

**Nicolae Sfetcu**

**THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN DEMOCRACY,  
NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT  
AND E-GOVERNANCE**

*MultiMedia Publishing*

# The Role of Social Media in Democracy, New Public Management and e-Governance

BOOK PREVIEW

Digital democracy

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# The Role of Social Media in Democracy, New Public Management and e-Governance

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## Abstract

In the contemporary landscape of public administration, significant changes have taken place, driven by the need for efficiency, transparency and increased citizen involvement. Three key concepts encapsulate these changes: New Public Management, e-governance, and the ubiquitous role of social media. Each represents a transformative approach to governance, collectively shaping a more responsive and accountable public sector.

This book explores the significant contributions of social media to democratic governance models, the realization of the principles of new public management and e-governance. It examines how social media facilitates transparency, improves accountability and citizen engagement, and encourages collaborative governance, thereby redefining traditional models of public administration.

**Keywords:** social media, social networks, new public management, e-governance, democracy

## Digital democracy

According to J. Millard public governance refers to "how the roles and relations of all actors are organized, structured, managed and administered, including power balance, and capacity and competence, relationships and the levers that each actor has, particularly when using digital technologies."<sup>3</sup> The goal is to provide benefits of public value. Since its inception, the EU has developed numerous policies to promote the public values of good governance as a means of addressing its challenges. The digital revolution has transformed the way we work, our environment, our social interactions and almost every aspect of our lives on a global scale. Digital transformation has become a central pillar in the Recovery Plan for Europe (NextGenerationEU), while the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) provides financial support to Member States.

Successive paradigms of public governance seem to align with major political and societal developments and shocks since 1945, and with digital technological developments. The types of

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<sup>3</sup> Millard, "Impact of Digital Transformation on Public Governance."

public governance paradigms both change in character and increase in variety over time<sup>4</sup>. In the early 1990s, Generation 1.0 went on the traditional Weberian paradigm of public governance, stimulating new public management and then helping to support the neo-Weberian paradigm for efficient and timely service to citizens. Around 2000, governments began to use digital technology as a public asset. The year 2000 coincided with the leap from Generation 1.0 to Generation 2.0, which enables participation and two-way interactions between providers and users, facilitating network governance paradigms and public values as two political philosophies. Since 2008, the financial crisis has simultaneously given rise to two quite different paradigms of public governance: lean and austerity governance, and a new multitude of open governance paradigms and models enabled by the new semantics-based technology of Generation 3.0. The year 2015, in the context of globalization and economic growth, and marked by increasing inequality and discontent and loss of trust in government, coincides with growing populism and "post-truth" movements, attracted by distributed and mobile technology of Generation 4.0. From 2020 a new era of crisis, disruption and turbulence is emerging, fueled by the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the threats of climate change. New forms of public governance are needed to face these existential challenges by involving the technologies of Generation 5.0 and the fifth industrial revolution.

Aspects regarding the existing models of public governance<sup>5</sup>:

- Societal shocks and crises are the strongest influences on public governance developments.
- Public governance paradigms accumulate layer after layer, resulting in a form of sedimentation over time, in a co-evolution process.
- The combination of paradigms and models in a given place and time depends on the context of global, national and local politics, as well as other factors, in a "real mix"
- Generative and emergent governance paradigms (co-creation) seem imminent.
- The ideal rebalancing of power and responsibilities for public governance is not yet complete, requiring a cultural shift.

J. Millard describes several models of public governance, classified into three main groups:

A) prevailing, B) new and experimental and C) new and emerging<sup>6</sup>.

**Prevailing** models of public governance provide the basic foundations of public governance today in all European countries, according to different historical, political and cultural conditions:

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<sup>4</sup> Millard.

<sup>5</sup> Millard.

<sup>6</sup> Millard.

1) *Traditional (Weberian) public administration*: Since about 1945, with digital technology only relevant since the early 1990s.

2) *New Public Management (NPM)*: Market-based since about 1980, with digital technology only relevant since the early 1990s.

3) *Neo-Weberian state*: From the late 1990s, a reaction against the NPM and some return to Weberian administration, but with a more external orientation.

6) *Poverty and austerity*: Some versions of NPM in response to the financial crisis that began in 2007-8.

All four are, however, less prominent today. Their dominance is now weakening as newer governance paradigms, often enabled by digital technology, are adopted.

