

2020

The Role of Social Media in Supporting U.S. Citizens' Trust in Government

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Walden University

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Terrence M. Cole

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Walden University
2020

Abstract

The Role of Social Media in Supporting U.S. Citizens' Trust in Government

by

Terrence M. Cole

MS, University of Memphis, 2002

BS, University of Tennessee, 1997

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Public Administration

Walden University

November 2020

Abstract

This qualitative study was designed to examine citizen trust in government relations. Data consisted of information from 23 semistructured interviews from 14 consumers/clients and 9 information technology coordinators in Oakland, California participating in a 501 C3 nonprofit agency and 2019 Pew Center surveys. Data were analyzed using content analysis and cross-verified through the process of data source triangulation. Results of each group interviews in comparison to survey results from the Pew Research Center's 2019 Trust and Distrust in America study indicated that participants demonstrated trust in social media platforms, and these platforms informed participants' views on their trust in government. Both the interviews and surveys from the Pew Research Center Trust and Distrust in America data indicated social media platforms may be useful in enhancing trust in government, with considerations made for how communication was structured and relationships building. Overall, the data sources suggested that with more government information disseminating online through the public communicating directly with government officials and politicians, citizen trust in government possibly could be improved. Moreover, direct interactions between the agent and the principal, such as through social media platforms, may increase perceptions of trust and enhance citizen-government relations. This trust is predicated on using principal-agent theory to gauge authenticity of those officials or politicians on the other end of the social media platform. Knowledge from this study may be useful for governments, policymakers, and citizens to enhance trust in citizen-government relations resulting in positive social change.

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Dedication

My praises are given to God up above whose wisdom and understanding I required in my quest to continue seeking my life's endeavors. Deprived of his blessings, kindness and grace, this work would not have been possible.

This study is also dedicated to the memory of my deceased father and my living mother whom I loved so dearly, parents, Charles Williams Cole Sr. and Geraldine Cole whose extraordinary parenting, laid the groundwork for my ambitions to become an agent of social change.

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Thanks to all, my son, Tyler and wife, Thea for putting up with me during this journey. I specifically, point out my wife, Thea and my son, Tyler who saw through my many twists and turns as I fought with several modifications. Your support kept my focus on the goal.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The increase in citizen use of electronic government (e-government) through social media, or the delivery of information from the government through the Internet, is changing the relationships between citizens and government entities (Bonson, Torres, Royo, & Flores, 2012; Franks & Evans, 2015; Hong, 2013; Lee & Kwak, 2011; Mergel, 2013). E-government may provide one method of restoring trust in government because it has the potential to make government more efficient, effective, accountable, and responsive (Matthew, 2011; Moon, 2002; United Nations, 2014; West, 2004). Moreover, interacting with e-government entities through social media may increase U.S. citizens' participation in government (Bonson et al., 2012) and enhance trust in the government because of increased perceptions of transparency (Lee & Kwak, 2011; Mergel, 2013). When the level of trust in government is low, the government cannot effectively provide services because policy goals and processes of implementations may not be fully understood by the people (Myeong, Kwon, & Seo, 2014).

Based on the 2014 Edelman Trust Barometer, governments have experienced the largest decline in trust of any institution in 2013. The most significant drops were in the United States, France, and Hong Kong, where levels of trust fell below 50% (Edelman, 2014). The 2016 Edelman Trust Barometer, based on surveys conducted between October 13 and November 19, 2015, revealed that the general population in Canada continues to exhibit higher levels of citizen trust in government than the United States, at 53% and 39%, respectively. Researchers have theorized that social media can influence citizen trust (Tolbert & Mossberger, 2006; Welch, Hinnant, & Moon, 2005). Specifically,

researchers theorized social media channels to be associated with trust in government indirectly through satisfaction with e-government services (e-satisfaction), while the use of social media in government is theorized to be related to trust in government indirectly through perceived transparency in government (e-transparency; Tolbert & Mossberger, 2006; Welch et al., 2005). Welch et al. (2005) found the relationship between e-government and trust in government to be significant.

However, a gap in the literature exists regarding the examination of trust in government through different social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, blogs, and YouTube) using principal–agent theory (PAT). The aim was to understand whether the examination of U.S. Citizens’ trust in government through different social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, blogs, and YouTube) using PAT play a role in supporting government and citizen relations. Chapter 1 includes an introduction to the study, background on this area of study, a statement of the problem, the purpose statement, and the theoretical foundation underlying the study. Chapter 1 also contains the methodology, the nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations. Chapter 1 concludes with a discussion of the significance of the study and a summary.

Background of the Study

Social media includes a variety of electronic services that enable increased efficiency and communication between government personnel and its citizens. In 2016, e-government involved e-services, or the use of the Internet to deliver information, services, and programs; e-democracy, or citizen participation, via electronic

communications (e.g., social media); e-commerce, or payment for services electronically; and e-management, or the use of electronic means to increase recordkeeping and other government management processes (Center for Technology in Government, 2016). There has been an increasing demand to implement e-government in the United States (Bonson et al., 2012). For example, the passage of the E-Government Act of 2002 provided for guidance and leadership within the government. Furthermore, in 2009, President Obama spearheaded the introduction of Data.gov, an online repository designated to increase government transparency (Shadbolt et al., 2012) and issued the Open Government Directive, designed to increase information for citizens (Lee & Kwak, 2011). Because of this initiative, the United States has been ranked seventh among leaders in the use of e-government, and 82.8% of U.S. citizens have used e-government in some way (United Nations, 2014).

E-government may offer several advantages for the U.S. government. Included in the benefits cited in the E-Government Act of 2002 were increased citizen participation; improved collaboration between agencies; and better information and transparency for policymakers, citizens, and agencies. Researchers have also suggested that e-government may influence trust between the citizens and the government (Bonson et al., 2012; Holzer, Melitski, Rho, & Schwester, 2004; Moon, 2002; Morgeson, VanAmburg, & Mithas, 2011; Tolbert & Mossberger, 2006). For example, e-government may increase transparency and improve the quality of interactions between citizens and government (Holzer et al., 2004). West (2004) noted that e-government can transform service delivery and citizen attitudes toward the government. Tolbert and Mossberger (2006), however,

found mixed results. Tolbert and Mossberger found the use of information and transaction services on government websites is associated with perceptions of the effectiveness of the services at the federal level, of their accessibility at the federal and local levels, and of their responsiveness at all levels of government. However, accessibility and responsiveness were associated with trust in government only at the local level (Tolbert & Mossberger, 2006). Morgeson et al. (2011) concluded that no relationship existed between the use of information and transaction services on government websites and overall trust in government, while Sharoni (2012) and Kim and Lee (2012) reported a significant link between online engagement with government and trust in government.

