open Government initiative (McClure, 2010; Mergel, 2013). More than 1000 agency, department, initiative, or team Twitter accounts exist within the federal government (Jaeger & Bertot, 2010; Lukensmeyer, Goldman, & Stern, 2011; McClure, 2010; Mergel, 2012). The National Archives and Records Administration reported more than 227,000 visits to its Flickr (photo sharing) page and another 18,000 more to Archive blogs (National Archives & Records Administration, 2011). Local governments are increasing their presences online as well (Hand & Ching, 2011; Holden, Norris, & Fletcher, 2003), especially in the service provision realm. For example, there is an application called FixMyStreet.com, and Anaheim, California (among myriad other cities) has a phone app that allows users to request city services with one click (City of Anaheim, 2012).

It is believed (Bertot & Jaeger, 2010) that social media should foster a sense of connectedness amongst and between citizenry and government to build two-way, dialogic organization/public relationships (Grunig & Grunig, 1991). These tools, though, might fall short of the goals of two-way collaborative potentials (Brainard & Derrick-Mills, 2011; Brainard & McNutt, 2010; Hand & Ching, 2011).

1.1. Research Question

This piece is a critical theoretical examination of social media adoption within the public sector. Social media, ranging from video-sharing sites to microblogging sites to online discussion boards, can allow citizens to *feel* as if they were participating in knowledge co-creation and co-governance, letting governments move beyond transaction-based exchanges on e-government platforms (Bryer, 2010; Eggers, 2004; West, 2004) to the solicitation of feedback, preferences, and public opinion (Leighninger, 2011). The expectation of immediate engagement and feedback fits within other idealized perspectives (Habermas,

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1984, 1987) on communication to foster civic engagement that often are critiqued for being egalitarian (Flecha, 2000), unrealistic, idyllic, and sometimes Pollyannaish. In practice, one might also see that social media can encourage a sort of ersatz collaboration, replacing face to face meetings, debates, and other more traditional forms of civic engagement. It could help foster a *spectator's* approach to governance a la Lippmann (2008). At one extreme, we have social media tools potentially functioning similarly to "American Idol" as a mechanism to engender conformity, docility, and a wholly passive (Lippmann, 2008), consumer-based (Baudrillard, 1998) approach to governance with little real engagement. At the other extreme, it holds the potential for truly democratic engagement for everyone with a computer or other device and an internet connection.

To critique the former, we address the following question: Why might social media increase the government's capacity for engagement but still fall short of dialogic potentials as current scholarship finds? We want to be clear up front that social media, when designed with dialogic, interactive features, can increase citizen collaboration with agencies, thus furthering network governance strategies prevalent today (O'Leary, Gerard, & Bingham, 2006). We depart from the traditional view of social media and build off existing scholarship (i.e. Hand & Ching, 2011) to critique rapid adoption of social media in government agencies. This critical view is one that practitioners should consider when delving into social tools, as adopting too many social media platforms at the same time might not be effective (Mergel & Greeves, 2012). This is what we mean by the ability to increase capacity for collaboration rather than encouraging two-way knowledge co-creation.

This paper utilizes Lippmann (2008) to introduce the theoretical constructs of Omnipresent Citizens and Omnipresent Administrators, who are now everywhere yet nowhere. By utilizing social media tools, government agencies can either build in talk-back mechanisms for knowledge sharing and co-creation (collaboration) or simply offer platforms for one-way, government-led participation (capacity). When discussing increasing capacity for participation, we mean asynchronous information sharing that relies on push mechanisms (Mergel & Greeves, 2012) rather than engagement strategies (Bryer, 2011; Mergel, 2013). Agencies practicing engagement "have recognized the need of their audience to interact with government in a natural conversation style, instead of pushing government reports or memos out without providing opportunities for interactions" (Mergel, 2013, p. 128). To the point being raised within this article, Mergel notes that "there are very little role models within government to mirror an interactive engagement approach" (Mergel, 2013, p. 128), and social tools cannot automatically overcome peoples' passivity (Romero et al., 2010).

To explore this manifestation in social media, we consider first Lippmann's (1965, 2008) omnicompetent citizen, the unachievable ideal used as a foil to Dewey's arguments. Near unlimited access to *filtered* information (such as the information on most governmental sites) cannot provide a complete picture. Filtered information is understood as that which an agency controls to project a desired image (Peterson, 1977), thus not allowing people to make fully rational decisions (Lippmann, 2008). Next, digital domains often offer an *illusion* of privacy allowing people to engage in otherwise socially unacceptable behaviors (i.e. — cyber bullying, flaming). "Feeling of privacy refers to online users' perception of privacy psychologically, mentally, culturally, or conditionally *rather than the actual security*. Generally speaking, online users perceive different communication media with different levels of privacy in different circumstances" (Tu, 2005, p. 298, emphasis added).