**New and experimental** public governance models:

4) *Networked*: Due to the impact of Generation 2.0 digital technology on public governance since around 2000.

5) *Public value management*: Same as 4).

7) *Open*: Following the financial crisis of 2007-2008 coinciding with digital technology Generation 3.0.

8) *Sustainability*: Starting to have a significant impact on public governance from around 2015, coinciding with Generation 4.0 digital technology.

9) *Locality and community*: Same as 8)

**New and emerging** public governance models: emerging after 2020, and for now highly speculative.

David Kaye, the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression said: "Today, to be disconnected from the net is to be silenced." <sup>7</sup> This digital transformation is reshaping the relationship between states and citizens. New technologies and social media have revolutionized the way people interact and exercise their freedom of expression and information, as well as other related - and sometimes conflicting - fundamental rights<sup>8</sup>. New information technologies have created a new "public sphere" for democratic debate, where we need a different model based on principles of co-responsibility and international cooperation. "The internet has quickly moved from primarily being used for information access to become a participatory environment more closely mimicking the democratic participation traditional in the physical world"<sup>9</sup>.

Opinion formation is becoming increasingly collaborative and self-regulating (e.g., Wikipedia, Facebook), and political activism has found new and effective ways of organizing and

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<sup>7</sup> Vargas Valdez, "Study on the Role of Social Media and the Internet in Democratic Development."

<sup>8</sup> Parliamentary Assembly, "The Right to Internet Access."

<sup>9</sup> Laidlaw, *Regulating Speech in Cyberspace*, 7.

expressing itself<sup>10</sup>. In democracy, the Internet facilitates three aspects of it: electoral, monitoring and deliberative<sup>11</sup>:

” Electoral democracy is commonly known in the internet context as ‘egovernment’... Monitoral democracy refers to the bottom-up, grassroots activism that can be facilitated by the internet.... Deliberative democracy refers to participation by individuals in open debate in the belief that it will lead to better decisions on matters of common concern.”<sup>12</sup>.

New information technologies make democratic processes more accessible, allowing people to organize and act to address specific social, economic or political issues. They also enable greater transparency and accountability and expand the reach of the "public sphere" and strengthen deliberative democracy.

According to a study conducted by Bond et al (2012) of 61 million Facebook users, the exchange of messages between them had a direct influence on their political opinion, and such influence extended to "close friends"<sup>13</sup>. There is a strong positive correlation between Internet and social media use, on the one hand, and support for democracy as a desirable form of government, on the other<sup>14</sup>. The widespread use of the Internet and social networks provides a more accurate knowledge of citizens' interests and facilitates the organization of large-scale social movements<sup>15</sup>.

The monitored democracy variables are embedded in the deliberative democracy category. Internet access has become so important that " “many states, such as Estonia, Finland, France, Greece and Spain, have legislatively recognized internet access as a fundamental right ”<sup>16</sup>. "Access to the internet as a fundamental right received the United Nations (UN) stamp of approval in a report by Frank La Rue, the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression"<sup>17</sup>, and the Court The European Court of Human Rights has ruled that internet blocking may be ""“in direct conflict with the actual wording of paragraph 1 of Article 10 of the Convention, according to which the rights set forth in that Article are secured ‘regardless of frontiers’""<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Cohen and Kahne, “Participatory Politics.”

<sup>11</sup> Vargas Valdez, “Study on the Role of Social Media and the Internet in Democratic Development.”

<sup>12</sup> Laidlaw, *Regulating Speech in Cyberspace*, 10–11.

<sup>13</sup> Bond et al., “A 61-Million-Person Experiment in Social Influence and Political Mobilization.”

<sup>14</sup> Basco, “Techno-Integration of Latin America.”

<sup>15</sup> Cohen and Kahne, “Participatory Politics.”

<sup>16</sup> Vargas Valdez, “Study on the Role of Social Media and the Internet in Democratic Development.”

<sup>17</sup> Laidlaw, *Regulating Speech in Cyberspace*, 20–21.

<sup>18</sup> European Court of Human Rights, “Yildirim v. Turkey,” para. 67.