The potential for improved trust because of using social media has been a concern during the past decade. In response to various government-related events involving the Internet, such as the WikiLeaks scandal and the Snowden trial, citizens have demanded increased transparency, improved availability, and greater clarity of information about government operations (Shadbolt et al., 2012; United Nations, 2014). Some researchers have discussed whether online interactions between citizens and government agencies may increase trust through social media platforms. Holzer et al. (2004) noted that increased citizen participation through the use of digital media was one avenue that may increase citizen trust in the government. Franks and Evans (2015), Hong (2013), and Tolbert and Mossberger (2006) also explored social media and the effect of e-government on citizens' trust and confidence in the U.S. government. Conversely, other researchers have demonstrated that e-government use decreased citizen trust (Grimmelikhuijsen,

Porumbescu, Hong, & Im, 2013). Still other researchers reported that social media and e-government use influenced citizen trust indirectly through mitigating factors, such as increased transparency (Lee & Kwak, 2011; Mergel, 2013).

Despite the large amount of research on trust, e-government, and transparency, I did not discover any researchers who used principal–agent theory (PAT) to understand citizens’ trust in government through social media platforms. Neither, did I find information on how that relationship can impact citizen’s perceptions of government transparency using social media platforms. The principal–agent theory (Stiglitz, 1993) allows researchers to examine trust within asymmetric relationships wherein an agent acts on behalf, and in the interests of, a principal. Social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, and YouTube) can enhance perceptions of government transparency and communication between citizens and the government, which represents citizens and ostensibly acts in citizens’ interests. However, agents typically have more power or knowledge than the principals on whose behalf they are acting (Barber, 1983). Whether citizens (principals) perceive that the government (agent) is acting in citizens’ interests through social media and via the lens of principal–agent theory and trust is unknown.

Problem Statement

Government agencies have increasingly used social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, blogs, and Twitter) to provide complementary and increased communication and participation with citizens (Bonson et al., 2012; Linders, 2012; Purser, 2012; Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013). Increased interaction and communication between government and the public through social media can lead to enhanced public

perceptions of trust in the government (Bonson et al., 2012; Franks & Evans, 2015; Hong, 2013; Lee & Kwak, 2011; Mergel, 2013). An issue occurs when the level of trust in government is low, when government cannot effectively provide services, and when the policy goals and the processes of implementation are not fully understood by the people (Myeong et al., 2014). Several researchers have investigated the relationship between e-government and citizen trust in government (e.g., Holzer et al., 2004; Moon, 2002; Smith, 2011; West, 2004). The relationship was significant in some studies (Sharoni, 2012; Welch et al., 2005) but not in others (Morgeson et al. 2011; West, 2004). Most of these studies pertained to information and transaction services on static government websites. What researchers had not examined was the relationship between e-government and citizen trust in government, as influenced by U.S. citizens' use of social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, blogs). Given the proliferation of social media at all levels of government (Bertot, Jaeger, & Grimes, 2010; Bonson et al., 2012; Mergel & Bretschneider, 2013; Purser, 2012; Snead, 2013), more empirical research on this topic is warranted.

Citizen trust in the government is a core concern in public administration and public sector leaders should be concerned with its decline during the last several decades (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2009). Social science scholars have documented the diverse sources of trust in government (Cook & Gronke, 2005). For example, researchers have identified that an individual's sociopsychological characteristics (Gabriel, 1995), social experiences and socialization (Coleman, 1990; Newton & Norris, 2000; Thomas, 1998), perceptions of government performance (Kampen, Van de Walle, & Bouckaert, 2006;

Mizrahi, VigodaGadot, & Van Ryzin, 2010; Newton & Norris, 2000; Thomas, 1998; Yang & Holzer, 2006), and perceptions of government transparency (Curtin & Meijer, 2006; Grimmelikhuijsen, 2009, 2011) are all closely related to trust in government.

E-government refers to the use of the Internet and other digital media, such as Twitter, Facebook, a blog or YouTube, to deliver government information and services to citizens (United Nations, 2012; West, 2004). This form of government can be an influential factor in the restoration of trust in government because it has the potential to improve government performance (e.g., productivity gains, improved decision processes; Andersen et al., 2010) and transparency (Welch, Hinnant, & Moon, 2005).

The growth of social media applications in the government context has an effect not only on government officials who use social media, but also on the increasingly information-hungry general public. The public expects local, state, and even the federal government to use these technologies to distribute information more effectively and to incorporate a forum for commenting (Andersen et al., 2010).

Scholars have suggested that leaders can engender trust in their constituents or clients by taking positive actions to improve society; expressing their values through honest, ethical engagement; enlisting employees to engage with the constituents or clients on behalf of the organization; and engaging with stakeholders on a topic that interests or concerns them (Edelman, 2016). Previous researchers have theorized that social media can influence citizen trust (Tolbert & Mossberger, 2006; Welch et al., 2005). Tolbert and Mossberger (2006) and Welch et al. (2005) theorized digital services are associated with trust in government indirectly through satisfaction with e-government services (e-

satisfaction). Researchers also theorized the use of social media in government is related to trust in government indirectly through perceived transparency in government (e-transparency; Tolbert & Mossberger, 2006; Welch et al., 2005).

The principal–agent theory approach was missing from the literature. This study represents an opportunity to evaluate potential relationships that may exist between the use of social media and the level of citizens’ trust in government. This study was intended to evaluate how government as the agent is perceived by citizens to be acting in, and being accountable to, citizens’ interests. Using a principal–agent theory approach, I identified and described potential connections between level of trust in government and citizens’ use of social media platforms. Moreover, I examined how that connection impacts citizens’ perceptions of government transparency using social media platforms. Principal–agent theory served as the theoretical backdrop to assess the incidence of information asymmetry on citizen propensity to trust government. The new knowledge gained from this study will serve scholars and practitioners alike. The result may help these individuals to better understand the relationships between citizens’ trust and government and social media use, which are potentially important contributions to public administration and policy discipline, as well as the literature that houses works related to the study of social media and e-government.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore what role does social media plays in supporting U.S. citizens’ trust in government. Secondly, in this research asymmetric with U.S. citizens’ and government officials and/or politicians was used for

information assimilation through the lens of the PAT to conduct the study. The argument for the study was that providing information about whether and how U.S. citizens interact with social media may influence the link between implementation levels of citizen trust in government including the impact social media platforms has on citizen's perceptions of government. The findings of this study may improve the understanding of whether and how U.S. citizens' can use social media platforms to increase trust in citizen-government relations.

