Developing a Conceptual Model on Public Engagement Through the Government Social Media in Malaysia

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Abstract. With social media, the government can interact with the public directly without the aid of media gatekeepers like journalists and producers. Therefore, most governments take initiatives in the e-government on social media to enhance public engagement to cultivate the public's confidence and trust in the government. This paper aims to develop a new model for explaining public engagement and government social media, which could expand the body of knowledge on public engagement on government social media in the communication field from a Malaysian's standpoint. The proposed model comprises e-government adoption, perceived content, and social media usage, with the mediating effect of gratification that could influence public engagement on the government's social media.

Keywords: Public Engagement, E-Government, Perceived Content, Social Media Usage, Gratification, Malaysia

1   Introduction

The evolution of social media shifts the communication landscape to two-way symmet- ric communication [1,2], and mobile social media has grown in popularity [1,3]. The government can interact with the public directly without needing media gatekeepers like journalists and producers [2]. Malaysia launched Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) in 1996, a unique mechanism for the country to join the 'information society' and assist in transitioning to the 'knowledge economy'; e-government is one of the flag- ship applications developed by MSC. [4]. Nowadays, e-government is a universal trend globally [5]while most countries, including Malaysia's e-government, are concentrated on social media [6, 7, 8]. Besides, public engagement is the primary goal of most e- government social media projects. It has created a variety of viewpoints to make the public's and governments' lives easier [9] and gradually cultivate the public's confi- dence and trust in their government [10]. Hence, the Malaysian government, through The Malaysian Administrative Modernisation and Management Planning Unit (MAMPU), as the lead government agency for public sector digitalisation, provides

support for all public sector entities [11] and has put in many efforts to guide and im- prove the e-government to strengthen public engagement on social media. MAMPU has circulated several documents or guidelines to government ministries and agencies regarding the excellent use of official social media, including the Use of Social Media Networks in the Public Sector, the Best Practices of Using Social Network Media in the Public Sector, and the Social Media Ethics in the Public Sector [12, 13].

2   Literature Review

Public engagement refers to the public's involvement in public affairs to develop trust- ing connections beyond basic information sharing [14]. Using social media for govern- ment purposes can increase public engagement [15], whereas continuance usage after adopting technology is a subset of behavioural engagement [16]. Engagement was also measured in two components: (i) individual involvement and (ii) personal meaning. Individual involvement denotes users' perception that their role is essential to meet their needs [17]. Personal meaning is defined as the degree to which users perceive that they are fulfilling personal needs, values, and interests [17]. The public with a stronger mo- tivation to increase their meaning expressed a stronger intention of public engagement [18]. Previous studies showed that public engagement is critical; if the public does not engage with the process and implementation of the government policies, this can result in government efforts failing; thus, enhancing public engagement through e-govern- ment, i.e., social media is an important, task to achieve [19]. Thus, presently, to what extent is public engagement in Malaysia? There is a need to identify current public engagement on government social media in the Malaysian context.

The United Nations Report in 2022 showed that of 193 countries surveyed in the E- government Survey, Malaysia had 53rd listed in the E-government Development Index (EGDI) [11]. If a country desires to remain competitive in the increasingly intercon- nected world of the twenty-first century, it must fully apply e-government [20]. E-gov- ernment is the advent of electronic-based governance through communication, which encourages a two-way exchange of information between the people and the government [21], including all governments' online communications and information exchange ac- tivities [22]. It enabled the public to save time and money by handling tasks through its services and reduced face-to-face public service to increase the productivity and trans- parency of the work process [23], enhance governments' service level and reach partic- ipatory [24]. In addition, E-government is a phenomenon that facilitates the relationship between the public and government to increase collaboration and interaction and addi- tionally to allow the public to interact with the government at any time and from any- where using the internet and social media applications. [8]. The public's interaction with governmental social media can be considered an e-government adoption process [25]. A previous study found that Malaysian would adopt e-government if it suits their work practices, environment, and objectives [26]. Hence, to what extent e-government adop- tion, mainly government social media in Malaysia, still needs to be explored in the literature [27].