We now have a starting point to theoretically understand why meaningful collaboration and engagement still remain relatively elusive for early governmental adopters of social media (Brainard & Derrick-Mills, 2011; Brainard & McNutt, 2010; Bryer, 2011; Hand & Ching, 2011; Mergel, 2013; Mergel, Schweik, & Fountain, 2009). At this point, we can clarify some terms readers will see throughout the paper. Public service delivery usually takes place in person or via one-way web-based

interactions, such as paying a water bill online. Service delivery, with its concrete outcome, often does not manifest in a social platform. Public engagement we defined above in line with Mergel's (2013) conceptualization of two-way knowledge sharing on social platforms. By collaboration, we mean the government agency and its stakeholders creating information together through social media's dialogic potentials. Mergel and Greeves (2012) detail numerous examples of this practice, such as the State Department's Ask State campaign via Twitter. All these practices mirror the shift in public administration toward governance (Linders, 2012) through networking rather than only top–down government interventions. Our focus within this critique is how government agencies might be increasing capacity for participation rather than engagement as Mergel (2013) understands it, thus expanding opportunities for one-way information pushes that potentially fall short of governance interventions.

We want to reiterate that we are not offering the theoretical constructs of Omnipresent Citizens and Omnipresent Administrators as blanket terms to explain the totality of social media use within government. Indeed, readers will see examples of the democratically minded use we noted earlier throughout the article, as well as examples of our constructs. Instead, this is a critical approach to the rapid adoption of social media, highlighting recent empirical studies showing that engagement practices are not quite reaching dialogic ideals of governance. The platforms encourage citizens and administrators to appear omnipresent, everywhere and nowhere, participating by 'liking' a post or 'sharing' a page instead of engaging in two-way dialogue. Omnipresent characteristics of both administrators and citizens include: accessibility, directive to participate, and the possibility of remaining anonymous. Concerns with each are discussed in detail later, but we list them here to show the inherent paradoxes that social media brings to administrators and citizens.

The article begins with a background on social media, e-government and e-governance before introducing collaboration, and our Omnipresence constructs. It concludes with avenues for future research.

2. E-government, social media and digital governance

As initially conceived, e-government was highly utilitarian and used for transactions and information. Citizens could, for example, pay a water bill, fill out forms and file for permits, browse a calendar, scan records, and more. E-government and e-governance (with the same distinctions that government and governance hold) advocates saw opportunities to foster two-way communicative interaction in a non-threatening, non-hierarchical manner (West, 2004). E-government was not only to open government around the clock but also was to build trust and citizen satisfaction (Tolbert & Mossberger, 2006) and reduce internal red tape (Welch & Pandey, 2007). This approach emphasized managerial language and outcomes that could, as a consequence, produce more citizen-initiated interactions with government (Leighninger, 2011; Thomas & Streib, 2003).

The demand for digital dialogic and knowledge-sharing options emerged as web technologies developed (Kent & Taylor, 1998), and the latest iteration of this is social media. Social media "integrates technology, social interaction, and content creation using the 'wisdom of crowds' to collaboratively connect online information. Through social media, people or groups can create, organize, edit, comment on, combine, and share content" (Federal Web Managers Council, 2011, para. 1). Examples of web-based social media include, but certainly are not limited to, weblogs, social networking platforms (such as Facebook), video/photo sharing (such as Instagram, YouTube, Vine), wikis (such as Wikipedia), discussion forums, Real Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds, podcasts, LinkedIn, microblogs (such as Twitter), and more (McClure, 2010). These are not the only means through which governments are attempting to become more transparent and interactive. As noted earlier, some agencies are turning toward mobile applications, online "help desks," blogs, and others. Our critique is not confined to one or two of

the more popular social sites. Indeed, any of the platforms can be used asynchronously or dialogically — it is all in how managers decide. Moreover, the focus is upon social platforms meant for interactivity and knowledge sharing rather than service-delivery as defined earlier.