Research Question

The central research question guiding this study was *What role does social media play in supporting U.S. citizens' trust in government?*

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study consisted of Barber's (1983) principal-agent theory. Barber theorized that in situations where one party (the agent) is responsible for acting on the behalf of another party (the principal), such as in economics or politics, dynamics must be considered for both parties. For example, the free flow of information between the principal and agent is essential, because the principal does not have the ability to act without the input of the agent (Kurian, 2012). Principal-agent theory derived from the economic concept of the principal-agent model. According to Pérez-Castrillo and Macho-Stadler (2009), principal-agent models provide a foundation for understanding contracts under asymmetric relationships. As an economic theory, principal-agent theory allows for examination of the cost incurred by the principal ostensibly acting in the interest of the agent in relation to the cost-value perceived by the

agent (Pérez-Castrillo & Macho-Stadler, 2009). For example, if asymmetry of information exists, in which a citizen does not have adequate information about the government, then it may reduce the citizen's perceptions of trust in, and accessibility to, the government. On the other hand, direct interactions between the agent and the principal, such as through social media platforms, may increase perceptions of trust and enhance citizen-government relations.

This study was designed to use the principal-agent theory approach because it encapsulates a tradition of rational choice modeling, in which some actor(s) the principal(s) uses whatever actions are available, to provide incentives for some other actor(s) the agent(s) to make decisions that the principal desires. The principal-agent theory approach was appropriate for this study because it pertains to the responsiveness of the agent's decisions to the principal's goals, and how this responsiveness is mediated by actions available to each actor as well as institutional settings in which they interact. This framework was an organic means to study accountability in political institutions. According to Pérez-Castrillo and Macho-Stadler (2018), principal-agent models provide a foundation for understanding contracts under an asymmetric relationship.

Through this study, I tested a specific element found in the foundation of the principal-agent model: in a asymmetric relationship. In relation to PAT, if an asymmetrical informational relationship exists, in which a citizen does not have adequate information about the government, then it may reduce citizen perceptions of trust in the government. On the other hand, direct interactions between the agent and the principal,

such as through social media platforms, may increase perceptions of trust and enhance citizen-government relations.

Access to and participation in government can help establish mutual trust between citizens and government, which may lead to increased trust on a more individual level (Kim & Lee, 2012). According to this perspective, overall public support for the government can be improved by bridging the gap between public expectation and public perception of governmental functions, which may include transparency, better access to online information, and an interactive platform that helps citizens to understand and respond to changes in economic policy, political scandals, policy failures, and in social climate and culture (Welch et al., 2005).

Nature of the Study

For this study, I followed a qualitative, case study approach to explore what role social media plays in supporting citizen trust in government.

A qualitative methodology was appropriate for this study because it facilitated an examination of the construct of interest in its natural context (Tracy, 2013). I also considered a quantitative approach; however, examination of numerical data would not offer the breadth and depth of information necessary to fully explore the perceptions of citizen trust through social media that supports the government. Because I intended to explore constructs that are not fully known, and because a paucity of information exists related to the influence of social media on citizens' trust in government relations, a qualitative approach is best suited for the study (see Yin, 2014). This study was designed to implement a case study approach to improve understanding of how and why social

media plays a role in supporting citizen trust in government. I gathered detailed information from a limited number of cases because the goal is to obtain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, not generalizability of results (see Johnson & Christensen, 2014). Data was collected through semistructured interviews and through detailed, in-depth data collection from multiple sources of information (e.g., interviews, social networking material, documents, and reports).

Definitions

E-government: “E-government is the use of information technology to support government operations, engage citizens, and provide government services” (Center for Technology in Government, 2016). E-government platforms included in the Pew Research Center dataset were MySpace, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, blogs, email, and websites.

Social media or social networks: Social media, or social networks, are platforms for exchanging personal and professional information, characterized by active participation through the use of an account or profile linked to an individual or other entity (Bonson et al., 2012). Examples of the most used social networks in government are Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter (Mainka, Hartmann, Stock, & Peters, 2014).

Trust: One widely held definition by Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, and Camerer (1998) is “a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another” (pp. 393-404).

Assumptions

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2001), assumptions are what the researcher takes for granted to conduct the study. Identifying such assumptions can aid in understanding of the study. I made several assumptions. First, I assumed that the participants of this study were as honest as possible when answering the interview questions. Accordingly, I crafted interview protocol carefully and encourage participants to ask questions or ask for clarification during the interview. This was done so that I could safely assume the participants understand the questions they are being asked.

Finally, this study was designed to include participants who have a variety of diverse experiences with respect to the use of e-government services, which have been implemented in various stages. As Mainka et al. (2014) stated, local e-government in the United States has been implemented to varying degrees, depending on the location in which a person lives. Therefore, this study was intended to include the data from individuals with varying experiences with social media platforms to guarantee that nonconformities and modifications are captured to expand the study.

Scope and Delimitations

Delimitations narrow the scope of a study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001; Nenty, 2010). In this study, I interviewed adult social media users in the United States. Participants was asked to respond to the interview questions designed to explore their own perceptions about whether or how their previous interactions with government agencies through social media platforms have increased or decreased their trust and support of these agencies. Because the participants were from the same narrow geographical region,

results was not transferable to other locations. This was especially true of those results specific to interactions with a local government. This study was designed to interview 23 participants. Participation in the interviews was voluntary.

Limitations

Any qualitative study research design has certain integral weaknesses that could require moderations. This weakness could be discussed within one limitation context: (a) methodological limitations. Methodological limitations involved the relationship between concept of analyses and the sample size. For instance, the 23 participants interviewed may not have consistently and/or proportionally represented the targeted groups. This was due in part to the changeability of internet and social media users. By changeability, I mean, there were few participants in this study who claimed mixed feelings due trusting internet and social media deciphering what is true within this study. Accordingly, few participants in this study defined their concerns through similar connections when interviewed utilizing social media such as, lack of trust, authenticity truth telling, must do own research, depends on who is posting, screening information, and transparency. These limitations were anticipated and were overcome by proper vetting and the norms set for inclusion. However, since the quality of the findings was dependent on the quality of data collected, a purposive sampling strategy was used in selecting participants very carefully and deliberately who fit the criteria for interviewing.

Other limitations were that study participants may not have been honest and truthful during interviews, and participants may not have been willing or able to

communicate effectively to share their perceptions or lived experiences regarding the phenomenon. Additionally, trustworthiness of information can pose a limitation for qualitative studies (Patton, 2002) (citation). Additionally, limitations are an essential nature of qualitative research, as mentioned by those who analyzed qualitative studies (see Billups, 2012). Accordingly, there were prejudice and individual interpretations in the planning, management, execution, and evaluation of the study (Yin, 2009). The issue of subjectivity was fundamental given the fact that, as a social and behavioral worker in the field. Consequently, these prejudices may have predisposed the direction of the study and its conclusion. However, these prejudices and/or biases were alleviated by disseminating between observations and reality. In this regard, I limited active participation on internet and social media forums pertaining e-government. This was done to reinforce the accuracy of the study and its findings. (see Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002).

Data collected from these participants through informal interviews and surveys allowed conclusions to be made with assurance, while also providing recompense for the size limitation. This supports the dispute that the sampling strategy used for selecting study participants and settings for the study enhance the understanding of the purpose, problem, and research question (see Creswell, 2007). As such, careful vetting and selecting the participants hopefully certified quality of the data collected. Data collection occurred through semistructured interviews and through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, social

networking material, documents, and reports) to help triangulate results and enhance credibility.