But even if “the internet has the power to be a tool of democracy... its potential in this respect is at risk... [because the] same technology that facilitates discourse creates opportunities for censorship of information, monitoring of online practices and the subtle shaping and manipulation of behavior.”<sup>19</sup>

The Internet and social media are very useful technologies to promote representative democracy, democratizing content production, erasing borders and jurisdictions. But at the same time, they have centralized the distribution channels in the hands of a few very powerful private actors, the owners of the information highways, who are powerful enough to dictate the terms of social, individual and political freedoms, thus becoming a third actor in the democratic arena. Because of this, the regulation of the Internet in the international realm requires a complex and more nuanced discussion, also taking into account the fact that the excessive limitation of individual rights could also have an impact on other rights necessary for the survival of liberal democratic regimes.<sup>20</sup>

Key current findings on digital technology and public governance include<sup>21</sup>:

- Everything is influenced by digital technologies.
- The implementation of technologies is mediated by organizational, institutional, legal, ethical and social conditions, as well as challenges such as digital exclusion and the growing digital divide.
- The reuse of digital technologies and data could be considered the only possible way to reach equity, transparency, accountability and inclusion.
- The complexity of human-technology relationships must account for how humans are affected by digital machines.
- The simultaneous multiplicity of public governance paradigms is a contextual response to prevailing political, socioeconomic and cultural differences.
- Public services are context-relevant, digital-ready and interoperable by design.
- We are still looking for the best ways to use data and digital technologies.

e-Democracy (digital democracy or internet democracy) uses information and communication technology (ICT) in political and governance processes<sup>22</sup>. E-democracy strengthens political self-determination, having a substantial impact on political norms and public engagement<sup>23</sup>. Jane Fountain analyzes the expansion of e-democracy and its interaction with

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<sup>19</sup> Laidlaw, *Regulating Speech in Cyberspace*, 1.

<sup>20</sup> Vargas Valdez, “Study on the Role of Social Media and the Internet in Democratic Development.”

<sup>21</sup> Millard, “Impact of Digital Transformation on Public Governance.”

<sup>22</sup> Noveck, “Five Hacks for Digital Democracy,” 287–89.

<sup>23</sup> Lee, Chang, and Berry, “Testing the Development and Diffusion of E-Government and E-Democracy.”



traditional government structures, arguing that e-government would require a significant overhaul of the modern administrative state<sup>24</sup>.

A major event in society has been the paradigm shift from traditional bureaucracies to network arrangements in policy making and service delivery, from "hierarchy to heterarchy"<sup>25</sup>. Open Systems Theory<sup>26</sup> assumes that organizations are in permanent contact with their external environment, and the emergence and widespread use of ICT and the "infosphere" help promote better and better democratic governance<sup>27</sup>. Thus, towards the end of the 20th century, the government was no longer solely responsible for the provision of public services<sup>28</sup>, moving from the provision of services by centralized government entities to the "empty state"<sup>29</sup> or "third-party government"<sup>30</sup>.

The new governance has been defined in several ways. Rhodes defines it as "self-organizing inter-organizational networks" that are "alternative to, not a hybrid of, markets and hierarchies"<sup>31</sup>. O'Toole speaks of "structures of interdependence involving multiple organizations"<sup>32</sup>, and Stoker considers governance as "the development of governing styles in which boundaries between public and private sectors have become blurred"<sup>33</sup>. Thus, governance means more than government, it transcends the traditional boundaries of government.<sup>34</sup>

Resource dependency theory postulates that governmental organizations are not self-sufficient<sup>35</sup>, relying on other organizations for various types of resources<sup>36</sup>, forming networks of governmental and non-governmental organizations<sup>37</sup>. McGuire defines collaborative public management as "s the process of facilitating and operating in multi-organizational arrangements

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<sup>24</sup> Fountain, "Building the Virtual State."

<sup>25</sup> O'Leary, "From Silos to Networks," 5.

<sup>26</sup> Katz and Kahn, *The Social Psychology of Organizations*.

<sup>27</sup> Moghrabi and Sabharwal, "The Role of the Information Society in Promoting a Better and a More Democratic Governance."

<sup>28</sup> Salamon and Elliott, "The Tools of Government."

<sup>29</sup> Milward and Provan, "Managing the Hollow State Collaboration and Contracting."

<sup>30</sup> Salamon and Elliott, "The Tools of Government."

<sup>31</sup> Rhodes, "The New Governance," 652.

<sup>32</sup> O'Toole, "The Implications for Democracy in a Networked Bureaucratic World," 45.

<sup>33</sup> Stoker, "Governance as Theory," 117.