2.1. Some social media benefits

Though this paper is a critique, one must acknowledge the power of social media tools. The platforms have been credited with spurring worldwide governance revolutions (Cohen, 2011; Oxley, 2011) while simultaneously keeping other hostile regimes in power (Sutter, 2011). Iceland's government turned toward social media technologies to crowdsource its revised constitution (Zavattaro, 2013). By focusing on government agencies employing social media to collaborate with various public spheres, one might see the rise of different phenomena such as the digital town hall meetings President Obama has held via Google Plus and Facebook. Mergel (2011) also highlights successful, civically engaged uses of Wiki technologies at various levels of government. Furthermore, citizens create "new opportunities to become far more involved in defining accountability, developing solutions and analyzing data via ever-evolving social media tools" (Kamensky, 2011, p.144).

Social media, especially digital, web-based social media (Bryer & Zavattaro, 2011), are instant, constantly available and have embedded within them mechanisms for *potential* collaboration and co-creation (DeSanctis & Poole, 1994; Orlikowski, 2000). Such technologies should have completed West's (2004) stages of e-government, taking digital platforms from a "billboard stage" (p. 17) to one involving "interactive democracy with public outreach and accountability enhancing features" (p. 17). The final phase enables citizens to use government websites as menus, picking and choosing the kind of information we want, how we want it, when and where (Rose & Grant, 2010; Sunstein, 2001). If implemented with dialogue in mind, social media can foster citizens as partners and not passive consumers of information (Linders, 2012).

One can, of course, launch into discussions about deliberative potential (Gordon & Manosevitch, 2011; Rishel, 2011), collaborative potential (Brainard & Derrick-Mills, 2011), interactive potential (Thomas & Streib, 2003), decision-making potential (Poister & Thomas, 2007), and the power-sharing potential (Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988) of social media or e-governance. While important, they are beyond the scope of this paper to cover in detail. We focus instead on the notion that collaborative, deliberative possibilities promised by social media might not be achieved as intended with government-citizen interaction (Brainard & Derrick-Mills, 2011; Bryer, 2011; Hand & Ching, 2011).

2.2. Building social media interactivity and collaboration

Arguments remain about how digital communication may not foster collaboration and can lead to group polarization (Jaeger, 2005; Rowe & Gammack, 2004; Sunstein, 2001). The tools themselves can expose users to malware, identity theft, and other cybersecurity risks (Oxley, 2011). Instead of building collaboration (Bingham, Nabatchi, & O'Leary, 2005; Vigoda, 2002) and engagement (Thomas & Streib, 2003), social media can potentially widen the gap between citizens and government (Bryer, 2011). Social media do not always harness aggregated wisdom (Bryer, 2011; Hand & Ching, 2011; Mannes, 2009; Poister & Thomas, 2007; Rowe & Gammack, 2004; Surowiecki, 2005) but instead can reveal other human characteristics such as irrationality (Mackay, 1932) and logrolling of potentially incorrect or flagrant (dis) information (Bryer, 2011; Sunstein, 2001). There are even digital expressions of groupthink (Janis, 1982) and mass behavior (Mills, 2000) demonstrating that technology does not overcome the limitations of its users. As Lippmann (2008, p. 29) notes, it is dangerous to believe that "compounding of individual ignorances of masses of people can produce a continuous directing force in public affairs."

3. Collaboration and assumptions

Collaboration is a key concept for citizen participation (Box, 1998) and representation (King & Stivers, 1998). Each holds certain assumptions about the nature of citizenship and the collaborative processes that surround it. These include notions of an idealized civic space, and openness In contemporary society, such an assumption becomes difficult to justify in either theory or practice. A cursory examination of the literature almost immediately uncovers discussions of conflict theories often tied to Marx (Marx, 1867/1984; Marx & Engels, 2002) and early sociologists such as Gumplowicz (Irving, 2007) and others. The observation that conflict was typically a normal state of affairs continued throughout the 20th century with the work of Lippmann (2008), Foucault (1980), and others, as well as a recognition of social and class-based disparities (Mills, 2000). There was even a growing awareness of how these positions can in truth be created or fabricated out of the ether, so to speak, (Boorstin, 1992; Bottomore, 1993) to achieve some social, economic, or political goal(s).

3.1. Collaboration pros and cons

We do not mean that all citizen participation is without cause. Nor are we arguing that all interactions on social media platforms are meaningless and non-collaborative. Instead, we draw attention to the realization that many social media sites used within government today typically function as one-way communication tools instead of the dialogic panacea to increase citizen engagement (Brainard & Derrick-Mills, 2011; Brainard & McNutt, 2010; Mergel, 2013). That noted, there are reasons why people choose to participate in government decision making processes, such as: giving legitimacy to governance processes (Stout, 2013), altering organizational structures to be amenable to participation (King, 2011), shifting the status quo (Marcuse, 1964), fostering empathy amongst administrators and the public (Zanetti, 2011), and building trust amongst stakeholders (Yang & Pandey, 2011).