Credibility of a study can be enhanced by reducing researcher bias (Billups, 2012). I used audio record the interviews to capture participants' responses as communicated by participants. In addition, recording allowed participants an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of the data collected. This study was designed to demonstrate these actions throughout all collaboration with research participants.

Not only are acknowledgment of these limitations transparent, but as Patton (2002) stated, it would provide an opportunity for further research. Additionally, it has academic integrity accommodations because it will also provide an opportunity to demonstrate to the audience that limitations were anticipated in advance and steps were taken to reduce their impact on the integrity of the study.

Significance of the Study

The study was significant because it provided information regarding the role social media play in supporting citizen trust in government, with a focus on U.S. citizens' social media platforms use. This study was intended to implement asymmetric information assimilation through the lens of the PAT. Tolbert and Mossberger (2006) noted concern among scholars that many U.S. citizens have lost faith in the government. Such an observation demonstrates the relevance of discovering what factors leading to decreases in the faith people have in their governments. This observation also merits the need for investigation of any actions that restored some measure of trust. Improved support in communication between the public and government through online

applications and services enables direct participation in government and decision making on the part of citizens, which may improve accessibility (Welch et al., 2005). An increase in the perceived level of support through social media platforms of government services may lead to improved trust among citizens. Kim and Lee (2012) found that to ensure citizen transparency in government, citizens should be collaborative partners in building democratic and effective governance. Furthermore, Kim and Lee reported a positive correlation between citizen use of e-government programs and their perceived accessibility of the government. However, few researchers have examined government's use of social media platforms in conjunction with supporting the role social media play in trust between citizen and government relations.

Significance for Social Change

The findings of this study served to improve understanding of whether and how government can employ social media platforms to address citizens' trust by providing online opportunities to communicate directly to citizens from government agencies and officials. These interactions also increased citizen support of the government (Hong, 2013; Porumbescu, 2015), thereby improving citizens' overall relationship with government officials and creating a feeling among citizens that government officials are acting as positive agents on their behalf. By better understanding the role social media play in supporting citizen trust in government relations, governments can use digital platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, blogs, and YouTube) to increase citizen's trust in government.

Summary and Transition

Social media platforms improved transparency and opportunities for citizen participation leading to increased citizen support of the government (Thomas, 1998). . However, I examined trust in government through different social media platforms using principal–agent theory and trust. In Chapter 2, I provide a detailed literature review concerning the role social media play in supporting trust between citizen-government relations. Chapter 3 includes a detailed discussion of the design and methodology of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Social media may enable more satisfying interactions between citizens and government (Holzer et al., 2004; Kim & Lee, 2012; Tolbert & Mossberger, 2006). E-government can make the government efficient, effective, accountable, and responsive (Matthew, 2011; Moon, 2002; United Nations, 2014; West, 2004) and may improve citizen trust in government (Bonson et al., 2012; Lee & Kwak, 2011; Mergel, 2013; Song & Lee, 2016). Although quantitative studies exist with respect to e-government and social media usage among citizens, it is not known whether interacting with government agencies through social media increases citizen perceptions of trust in government. When the level of trust in government is low, government cannot effectively provide services because the public misunderstands policy goals and the implementation (Myeong et al., 2014).

I addressed this gap in this research intentionally regarding the examination of trust in government through different social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, blogs, and YouTube) using principal–agent theory. Chapter 2 is a review of the current literature regarding these topics and served to demonstrate the need to conduct the study. Topics included are an overview of the theoretical foundation and relevant literature, a discussion of social media use by the U.S. government, and an in-depth analysis of the current state of the literature regarding social media usage and citizen trust. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the gap in the literature and the need for the study.

Literature Search Strategy

To ensure that I conducted a thorough review of the literature, I reviewed several

resources using an exhaustive list of relevant search terms. These resources were available via Walden University databases. Databases included Web of Science, Emerald Insight, JSTOR, Elsevier, and Google Scholar. This study queried these databases using the following search terms: *social media platforms*, *social media use in the United States*, *principal-agent theory*, *citizen trust and social media*,; *social media use and trust in U.S. government*, and, *social media use and influenced support in U.S. government*.

From this initial search, this study was designed to identify several key resources regarding this topic and investigated these avenues further for additional research related to the topic. Journals publishing key academic research related to these topics included: *Government Information Quarterly*, *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, *Public Administration Review*, and *Public Management Review*. I searched the archives of these journals for special issues related to this topic. I also identified seminal authors on this topic. Although research relating to social media and trust was relatively sparse, seminal authors included Bonson et al., Grimmelikhuijsen et al., and Lee, Mainka, and Porumbescu. Consequently, the I searched for additional related studies published by these five authors.

Altogether, the search yielded a total of 53 articles. These articles include 40 peer-reviewed, academic articles, a study conference paper, and two publications from government reports, used as sources for background on social media. The resources included in the literature review are primarily peer reviewed (50; 93%) and have been published within the last 5 years (34; 79%).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was guided by concept on principal–agent theory (Barber, 1983). According to Barber (1983), to understand economic and political actions and perceptions, it is essential to understand the relationship between a principal, or governed party, and the agent, or governing party. Figure 1 provides clarification of the information and power dynamic between the government and citizen’s trust, according to principal–agent theory.

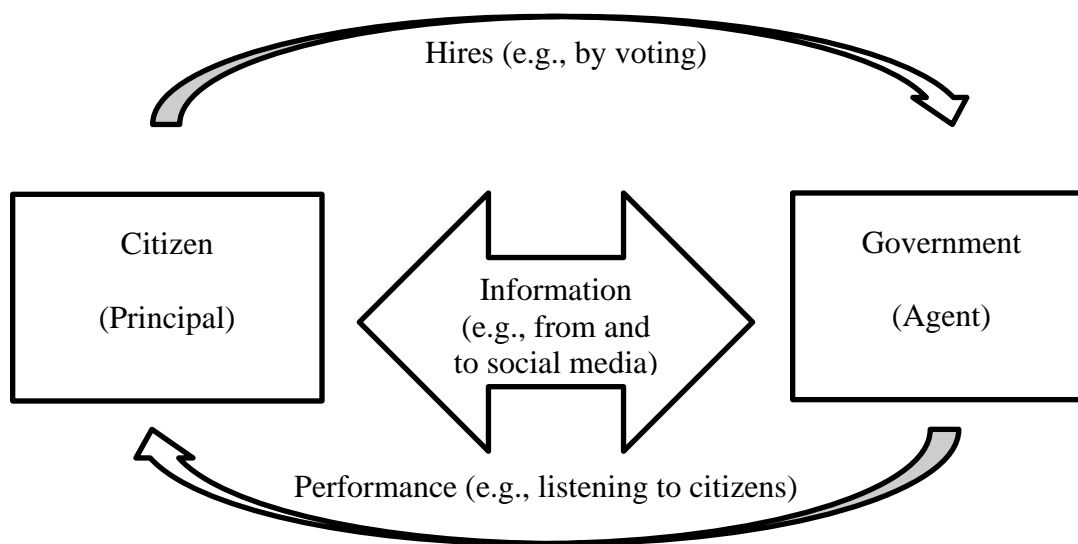


Figure 1. Principal–agent theory. Adapted from Twinomurinzi and Ghartey-Tagoe (2011).