Previous literature discussed some dimensions of social media content, i.e., transparency, participation, collaboration, conform, and posted topic [24, 28, 29]. The public's presence on social media is a sign of a robust and transparent communications strategy [2, 30. The higher the transparency in the social media content, the higher the public engagement with the government's social media [28, 31]. In the same context, transpar- ency is the most substantial factor that influences the decision of the public to adopt e- government [32]. In another way, participation is a crucial dimension of governance and one of the pillars of sustainable development. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development highlights the importance of participatory processes [11, 33]. The pri- mary distinction between participation and collaboration is that the latter refers to team- ing to achieve a common goal. On the other hand, participation is about communication and feedback. So, collaboration gives a higher level of participation [24]. Another di- mension is comfort which is the use of social media by governments in communicating with its stakeholders to publish information, provide services, or get feedback from them, attaining the comfort level required from e-services [28]. Lastly, the posted topics may affect the communication or engagement between the government and its stake- holders [28]. However, most government agencies use social media tools to replicate existing content from their websites or online [34]. The public frequently tries to match these social media cues with their perception. When the public accepts or rejects gov- ernment content, they send a clear message to governmental social media accounts about what types of content are permissible [25]. Hence, it needs to identify to what extent the perceived content in government social media in Malaysia, particularly from the above dimensions.

Social media usage can improve the interactivity between a government and the public [35]. Thus, social media continues to be used by the government within the public [11, 36, 37, 38]. It allows the government to disseminate information and enables the public to give feedback to the government [39, 40, 41]. But some studies showed that social media usage does not assure engagement with the public. In many cases, governments need to use social media as they still use it as a tool for one-way communication [42]. As a result, the public is the only information recipient [43]; thus, there is a need to study to what extent of the government's social media usage among the public in Ma- laysia.

Gratifications are the "perceived fulfilment" of needs through media [44]. In the early 80-an, Cutler & Danowski suggested two types of gratifications: content gratifications and process gratifications [45, 46]. Additionally, gratifications have been described as expectations and desires that come from and are limited by social context, interaction, and personal traits [47]. Recently, gratifications have been obtained by experiencing media after adoption [48]. The mediating effect of gratification was critical for improv- ing users' engagement in social media [49]. But fewer studies were found regarding gratification as a mediator for public engagement on social media [49,50,51]. Hence, it needs to study to what extent gratification is as a mediator towards public engagement.

3   The Development of Conceptual Model on Public Engagement

E-government adoption influences public engagement [30, 41, 52, 53]. The primary motive for e-government adoption is that it improves the public's access to the delivery of government services [54]. Besides, gratification influences their positive perceptions of e-government services adoption [55, 56]. Nevertheless, the public must have the skills to use social media tools after adoption and continue to use and engage with them. [54]. It only holds meaning if these have end-user adoption, especially for e-govern- ment services [57]. Once the e-government adoption starts with the interactions in gov- ernmental social media, the public seeks to reduce information uncertainty. It trans- forms it into a purposeful pursuit to foster likelihood by aligning media characteristics with their interaction needs [25]. Conversely, engagement significantly impacts how the public perceives media content [58, 59]. The content governments post on social media can attract the public's attention and engage them if they perceive the topics' interest and significance [60, 61]. Nevertheless, the government's public administration can affect the amount of public participation by posting different content on public en- gagement [41]. Furthermore, if the public is more engaged with social media, the public may view the content as likeable and credible [1]. On the other hand, substantial evi- dence shows that perceived content quality significantly influences user gratification [62]. The content must be designed to create gratification for users to build a more substantial level of engagement and facilitate value outcomes [63]. Thus, social media content influences public engagement [13, 28, 29]. To increase public engagement in social media, the government needs to understand general behaviour on social media by exploring public preferences for the content produced [13, 34, 36].