Concerns about citizen participation (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004) emerge as reactions to assumptions ranging from issues surrounding voluntary associations and the compartmentalization that emerges from them (Skocpol & Fiorina, 1999) to the linguistic shifts experienced from the adoption of phrases such as civic capacity (De Souza Briggs, 2008; Elias, 2010). Civic capacity often is used interchangeably with civic engagement. Though they share some common elements for application, they remain different. Both often are linked to what many would understand as idealized speech (Habermas, 1970), but civic capacity in particular ranges from conventional applications of engagement including the use of symbolic activity, community group interaction, and the often-present call for engagement with educational institutions (Pierce, Lovrich, & Moon, 2002) to advocacy based on economic and other private-sector language (Brush, Monti, Ryan, & Gannon, 2007; Banyan, 2008).

3.2. Social media and citizen collaboration

Governments deploying social media platforms inherently increase capacity for participatory governance, "the active involvement of citizens in government decision making" (O'Leary et al., 2006, p. 7). When social media are constructed with talk-back potentials, they could foster collaboration and cooperation, whereby the government agency and its stakeholders move beyond static, one-way participatory mechanism to co-labor, "to cooperate to achieve common goals, working across boundaries in multisector relationships" (ibid, p. 7). Again, this depends upon how the technology is used (Mergel, 2013; Orlikowski, 2000).

While government agencies at all levels might jump into social media, Bryer (2011) elucidates democratization costs for both administrators and citizens, costs that should be considered when debating collaborative potentials detailed above. Organization members, ultimately,

decide how to utilize social media technologies, weighing the costs and benefits of deploying them in fully dialogic modes or controlled modes. Citizen capacity to contact a government might be increased, but Bryer (2011) notes there are production, participation and technological costs – together the costs of democratization – that both citizens and administrators incur. Citizens could become, as argued here, potentially discouraged because they might "participate with limited information, uncertain expectations as to their power or the decision process, and an insufficient understanding of the policy or management issue may lose trust and efficacy rather than become more empowered and trusting through the social media tools deployed" (Bryer, 2011, p. 345).

Social media tools, when not designed with dialogic, knowledge sharing, engagement, co-labor (O'Leary et al., 2006) principles in mind, can expand civic *capacity* for collaboration, though not necessarily meaningful *collaboration* (Mergel, 2012, 2013; Rowe & Gammack, 2004). Capacity, in this limited sense, might refer to the number of 'friends' or 'followers' a government entity has rather than engagement with potentially meaningful feedback or results that those advocating for genuine participation likely would envision (Arnstein, 1969; King, Stivers, Feltey, & Susel, 1998). It also refers to policies from government agencies that dictate there will be no official response to citizen posts, or posts that simply go unanswered (Brainard & Derrick-Mills, 2011; Brainard & McNutt, 2010). If an administrator from an agency with a no-response policy replies on a social platform, then it likely will be to direct a citizen to an official website or 'virtual help desk.' For example, the City of Iowa City's social media policy emphasizes that the city's website will remain the place's main internet presence (City of Iowa City, 2012), and Arlington, Texas's policy indicates that social users should be directed back to the city's official website when possible (City of Arlington, 2011). While comments might be made to social sites, there might not be engagement and collaboration taking place *there*. Therefore, there is expanded capacity for interaction but not necessarily collaboration.

Again, we do not mean that no dialogue is taking place on social media platforms. Research shows the design of the platform can help engagement (Mergel & Greeves, 2012), as well as the kind of content posted (ICMA, 2011). Moreover, social media might not be the best platform for decision making, but savvy government agencies can use the information citizens share to discover and respond to patterns (ICMA, 2011). Administrators might create capacity for collaboration but still use the platforms to push and pull information (Mergel, 2013).

There are a number of consequences that this shift has on civic processes in practice. If one conceives of the civic as capital, (Oxendine et al., 2007) or as a resource (Shipps, 2003), then officials might use citizens as such, employing them as a mechanism or tool to achieve some sort of directed end — as manipulated public relations tools (Zavattaro, 2010). In such a case, there is not collaboration; rather, there is marketing, use, consumption and persuasion. 'Collaboration' in this sense, happens as part of a larger political spectacle (Edelman, 1988) where consent might be manufactured, or at least influenced, through the manipulation of media (Herman & Chomsky, 2002) and the positioning of resources to achieve specific ends. Consequently, interaction with government-run social media remains predominantly one way and consumptive in nature (Brainard & Derrick-Mills, 2011; Brainard & McNutt, 2010; Hand & Ching, 2011; Mergel, 2013).