<sup>34</sup> Moghrabi and Sabharwal, "The Role of the Information Society in Promoting a Better and a More Democratic Governance."

<sup>35</sup> Pfeffer and Salancik, *The External Control of Organizations*.

<sup>36</sup> Kaufman, *Are Government Organizations Immortal?*

<sup>37</sup> Mitchell, "Collaborative Propensities Among Transnational NGOs Registered in the United States."

to solve problems that cannot be solved or easily solved by single organizations <sup>38</sup>. Network arrangements have come to dominate and control public policy<sup>39</sup>.

In these emerging models, all actors are autonomous but interdependent<sup>40</sup>, making "collaboration and negotiation legitimate components of public administrative routine rather than regrettable departures from expected practice."<sup>41</sup>. Thus, collaborative governance is seen by some as the new paradigm for governance in democratic systems<sup>42</sup>.

The shift from bureaucratic hierarchies to governance networks involves reformulating the concept of democratic accountability and redefining the concept of democracy. According to Moghrabi and Sabharwal,

"Unlike traditional public administration and NPM in which accountability is the strongest point of the model, accountability in the new governance model remains the weakest link. In governance network settings, accountability is diffused unlike accountability in both traditional public administration and NPM which is well defined. In traditional hierarchies, accountability is determined in terms of hierarchical control and external oversight, whereas under NPM, accountability is defined in terms of accountability for results that can be measured against targets' attainment and consumer choice."<sup>43</sup>

Public spheres are " cultural arenas whereby people come together to articulate their views and voice their concerns in order to influence policies "<sup>44</sup>. Habermas claims that between the state and society is the public sphere, a network of communication of information and points of view<sup>45</sup>.

"The traditional Habermasian concept of the national public sphere created by the mass media of newspapers and television is said to have transformed to a multi-layered sphere of online and social networks which are increasingly important in engaging and mobilizing citizenship and in shaping the discourse within which rational discussion takes place"<sup>46</sup>.

Virtual public spheres and communities have thus been formed that connect people anywhere on any topic that concerns them, on a democratic basis. <sup>47</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Mitchell.

<sup>39</sup> Peters and Pierre, "Governance Without Government?"

<sup>40</sup> Moghrabi and Sabharwal, "The Role of the Information Society in Promoting a Better and a More Democratic Governance."

<sup>41</sup> Salamon and Elliott, "The Tools of Government," 15.

<sup>42</sup> Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh, "An Integrative Framework for Collaborative Governance," 3.

<sup>43</sup> Moghrabi and Sabharwal, "The Role of the Information Society in Promoting a Better and a More Democratic Governance."

<sup>44</sup> Moghrabi and Sabharwal.

<sup>45</sup> Habermas, "Between Facts and Norms," 360.

<sup>46</sup> Iosifidis, "The Public Sphere, Social Networks and Public Service Media," 619.

<sup>47</sup> Putnam, Leonardi, and Nonetti, *Making Democracy Work*.

Mobile government (m-Government) refers to the provision of services using mobile communication devices (mobile phones, laptops, etc.) and wireless internet infrastructure. Mobile government services can be defined as "a strategy and its implementation involving the utilization of all kinds of wireless and mobile technology, services, applications and devices for improving benefits to the parties involved in e-government including citizens, businesses and all government units"<sup>48</sup>. m-Government services aim to transform e-Government services directly into the mobile platform, providing access to mobile technologies and applications, enabling smart/flexible working, and providing services to citizens anytime, anywhere. For now, wireless and mobile networks and related infrastructure, as well as software, need to be further developed to meet the requirements, and better security needs to be provided to eliminate vulnerabilities in wireless networks.

Dwight Waldo wrote that democracy is very much more than the political context in which public administration is carried out<sup>49</sup>. The new government " does not constitute a departure from the democratic ethos that traditional Public Administration sought to cherish, but a reassertion of this ethos in a way that speaks to the new reality of our time "<sup>50</sup>.

But in the new digital age, for cyber surveillance<sup>51</sup> and ICT we should pay more attention to ethical perspectives. The government must not only provide the necessary infrastructure and easy and cheap access to these technologies, " but also to invest in the integrity and security of shared data"<sup>52</sup>.

### **Challenges to democracy**

Some authors argue that as long as the Internet remains an open structure, the logic of the network economy will not allow excessive concentrations of power<sup>53</sup>, but there are also specialists who believe that the architecture and coding of the most relevant Internet and browser communities could concentrate enormous power in private hands: the power to control the information

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<sup>48</sup> Kushchu and Kescu, "From E-Government to M-Government," 253–60.