Barber 1983 posited that situations where one party (the agent) is responsible for acting on the behalf of another party (the principal), such as in economics or politics, involve dynamics that must be considered for both parties. For example, the free flow of

information between the principal and agent is essential for the principal does not have the ability to act without the input of the agent (Pérez-Castrillo & Macho-Stadler, 2018). Principal–agent theory derived from the economic concept of the principal–agent model. According to Pérez-Castrillo and Macho-Stadler (2018), principal–agent models provide a foundation for understanding contracts under asymmetric relationships. As an economic theory, PAT allows for examination of the cost incurred by the principal ostensibly acting in the interest of the agent in relation to the cost-value perceived by the agent (Pérez-Castrillo & Macho-Stadler, 2018). In relation to PAT and my study, if an asymmetrical informational relationship exists, in which a citizen does not have adequate information about the government, then it may reduce citizen perceptions of trust in the government. On the other hand, direct interactions between the agent and the principal, such as social media platforms allowed, may increase perceptions of trust, and enhance citizen-government relations.

Broadbent, Dietrich, and Laughlin (1996) evaluated the ethical implications of introducing PAT into the study of the public sector in the United Kingdom. Some general problems with applying PAT to the public sector included problems of hidden action and hidden information in government relationships, and the presence of two-way relationships rather than the typical unidirectional principal–agent relationship (Broadbent et al., 1996). The authors posited that applying PAT in the study of a democratic system led to increased government domination and control through its descriptive analysis of relationships, which in turn led to prescriptive choices being made for citizens. Thus, Broadbent et al. noted the importance of reducing ignorance on the

part of the principal through transparency and information transfer on the part of the agent, which may be achievable through social media.

Related to my study, the relationship between the citizen (principal) and the government (agent) is not usually reciprocal (see Linders, 2012). In other words, citizens' knowledge about government is limited, and therefore creates the opportunity for a lack of trust and support. However, social media has the potential to decrease information asymmetry, thereby increasing the level of trust between principal and agent. Thus, as Linders (2012) discussed, e-government, especially via social media, can change citizens from being customers of government to being partners of government. PAT allows for examining the role of social media in citizens' trust that government is acting in their interests. The principal–agent problem (also known as agency dilemma or theory of agency) occurs when one person or entity, the agent, can make decisions on behalf of, or that effect, another person or entity, the principal (Barber, 1983). This dilemma exists because sometimes agents act in their own best interests rather than those of principals (Kurian, 2011). According to Bugeja (2011), this type of obligations which impose on a person duty of care and to act in the other persons' best interest. examine trust through the principal–agent using information asymmetrically.

The proliferation of theories specific to social media, as highlighted by Bannister and Connolly (2011), motivated me to develop the theoretical model, which was used in this present study (see Figure 1). This theoretical model consists of several propositions drawn from the literature. First, through Internet programs, and especially social media programs, individuals can access and participate in government in a more direct way than

they are otherwise capable of doing. One way citizens could gain access to information was by using social media services (i.e., information transaction services on government websites). Social media use by citizens may increase government interaction with citizens and increase feelings of agency among citizens (Bonson et al., 2012).

Previous researchers have theorized that e-government and social media can influence citizen trust (Tolbert & Mossberger, 2006; Welch et al., 2005). These services have been shown to influence the level of trust in government indirectly through satisfaction with the e-government services (e-satisfaction). Likewise, researchers believe the use of social media by the government is related to indirect trust in the government through perceived transparency of the government (e-transparency; Tolbert & Mossberger, 2006; Welch et al., 2005). Welch et al. (2005) reported a significant relationship between e-government, social media, and trust in government. However, researchers have not used PAT to understand the role of social media in developing citizens' perceptions of trust and perceptions that government is acting in their interest. This theoretical foundation is appropriate for the interdisciplinary nature of e-government and social media research (Bannister & Connolly, 2011). Thus, the theoretical foundation guided the design of my study.

Social Media Platforms

Because social media platforms have revolutionized communication and participation in the government, it may be essential for government agencies, policymakers, and citizens to collect data and understand the influence of social media on political processes (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013). One promising avenue is the

integration of social media (Bonson et al., 2012; Lee & Kwak, 2011; Linders, 2012; Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013). Based on a systematic review of the scholarly literature, Linders (2012) suggested that increased citizen participation through social media included citizen sourcing (citizen to government information sharing), government as a platform (government to citizen information sharing), and do-it-yourself government (citizen to citizen information sharing). These initiatives can increase feelings of ownership and agency within the citizen-government relationship through information provision, transparency, and e-participation (Kim & Lee, 2012; Lee & Kwak, 2011; Linders, 2012).

To ensure social media is effective, it may not be enough that a government merely has an online presence. Mainka et al. (2014) presented an empirical investigation of 31 cities with enhanced social media infrastructures, specifically related to government use of social media services, their popularity, and their intensity of usage. These cities made various uses of social media, including Facebook, Twitter, and blog hosting sites (e.g., Tumblr). The three most frequently used services for social media include (a) Twitter, (b) YouTube, and (c) Facebook. These well-developed cities linked content between their sites, including linking to their main webpages to ensure authenticity, frequent posts, and interrelations between their various social media accounts. These considerations led to increased engagement among users (Mainka et al., 2014). Of the 10 most active cities in the world in terms of social media use, the only U.S. city was New York City, which suggests that the United States may be lagging behind the rest of the world in engaging citizens through social media (Mainka et al., 2014).

In a follow up study, Mainka et al. (2014) further analyzed the social media usage of 31 cities from November 2012 to January 2013. Specifically, Mainka et al. focused on how many platforms governments should deploy, how they should interconnect the social media channels with each other and with the Web, how often they should add posts, and whether stakeholders were being reached via social media. In terms of social media usage, findings revealed that governments most frequently use Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. Almost all the governments surveyed used YouTube, but there were far fewer subscriptions and less activity on this platform than on others (Mainka et al.'s 2014). This result may be because it is possible to view their YouTube videos without subscribing to the government's channel. It is difficult to compare services because of diverse user behaviors and differences in the time spans of service availability. User behaviors are assumed to be influenced by regional and cultural differences, visibility of the accounts, and the style of the content in the material posted by various governments (Tolbert et. al. 2006).