4. Lippmann's omnicompetence to omnipresence

We rely upon Lippmann's (2008) conceptualization of the idealized omnicompetent citizen to answer our research question: Why might social media increase the government's capacity for engagement but still fall short of dialogic potentials as current scholarship finds? Lippmann (2008) argued that the phantom public was a more accurate description of how citizens interact with government agencies, working from the agents versus bystanders perspective. Agents (insiders) act while bystanders (outsiders) do little or nothing without guidance.

This challenges the idea of an omnicompetent citizen, understood as a rational person with a strong civic education (Lippmann, 2008) who can act as insiders to foster change. In practice, such a citizen would need copious amounts of time to be well informed (either though his/her own doing or via government public information) on "every question which confronts a self-governing community" (Lippmann, 2008, p. 10). Rather it is more likely that one or more of these elements are missing. Citizens, Lippmann (2008) continues, have little chance of affecting any form of substantive change at any level of government. Elected officials and career administrators as insiders are the ones with broad access to information citizens would need to engender change. The public, as outsiders, cannot and will not have access to this information, as the public "does not itself control the executive act" (Lippmann, 2008, p. 45). The best a citizen can do, he argues, is influence an actor within the political or administrative process.

Social media, then, might reinforce Lippmann's (2008) claims about a phantom public rather than furthering engagement and collaboration because of the filtered information and crowdsourcing concerns noted earlier (i.e. Bryer, 2011). Citizens and officials might not be omnicompetent, but they can be omni*present*, simultaneously everywhere and nowhere. This leads to our discussion of Omnipresent Citizens and Omnipresent Administrators. We used Lippmann's (2008) characteristics of omnicompetence and combined those with social media characteristics to generate ideas about omnipresence. This relationship, and examples, is shown in Table 1. Put simply, the Omnipresent constructs reflect the realities and intricacies of the U.S. political system. Elected officials carry out our desires, and appointed/hired public servants serve as technical experts to, for example, answer questions we cannot — because we cannot be omnicompetent. Even though social media tools can create instant access to government agencies that does not mean more or better information becomes available. Therefore, we argue that omnipresence is an applicable reflection of the governance apparatus.

4.1. Omnipresence — citizens

Omnipresent Citizens, as conceived here, embody three characteristics: accessibility, the directive to participate, and the possibility of appearing anonymous or hidden. These goals conflict with each other as social media and digital interaction offer the *feeling* of anonymity and the *feeling* of access to users, while their digital footprints are being tracked, archived, and recorded regularly through *automated* systems (McCarthy & Yates, 2010). Consequently, web-based platforms make interaction easier and sometimes simpler — yet they do not necessarily make them collaborative. To reiterate, social media can increase one-way information sharing that relies on push mechanisms (Mergel & Greeves, 2012) rather than engagement strategies (Mergel, 2013) that expand *capacity*, but not necessarily *collaboration* (Bryer, 2011).

First, we consider accessibility, which is the ability of citizens to access social media and web platforms at his or her convenience. With rapid diffusion of technology through outlets such as smart phones, broad band internet access, WiFi, and others, technology allows for nearly constant contact. With social media, citizens 'gather' online and interact with each other and sometimes with representatives (or avatars) from their governments. No formal group norming or forming processes are undertaken. These groups can be understood as "a symbolic community, a group of people who share a common set of symbols and experiences" (Hallahan, 2000, p. 502; also see Anderson, 1991) or more accurately an ersatz community. Returning to the Death Star example, more than 34,400 people signed the petition (as of this writing), but are they a group? They more closely resemble a symbolic community with little interactivity between members. There also were no responses to the official White House reply. This is interaction not collaboration.

Table 1
Understanding omnipresence in social media use.