The government should use efficient social media tools to increase public participation [64]. Public engagement on social media has been recognised as a critical metric for determining the success of corporate public relationships on social media [65]. Thus, social media is used as an interaction mechanism for fostering public engagement [6, 36]; while the continuing usage of social media indicates engagement [66]. Besides, the total likes of social media have been found to relate to engagement since highly engag- ing content may contribute to page growth in terms of followers and likes [7]; the grat- ification of the public is influenced by media technology [67]. The public use social media for different needs to gratify, and social media provides the versatility of infor- mation in the form of pictures, videos, posts, tweets, live streams, stories, messages, etc., to gratify these needs [68]. In addition, using social media for information dissem- ination significantly influences public satisfaction, ultimately affecting public engage- ment [69]. Moreover, the public who feels gratified by the media is more likely to increase their engagement with the media [69, 70]. Cultural factors might strengthen people's needs and guide people's gratifications [71]. The mediating effect of gratifi- cation was vital for refining engagement in social media [49].

This paper is based on the theory of Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT); it posits that users' gratification of public engagement will be fulfilled once the content of the social

media, the desire for e-government adoption, and the uses of social media is met which is leading to the engagement of that media [47, 72]. This theory justifies the possible links between an individual's perception and behavioural engagement intention [72]. In addition, the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) com- prehensively explains e-government adoption in social media, particularly in perfor- mance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions [73, 74]. Social Media Engagement Theory is a new viewpoint on how the user experience drives engagement [17]. This theory is used in forming the model indicating that the more frequently users take part in social media, the more exploration and experience of contents users can get [75]; and the more understanding of the e-government [76]. In addition, gratification refers to user satisfaction regarding their experience, which im- plies that users' gratifications are reinforced through their positive experience with me- dia [46].

Hence, a model that connects to the dimensions utilised in previous research has been proposed below.
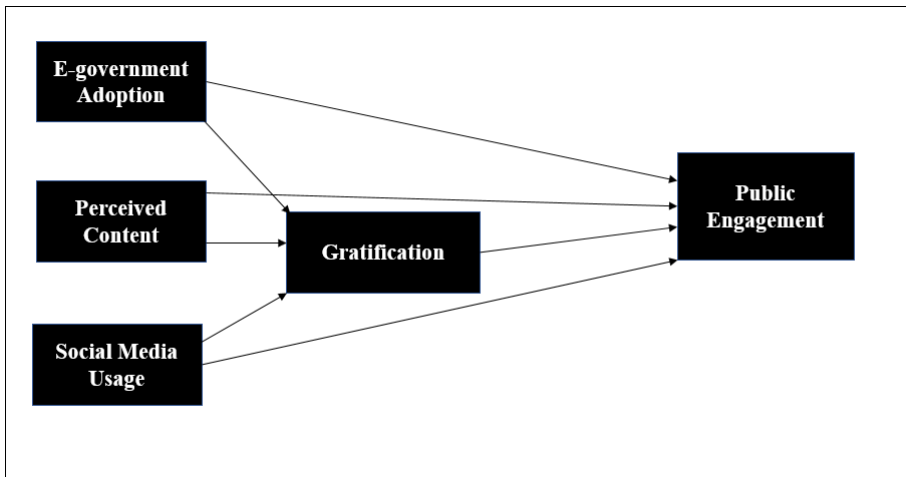

Fig. 1. Proposed Conceptual Model on Public Engagement Through the Government Social Media in Malaysia

4   Conclusion

The proposed model highlights past studies on public engagement and the relationship between e-government adoption, perceived content, uses of social media, and gratifi- cation in government social media. This proposed model aids the government in ex- panding the body of knowledge on e-government by determining the perception among the public that is most likely to increase public engagement and foster dialogic com-

munication with the public. A successful social media communication strategy can en- sure that the correct information or content is conveyed to the public at the appropriate time without relying on public trust, thereby increasing public engagement. On the other hand, this model aims to measure public engagement based on the public's per- ception and can help the government to evaluate the effectiveness of the present gov- ernment's social media. Additionally, it is crucial to forming a sustainable and pros- perous Malaysian government's strategic communication through social media, even- tually establishing a creative and fundamental digital approach to national policies. Ul- timately, it helps to discover issues that can improve public engagement with govern- ment social media. As a result, this paper is critical in upgrading and developing new capabilities of the government's officers to move toward successful e-government on social media.

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