Mainka et al.'s (2014) research supported four recommendations for all city-level governments. First, a government should deploy a microblogging platform, like Twitter or Facebook, the video-sharing platform YouTube, and an image-sharing service like Instagram or Flickr. Second, governments must ensure their Web presence and social media channels are interconnected. Third, it is best practice for a government to avoid using too few or too many social media activities. Results showed the most effective amount to be four to five microblog posts daily, one to two Facebook posts with images daily, 40 new images monthly on the image-sharing service, and five videos daily on

YouTube. Finally, governments should analyze the users' behaviors. Through these behaviors, Mainka et al. argued that governments would be effective in establishing an online presence and engaging citizens.

However, according to some authors, governments in general underutilize social media (see Bonson et al., 2012; Mergel, 2013). Bonson et al. (2012) analyzed the websites of the five largest cities of 15 European Union countries to measure the level of use and rationale for the use of social media tools by local governments. During February and March of 2010, Bonson et al. took a two-pronged approach to their research. First, the official website of each local government was rated in terms of the presence of eight variables: (a) podcasts from management, (b) RSS or Atom, (c) vodcast from management, (d) real-time webcasts of municipal events (participative videos), (e) widgets, (f) blogs, (g) links to YouTube videos, and (h) social networks for users. Second, the researchers examined the presence and activity of the local governments on the social platforms of Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Google blogs. Data obtained from the official website was combined with activity on social media to create a Sophistication Index. Bonson et al. performed regression analysis on these data regarding public administration style, as well as analyzed six variables related to the development of the information society on the Sophistication Index. Add summary and synthesis to connect back to your study.

Bonson et al. (2012) revealed that several factors influenced social media use by the government. Neither city population, citizen demand, nor public administration style were significant in predicting the use of social media tools and other Web 2.0

applications by local governments in the European Union. The significant factor was the city's prior experience with e-government tools. Findings also revealed that although e-government is a popular tool, social media was underutilized in the sample. However, citizens did use social media to discuss civic matters, which suggested that local officials should commit to increasing their official presence to access local citizen opinions and feelings.

In a cross-cultural, descriptive study, G. Khan et al. (2014) used website use data and social network analysis to compare Twitter strategies used by the Korean central government and the U.S. federal government. G. Khan et al. collected data between February 2011 and August 2011 from 32 agencies in the United States and 40 agencies in Korea. Significant findings were that the Korean ministries utilize a dense network of reciprocal connections (they follow the accounts of their followers), engage in collective cooperation, and retweet to reinforce collective agendas rather than specifically departmental information. Conversely, U.S. departments were much more individualistic and tended to only retweet messages specific to departmental functions. Where 80.98% of Korean government relationships were reciprocal, only 3.96% of U.S. government relationships were reciprocal. In addition, the review of hyperlinks on government websites shows that Korean ministries prefer to cite government sources while U.S. departments preferred private information sources (G. Khan et al., 2014). These differences in social media use may help to explain the differences in social media perspectives and their influence on citizen trust, and reveal the necessity of conducting studies, such as this present study, to investigate situations specific to the United States.

Social Media Use in the United States

According to information published by the United Nations (2014), the United States has a well-developed e-government system. The United States ranked seventh globally among leaders of e-government, and 82.8% of U.S. citizens utilized some form of e-government (United Nations, 2014). Several different functions of e-government are currently used in the United States: (a) e-services, or the use of the Internet to deliver information, services, and programs; (b) e-democracy, or citizen participation via electronic communications (e.g., social media); (c) e-commerce, or payment for services electronically; and (d) e-management, or the use of electronic means to increase recordkeeping and other government management processes (Center for Technology in Government, 2016).

Several legislative and political actions have led to the development of the current U.S. policies on e-government use (Bonson et al., 2012). For example, the passage of the E-Government Act of 2002 provided for guidance and leadership within the government regarding such procedures. According to the E-Government Act of 2002, benefits of e-government include (a) increased citizen participation; (b) collaboration between agencies; and (c) better information and transparency for policymakers, citizens, and agencies. In 2009, President Obama also introduced Data.gov, an online repository of government information intended to increase government transparency (Shadbolt et al., 2012), and issued the Open Government Directive (Lee & Kwak, 2011). Both programs have contributed to increased transparency and citizen interaction with government processes (Bonson et al., 2012; Shadbolt et al., 2012). These increased interactions may

also have had a positive influence on the trust between citizens and the government (Shadbolt et al., 2012).

However, based on analysis of five U.S. healthcare administration case studies, Lee and Kwak (2011) postulated that many U.S. government initiatives launched to emphasize transparency, participation, and collaboration in accordance with President Obama's 2009 Open Government Directive were not delivering anticipated results. The authors suggested this failure was because of organizational, financial, and technological challenges. To address this lack of results, Lee and Kwak proposed a model of government levels designed to explain the development of programs and citizen e-participation. Stages of the model begin with initial conditions, and progress to data transparency in Level 2. Subsequently, Lee and Kwak posited that these initiatives would lead to open participation and collaboration, and finally end with ubiquitous engagement. The end goal in this model is that the government would integrate its data, methods, social media tools, and government services across agencies to make navigation and engagement by the public accessible and ubiquitous. Through these measures, Lee and Kwak noted that the government could increase citizen participation and trust, particularly by using social media. A limitation of the study was that, unlike this present study, the researchers did not incorporate the perspective of the public, and the data were based strictly on an agency perspective.

Mergel (2013) also conducted a study from the agency perspective. Mergel used qualitative interviews with the social media directors of 15 innovative departments in the executive branch of the U.S. federal government and five additional agencies to analyze

the factors that influenced their decision to adopt various social media applications. Mergel conducted hour-long semistructured interviews, resulting in 12 final themes. Findings included that the decision to adopt social media was influenced by (a) information received about best practices from an informal network of their peers, (b) observation of perceived best practices in both the public and private sector, (c) observations of citizens' market-driven use of social media, and (d) formal guidelines received from their top management or other existing hierarchy. However, none of the interviewees reported receiving any formal guidance prior to the study. This lack of guidance seems to be a missed opportunity, and may be part of what results in the lack of engagement in social media within the United States (Hong, 2013; Mergel, 2013).

The positive influence of social media may be diminished in the United States because of inefficient use of social media platforms (Franks & Evans, 2015; Kavanaugh et al., 2013). Kavanaugh et al. (2013) collected data in 2010 in the Washington, D.C. area to better understanding the use and influence of social media by the government in crisis situations. Kavanaugh et al. collected social media posts and comments for analysis from Facebook pages, Twitter feeds, YouTube videos, and searches of local web pages of civic organizations, including government organizations. In addition, three separate 2-hour focus group sessions involved electronic brainstorming and an online questionnaire about social media use and community involvement to collect anonymous data from 24 county officials. Relevant findings were that local governments often use social media, but without an accurate perception of its costs and benefits, and without an understanding of their audience. Someone other than organization leaders often managed social media, and

there was little understanding of who should monitor communications, how and when responses should be made, and what effect the social media postings had on the public (Kavanaugh et al., 2013).