Social media characteristics[a]	Content often shared and subject to refinement	Two-way dialogic conversation and information sharing rather than one-way push	Feedback ideally instant, so citizens and administrators co-produce knowledge
Phantom public characteristics[b]	Does not have access to perfect information, thus limiting participation opportunities and possibly compounding ignorant masses	Spends little time thinking about public affairs, but even when a person does participate has little direct influence on direction of affairs	Failure to become an omnicompetent ideal citizen has led to dissatisfaction with government
Omnipresent characteristics (relating to social media participation)	Accessibility (Ability to access technology from mobile and network-enabled devices; possibly compounding ignorant masses)	Directive to participate (Might expand capacity rather than engagement; still no access to perfect information)	Possibility of remaining hidden or anonymous (Not always manifested in practice)
Scholarly support of omnipresent characteristics in government social media use[c]	Burke (2008) Hallahan (2000) Lee and Kwak (2012) Mergel (2013) Mergel and Greeves (2012) Zavattaro (2013)	Bezboruah and Dryburgh (2012) Brainard and McNutt (2010) Bryer (2011) McDermott (2010)	Alonzo and Aiken (2004) Lee (2005) Oxley (2011) Wright (2006) Zimmerman and Rappaport (1988)
Practical examples of omnipresent characteristics[c]	Death Star petition 56% of Americans own a smartphone (as of June 2013, Pew Internet) Evolution of big data and smart cities	We the People Nearly 1000 U.S. federal government organizational units on social platforms Collaboration, customer service, and mobile communication top concerns for local administrators (Yang, 2013)	Wiki platform anonymity (Mergel, 2012) Twitter archives Tracking cookies City of Iowa City and City of Arlington policies regarding comment removal

[a] Adapted from Mergel and Greeves (2012).
[b] Adapted from Lippmann (2008).
[c] Scholarly and practical examples align with each omnipresent characteristic under which they are listed. For example, Bryer (2011) aligns with will and desire to participate.

We also argue that Omnipresence offers users both a directive to participate while possibly remaining anonymous, as people appear to be more willing to voice their opinion when there is less chance for the ridicule associated with parrhesia and related forms (Foucault, 2001; Sementelli, 2009). Put differently, participants have the *feeling* of remaining hidden, disconnected, and anonymous (Lee, 2005). Participation for such a citizen appears easier because they do not physically leave a safe space, such as home, work, or Internet-connected device, to collaborate with government (accessibility).

To be clear, we do not mean that every person who engages with a government agency on a social media site wants to remain anonymous. Sometimes a person might share positive thoughts with the agency or might not mind his or her name appearing front and center on a negative comment. Mergel and Greeves (2012), for example, offer the instance of a person who complained on a Florida police department's Facebook page about officers not using turn signals while driving. The agency responded back with a funny-yet-serious response, prompting the original commenter to praise the department. The person probably did not want to remain hidden but *could* have if her Facebook page contained, say, a false name or other nickname, thus not revealing a true self identity but a firm online identity via a unique internet protocol (IP) address.

As a counter example, some, though certainly not all, Wikis used in government agencies do not require users to supply identities to comments (Mergel, 2011). In another illustration, McCarthy and Yates (2010) detail the U.S. federal government's policy toward tracking cookies, which were recently allowed with certain limitations (Hooker, 2010). These cookies gather user metadata, such as IP addresses and online use patterns. Finally, the Library of Congress recently announced, as another illustration of our argument, that it has archived more than 170 billion user Tweets (Gross, 2013). These Tweets will be made available for public and scholarly viewing. The comments, then, never disappear from the digital world. Citizens leave a clear digital footprint behind, making comments and web browsing history well known, open and permanent.

This notion of privacy that engenders security and participation among citizens in the first place is best understood as a simulation (Baudrillard, 2000). We argue this phenomenon is a contemporary expression of a panopticon-like (Bentham, 1995) process that pervades online interactions with government. Within such panopticism (Foucault, 1977), a central presence keeps people (prisoners, students, patients, etc.) in check. Knowing a person is watching can inspire docility and passivity amongst citizen users. For example, cities might take down comments that contain information not in line with social media policies (City of Arlington, 2011; City of Iowa City, 2012).

While citizens might self-monitor, we also see the *opposite* in practice. Knowing one is being observed can fall away, and when it becomes routine people might forget they are being watched creating this ersatz privacy or anonymity. In some instances, this can make them willing to engage in behavior that might normally be considered: 1) socially unacceptable, such as flaming (Alonzo & Aiken, 2004; Lee, 2005) or 2) not useful to harnessing aggregated wisdom (Lippmann, 2008; Thompson, 2011). In other words, forgetting the panoptic presence can erode rational thought and action in the minds of omnipresent citizens and dilute dialogue.