<sup>49</sup> O'Toole, "Treating Networks Seriously," 443.

<sup>50</sup> Moghrabi and Sabharwal, "The Role of the Information Society in Promoting a Better and a More Democratic Governance."

<sup>51</sup> West and Bowman, "The Domestic Use of Drones."

<sup>52</sup> Moghrabi and Sabharwal, "The Role of the Information Society in Promoting a Better and a More Democratic Governance."

<sup>53</sup> Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks*, 240.

highways<sup>54</sup>, with the ability to "profoundly alter the nature" of social interaction by providing users with only information similar to their interests and worldviews. Social networks and search engines can also shape social interactions online because of their ability to profile and predict the attributes and behaviors of their users<sup>55</sup>.

There are at least three sets of rights involved and which are mutually conflicting, in electronic democracy<sup>56</sup>: personality rights (confidentiality and protection of personal data, ...); commercial rights (freedom of trade, ...); and political rights (electoral equity, right to information, ...). The collision between these sets of rights occurs when private companies or even political parties use personal data to influence elections.

This new "networked public sphere" has two additional drawbacks for democracy: first, the fact that its powerful architecture is private property with a possible threat to free speech (through the manipulation of electoral preferences, epistemic bubbles, echo chambers and fake news), and the commercial logic and incentives of the architects weakened and radicalized the democratic discourse<sup>57</sup>. The manipulation of electoral preferences has been documented by Rob Epstein, who studied and measured what he called the Search Engine Manipulation Effect (SEME), the influence that search engine rankings (especially Google<sup>58</sup>) have. Epstein presents evidence from five experiments, showing that "(i) biased search rankings can shift the voting preferences of undecided voters by 20% or more, (ii) the shift can be much higher in some demographic groups, and (iii) such rankings can be masked so that people show no awareness of the manipulation."<sup>59</sup> Social media platforms are also biased, motivated primarily by commercial interests with the help of algorithms<sup>60</sup>. This situation has created what Thi Nguyen calls epistemic bubbles ("an information network from which relevant voices have been excluded by omission" that promotes a partial understanding of political reality and impedes freedom of expression) and echo chambers (social structures "from which other relevant voices were actively discredited")<sup>61</sup>.

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<sup>54</sup> van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity*.

<sup>55</sup> Kosinski, Stillwell, and Graepel, "Private Traits and Attributes Are Predictable from Digital Records of Human Behavior."

<sup>56</sup> Vargas Valdez, "Study on the Role of Social Media and the Internet in Democratic Development."

<sup>57</sup> Vargas Valdez.

<sup>58</sup> Epstein, "Robert Epstein."

<sup>59</sup> Epstein and Robertson, "The Search Engine Manipulation Effect (SEME) and Its Possible Impact on the Outcomes of Elections."

<sup>60</sup> van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity*.

<sup>61</sup> Nguyen, "Why It's as Hard to Escape an Echo Chamber as It Is to Flee a Cult | Aeon Essays."

Also, excessive or inadequate regulation of architectural aspects of the Internet could be counterproductive. To solve this problem, nations must work towards a regulatory and adjudicative approach that differs from the traditional top-down legal paradigm; a model that includes co-responsibility and multiple approaches to regulation and conflict resolution, including at least three strategies:

- Education to strengthen the legal and democratic culture of citizens.
- Self-regulation such as the mandatory adoption of codes of ethics and corporate social responsibility; and,
- Remedial mechanisms provided for in laws, policies and alternative conflict resolution mechanisms.<sup>62</sup>

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In the contemporary landscape of public administration, significant changes have taken place, driven by the need for efficiency, transparency and increased citizen involvement. Three key concepts encapsulate these changes: New Public Management, e-governance, and the ubiquitous role of social media. Each represents a transformative approach to governance, collectively shaping a more responsive and accountable public sector.

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<sup>62</sup> Vargas Valdez, "Study on the Role of Social Media and the Internet in Democratic Development."

This book explores the significant contributions of social media to democratic governance models, the realization of the principles of new public management and e-governance. It examines how social media facilitates transparency, improves accountability and citizen engagement, and encourages collaborative governance, thereby redefining traditional models of public administration.



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