The lack of management (Kavanaugh et al., 2013), lack of formal guidance from the government regarding social media (Mergel, 2013), and the absence of general direction for e-government programs (Lee & Kwak, 2011) are issues with the current use of e-government in the United States. These issues may explain why citizens have low rates of engagement with the U.S. government's social profiles (Hong, 2013). Much of this research has been conducted from an agency perspective, rather than from the citizens' perspective (Lee & Kwak, 2011; Kavanaugh et al., 2013; Mergel, 2013; Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013). However, to understand the influence of social media on trust, the citizens' perspective is necessary. Therefore, this study was designed to focused on the citizens' perspective.

Principal-Agent Theory

According principal-agent theory (Barber, 1983), actions taken by the government, such as the implementation of social in the United States, may increase the information exchange between the government and citizens, and thereby improve the relationship between them, primarily because increased transparency by government increases the confidence among citizens about the government's ability to meet their needs. Several researchers have supported this theoretical improvement (Bonson et al., 2012; Holzer et al., 2004; Lee & Kwak, 2011; Moon, 2002; Morgeson et al., 2011; Tolbert & Mossberger, 2006; West, 2004). Thus, examining the influence of social media

on trust may be a new, promising direction for e-government research to provide guidance for its future development (Moon, 2002).

When it is applied to politics, one must model a *double* principal–agent interaction, starting backwards with first the government choice of agents who will handle the provision of services and moving to the choice of the electorate of political agents with different policy preferences (Lane 2013). The simplest principal–agent model analyses included the interaction between a risk prone principal and a set of risk avert agents, where the former hires the latter on the basis of a contract involving work effort and offers salary plus perks with a basic quid pro quo, whereby the agents are paid from the value of the output they deliver (Lane 2013). The agents may deliver low or high effort, which has implications for the probabilities of low or high output. As the principal aims for high output, he or she wants to write a contract that elicits high effort (Lane 2013). But all contracts are subject to two basic principles that must be satisfied: the reservation price of the agents on the one hand and incentive compatibility on the other hand (Lane 2013). With perfect information one may calculate best solutions that satisfy these requirements. However, given asymmetric information—hidden actions and hidden knowledge—one has to face suboptimal solutions (Lane 2013). PAT was actually well-known in the literature on bureaucracy and comparative politics, although the language of the principal–agent model has not been used (Lane 2013).

To increase understanding of how asymmetric information from government officials and/or politicians in government manifests differently at different times, Hetherington and Husser (2012) merged survey data gathered between 1980 and 2004

with media content analyses to test the effect of media focus on political trust. The media is, in large part, responsible for the framing effects that influence people's consideration of the government. The three domains tested were defense spending, race, and redistribution policy. The researchers measured salience of each domain by media content analysis from Baumgartner and Jones' Policy Agendas Project and original content analysis and then merged data from the National Election Study panel surveys. Results revealed that the increase in media coverage of foreign affairs subsequent to the September 11 attacks framed public opinion regarding defense and foreign policy in relation to the government. In addition, Hetherington and Husser found trust in the government affected foreign policy and defense preferences for these citizens. Data were also used to test causal direction, and strongly suggested that political trust was unusual prior to policy preferences, rather than the other way around.

The principal-agent model identifies two major difficulties when a principal contract with a set of agents under asymmetric information from government officials and/or politicians, namely moral hazard (*hidden action*) and adverse selection (*hidden knowledge*) (Lane 2013). These two difficulties surface whether the contract is explicit and enforceable in court, as with policy implementation, or the contract is opaque and only enforceable to a limited extent, as with politics (Lane 2013).

Warren, Sulaiman, and Jaafar (2014) conducted a study of active Malaysian Facebook users based on a sample of 502 surveys collected through criteria sampling in 2013. Findings revealed that Facebook users were more likely to express concern regarding social issues online than to act online (e.g., Facetime). Group incentives had a

significant positive effect on social media usage for behaviors involving civic engagement. Warren et al. also conducted a post-hoc analysis through interviews with 10 social activists. I gain insight into the reasons for the lack of trust in government institutions indicated in the earlier part of the survey. The respondents reported a lack trust and confidence in their institutions because of their perceptions of widespread corruption in the government and within the justice system. The respondents also reported considerable alienation between the public and the police. However, two findings were particularly significant. First, social media can contribute somewhat toward mobilizing citizens to participate online in civic engagement. Second, online coordination of civic activities can reinforce citizens' propensity to support e-government services (Warren et al., 2014). Although directly relevant to the research question, this study has limited generalizability because of its geographically limited sample.

Social media and e-participation are the primary improvements stemming from e-government implementations (Holzer et al., 2004; Kim & Lee, 2012; Tolbert & Mossberger, 2006). However, some authors have disputed these potential effects, suggesting that e-government has its limitations (Matthew, 2011). The lack of consensus regarding the benefits of e-government, particularly regarding transparency, has led to the need for additional investigation of perceptions on social media support services. Researchers have examined the influence of social media adoption on the accessibility of social media services to the citizen.

Citizen Trust and Social Media

Consistent with Bannister and Connolly's (2011) assessment that the field of social media research is primarily conducted with an information technology focus, much of the research on social media and transparency concerns the adoption of social media services. For example, in a quantitative, cross-sectional study, Al-Hujran, Al-Debei, Chatfield, and Migdadi (2015) used an Arabic language questionnaire to analyze the factors that influenced the adoption of social media by citizens, including the constructs of transparency, perceived public value, and national culture. Al-Hujran et al. distributed surveys to 1,500 Jordanian participants randomly chosen from Internet café users and four universities. The return rate was 65.9%. Out of 975 respondents, only the responses of participants who had adopted social media services were used for testing the hypotheses. This provided a sample size of 413.

Al-Hujran et al. (2015) reported that the most significant determinant of adoption and use of social media services was citizen attitude, which was determined by perceived public value and perceived ease of use. Therefore, the results of this study confirmed the existence of a direct and positive relationship between the intention to use social media services and attitude. Regarding the external variables of culture, the study proposed five dimensions of cultural variation defined by Hofstede positively influenced the perception of ease of use. The cultural dimension of uncertainty avoidance also had a significant positive influence.

Colesca (2009) also investigated factors that influence social media. Using multiple regression analyses of surveys from 793 Romanian Internet users, Colesca

(2009) examined the factors that determined the level of citizen support for Romanian e-government. Building on previous studies, Colesca developed a social media model with 12 interrelated variables. A Likert-scale survey with one question for each variable was administered to a representative sample of the general Romanian population of Internet users. Colesca found the most significant influence on social media was the concern for privacy, and therefore concluded that establishing trustworthiness in this area is an essential strategy for government organizations. The use of social media in e-government services increased with Internet experience. Age had a significant negative influence on social media in e-government, with older respondents less open to using e-government services. Other statistically significant factors that influenced the willingness to use social media associated with e-government were perceived organizational trustworthiness, support offered to those using the technology, the perception of quality, and perception of usefulness. Education level, gender, and income were not found to influence the willingness to use social media associated with e-government. One insight from Colesca's study was that functional technology is not sufficient to enhance social media use in e-government, because it is also necessary to incorporate elements that meet the social needs of users.