4.2. Omnipresence — administrators

Administrators and other officials can engage in similar practices as those described above referencing citizens. They, too, embody accessibility, a directive to participate often, and the possibility of remaining anonymous. Again, similar to our Omnipresent Citizen, these are not blanket statements. Instead, we mean that the organization might expand *capacity* for engagement rather than offering meaningful collaboration, thus becoming omnipresent. Indeed, social media experts have found that platforms meant to empower citizens "often [do] not bring new voices into the process" (ICMA, 2011, para. 9). Put simply, just because a social media platform is available does not mean citizens will take advantage — capacity not collaboration.

Officials embody omnipresent characteristics a bit differently than citizens. Officials might treat social media technologies as anything ranging from a sort-of digital security monitor used to identify when certain interactions happen to a textual data source that can pinpoint not just points of dissent, but the dissenters, their locations and preferences. To the former point, Oxley (2011) noted that President Obama's advisers often search social networking sites to see how people are talking about the president or social issues. To the latter point, for example, this happens when you 'friend' or 'follow' a government entity on some social media sites. Those agencies then potentially have access to your personal network and posts (Oxley, 2011). Social media in many respects embody a near-perfect set of tools to develop and

maintain digital panopticons typically attractive to power elites, and often feared by proponents of individuality, privacy, and equality.

Regarding accessibility, administrators in particular embrace social media to offer citizens the appearance of a responsive government that is open 24/7 (McDermott, 2010; Misuraca, 2009), thus further blurring the work–life balance lines (Bezboruah & Dryburgh, 2012; Jacobson & Tufts, 2013). As noted, social media tools are meant to be dialogic (Brainard & McNutt, 2010; Leighninger, 2011) *only if* those capabilities are built into their application (DeSanctis & Poole, 1994; Orlikowski, 2000). For civic employees in particular, there often is a confusing mire of what they can and cannot post, even as private citizens, affecting their rights and responsibilities, and the organization's image (Bezboruah & Dryburgh, 2012; Jacobson & Tufts, 2013). For the government employee in charge of an agency's social media presences, he or she becomes intertwined with the work when dialogic potentials are capitalized upon. The person might be expected to respond no matter the time. As one social media professional recently told one of the authors, "I work weird hours," as he is expected to respond to citizen posts from mobile technologies when not at work (accessibility) (Jacobson & Tufts, 2013).

The latter characteristics of Omnipresence in administrators – a directive to participate often while possibly remaining virtually hidden – cohere and are treated as such. Put simply, administrators in charge of a government's social media presence might never be known yet work to foster a sense of constant connection to citizens. A citizen posts to, say, City of X's Facebook page and gets a response (ideally). But from whom? As an example, a communications specialist for a U.S. military branch recently told one of the authors that they implement the unit's Facebook page. Yet this person's name appears nowhere on that Facebook page, thus leaving one to wonder who is behind the content.

Earlier we offered the possibility of digital panopticons (Bentham, 1995) eroding privacy for the citizens. Citizens can and often do post online even while someone watches or tracks their input at any time, both physically and digitally (Oxley, 2011). Administrators could become the panoptic controllers who are everywhere yet nowhere. As noted earlier, citizens might forget this panoptic controller exists and engage in online flaming (Lee, 2005) or other exposure of their personal lives. With a constant online presence, administrators can give the appearance of caring and responsiveness, which is often more important the actual response (Baudrillard, 2000).

The administrator as panoptic controller immediately has the position of power in this so-called exchange relationship. The administrator is in a position to control and censor the information to align with the government's official position (Wright, 2006). Online moderators play a strategic role in fostering democratic participation while figuring out how not to trample free speech rights (Wright, 2006). As Wright notes, (2006, p. 553), "being accused of even 'justifiable' censorship can create a public relations quagmire, and thus the cost/benefit ratio of operating online must be carefully thought through." Governments can choose, he continues, between passive moderation without explanation and two-way moderation involving an administrator performing more intermediary, participatory functions.

Administrators can control the 'dialogue.' They have the power to remove posts deemed inappropriate (flaming) — looking at federal, state, and municipal social media policies reveals language toward this end. In this way, citizen participation is shaped, measured, and controlled (Wright, 2006) in the mirror image of government-generated rhetoric and imagery. For the Omnipresent Administrator, such an occurrence is possibly acceptable, as oftentimes it is enough to make the citizen feel empowered rather than be empowered (Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988).

Posting, by a citizen or administrator, to whatever social tool employed is *not necessarily nor inherently collaborative*. Government organizations offering these tools might not use them collaboratively but as symbolic capacity-building measures instead. As Dahlberg notes

(2001, p. 619), "government online services… are always affected by the interests of those in power," even though moves toward deliberation are utilized in these digital spaces. We do acknowledge there are platforms designed specifically for coordinated, open exchange of information (Kavanaugh et al., 2007; Mergel, 2011 illustrate this point), but the government organization often curbs dialogue online to reduce unwanted responses.

5. Conclusion and discussion

We began this article by indicating that we intended to turn a critical eye toward social media use within government agencies. Many prescriptions available focus on the dialogic, co-creation platforms that ideally should produce active, engaged citizens congregating in collaborative, dialogic spaces 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We employed a critical lens based on emerging research that indicates these dialogic potentials are often not fully realized (Brainard & Derrick-Mills, 2011; Bryer, 2011; Hand & Ching, 2011). The paper is, overall, a critique of citizen participation in a digital realm. Lippmann's notion of a phantom public informed the research question. We argued that social media can foster ersatz participation and not necessarily the dialogic, collaborative participation agencies imagine or intended. Moreover, we introduced the constructs of Omnipresent Citizens and Omnipresent Administrators with three similar characteristics — accessibility, directive to participate, and the possibility of remaining anonymous. Collectively, these traits could lead to ersatz participation because of the non-interactive, one-way focus. Now, we acknowledge that examples of well-rounded, collaborative networking opportunities online do exist (Mergel, 2012, notes success at the Department of State, for example). We mean, however, to highlight the potentially negative effects of rapid technology adoption that might not necessarily build in dialogic, engagement capabilities but encourage more one-way, push communication (Mergel, 2012).

5.1. Managerial implications

So what can administrators of social media platforms do? First, we suggest taking a look at the costs of democratization (Bryer, 2011) to determine what, if any, social platforms are right for the organization. Platforms should be part of a strategic governance program and not simply offered for the sake of offering. Second, once platforms are chosen, there should be appropriate staff dedicated to developing, implementing, and updating the social sites. Third, the sites should be designed to include feedback that goes beyond a simple page 'like' or status share. Administrators can pose questions, encourage use of a hashtag, host online town hall meetings. Officials should, though be prepared for any kind of feedback, some not necessarily helpful (Bryer, 2011). Fourth, the social sites should identity the administrators in charge and include, when possible, a way to contact those administrators. This way, the Omnipresent Administrator becomes better known, and the constant administrative presence could increase dialogue and feedback. When users see their posts being taken seriously, they could be more likely to build a positive organization–public relationship (Mergel & Greeves, 2012).

Public administrators also need to be aware of social media's unintended effects (Rowe & Gammack, 2004), which need to be explored further. It is essential to realize that at least in early stages of use, they can foster increased *capacity* but not necessarily increased engagement (Lee & Kwak, 2012). Naïve use of media creates opportunities for information asymmetry as citizens open their private lives for public inspection. The possibility for an ersatz community emerges contextually from a 24-hour service-based government. There are also multiple opportunities to implement digital panopticons that can strip away privacy and anonymity, while locating cases of dissent. Finally, the development of one-way communication through social media allows for more careful implementation of public sector marketing strategies, enabling those

in power to shape information, discourses in general, and imagery in particular. As ersatz omnipresence becomes the norm, we find that the concepts of democracy, civic engagement, and justice, become placed at risk, as well as their associated practices.

5.2. Future research

With this theoretical introduction of Omnipresnce, there are avenues for future research that include empirical investigation of how these constructs manifest in practice, if at all. Researchers can start with this broad question and alter the constructs as necessary. Next, qualitative, depth interviews might be used to better understand how practitioners define engagement within social media settings. What measures of success are used? How can administrators balance council-member expectations with citizen participation realities noted above? Alternatively, the same procedure could be used to interview citizens to better understand the kinds of interactions and information they expect from government agencies. This way, best practices might be developed in both directions. Finally, researchers can explore the levels of government, agencies, and kinds of decisions that best lend themselves to inclusion on social media platforms. Perhaps one agency turns more toward push mechanisms (Mergel, 2013) rather than co-laboring (O'Leary et al., 2006) because of decision and issue complexity. It would be worthwhile to uncover those characteristics so administrators can utilize social campaigns strategically and give citizens meaningful ways to participate instead of offering many platforms that might not be used (Bryer, 2011; Irvin & Stansbury, 2004). These questions scratch the surface of the future research needed as social media platforms of all types emerge quickly in government agencies.

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