A questionnaire was randomly distributed to 300 users of the electronic services, and asked customers to evaluate the quality of the services they received electronically on the dimensions of reliability, efficiency, support of citizens, and security/privacy. Findings supported a significant positive influence between the quality of e-government services and social media. Security and privacy (labelled collectively as support) had the

largest effect on social media platforms, while reliability (accurate and timely service, convenience, and speed of the portal) had the smallest effect on the willingness to use social media connected with the bank. This study was relevant to the current research question because it highlights the fact that it is the *quality* of a service provided by an organization, such as social media interactions, rather than the simple *availability* of the service, that influences the public's perception of support from the organization.

As demonstrated in the studies previously cited, a multitude of factors influence e-government adoption and citizens' feelings of trust. Citizen attitudes (Al-Hujran et al., 2015), security and privacy (Colesca, 2009), and quality of services (Hong, 2013) all influenced the citizens' perception of transparency in social media. The body of literature that addressed the influences on the perception of support associated with social media within the United States was sparse, as demonstrated by the small number of studies reviewed in this section (Al-Hujran et al., 2015; Colesca, 2009). Without the appropriate implementation and concern for taking the necessary steps to encourage the adoption of social media, it is unlikely that citizens will subsequently use social media and if citizens do not use it, the government will not reap any of the potential benefits from social media, including improved relationships between citizens and government agencies.

Social Media Use and Trust in U.S. Government

Other researchers have examined whether the use of social media influenced citizen trust of government. Relevant to the present study, Colesca (2009) reported a positive relationship between propensity to influence the government in general and support in e-government. Tyler and Degoey (1996) referred to PAT as relational trust—

trust based on the expectation of good intentions or fairness and good faith. Barber (1983) cautioned that trust is multidimensional and when discussing or examining trust, whether looking at fiduciary responsibility or more generalized trust, context is important. The social relationship or social system of reference must always be specified. For instance, what is regarded as fiduciary responsibility among friends may be different from the trust exhibited within or between formal organizations (Lane 2013). According to Denhardt and Denhardt (2009), and based on recent events regarding the transparency of the government, U.S. citizens may be unlikely to support the government in general, which may also influence their feelings about e-government. Research regarding the use of e-government and social media has yielded mixed results (Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer, 2014; Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2013; Hong, 2013; Song & Lee, 2016), and much of this research occurred outside of the United States (Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer, 2014; Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2013; Kim & Lee, 2012).

Because so many of these studies occurred outside of the United States, it is difficult to apply most of them regarding transparency through e-government to the present study (Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer, 2014; Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2013; Kim & Lee, 2012). Previous researchers have determined that cultural preferences and political nuances influenced perceptions of transparency and social media used by various governments (Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2013). For example, Grimmelikhuijsen et al. (2013) compared the influence of transparency on citizen support of government between the Netherlands and South Korea. The researchers used two similar series of three experiments to test decision-making transparency, policy information transparency, and

policy outcome transparency through a questionnaire that measured levels of social media use. The sample consisted of 381 students in the Netherlands and 279 students in South Korea, but samples were not representative of the general population of either country. Furthermore, the topics addressed in each country were different. The subject under discussion for the Netherlands was air pollution, but the subject asked about in South Korea was identity theft. The findings showed a subtle and negative effect of transparency on government support in both countries, with a stronger negative effect in South Korea (Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2013). This finding suggested that national cultural values, particularly power distance and short- and long-term orientation as described by Hofstede, affected perceptions of government trustworthiness. Grimmelikhuijsen et al. (2013) came to this conclusion because of the somewhat counterintuitive findings that increased transparency decreased support for the government, and this effect was more pronounced in South Korea than in the Netherlands.

Different parts of similar studies do not support the expected correlations between transparency through e-government and increased citizen accessibility in e-government services. The procedure involved a brief instructional phase, followed by presentation of the experimental stimuli (one of two 2-page websites) to the treatment groups, and a posttest regarding the local government's dealings with air pollution (Grimmelikhuijsen et al. 2013).

However, Grimmelikhuijsen et al. (2013) findings supported the claim that transparency influences perceived competence of a government organization among

citizens with prior high trust and little knowledge. Transparency also decreased perceived government benevolence among citizens who had previously low trust and low knowledge. A limitation of the study was that the population was not representative of the larger population in the Netherlands (Grimmelikhuijsen et al. 2013). Because of the self-selection bias, it was likely that more highly educated people, those who were more politically left-leaning, those relatively knowledgeable about the policy topic, and those who initially had more support toward the government than did the general population had a higher probability of being included in the study (Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer, 2014).

To test the influence of citizen pushes for social and e-participation support in government, Moon, Kim, and Lee (2013) conducted a study in South Korea regarding the use of e-government services, e-participation, and the opportunities available for citizens to initiate bottom-up participation through use of the Internet. Moon, Kim, and Lee (2013) collected data from the 2009 Knowledge Center for Public Administration and Policy Survey conducted by Korea Gallup. A representative sample of 1,213 Korean citizens completed surveys via face-to-face interviews using a structured questionnaire. A follow-up telephone verification procedure, which recalculated 30% of the original respondents ensured reliability. The researchers calculated the dependent variable of public trust in government based on a standardized questionnaire developed by the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan. Moon et al. found that Internet use was significantly and negatively correlated with the level to which individuals expressed trust in government. Lower trust led to lower levels of compliance

with governmental policies. Moon et al. noted that within South Korea, controversial legislation aimed at preventing the spread of what the government deemed as misinformation likely led to the results that pointed to lower levels of support in the government, despite increased emphasis on e-government and citizen participation.

Conversely, other studies conducted abroad demonstrated more positive correlations between e-government and citizen trust. Using 2009 E-Participation Survey data from 1,076 e-participants in a Seoul, South Korea government program, Kim and Lee (2012) explored the relationship between e-participation and support. Kim and Lee cited five dimensions of e-participation: (a) satisfaction with e-participation applications; (b) satisfaction with government responsiveness to e-participants; (c) e-participants' development through the participation; (d) perceived influence on decision making; and (e) assessment of government transparency. Among the Korean participants, Kim and Lee determined that there was a direct, positive correlation between the perception of personal development through participation in e-government and satisfaction with e-participation applications and government responsiveness. The researchers also found a positive correlation between e-satisfaction and participants' perceptions of their abilities to influence U.S. citizens.

Relevant to the present study, Kim and Lee (2012) determined that participants were more likely to have positive perceptions of government transparency when they felt that their participation in e-government had increased their personal development and their decision-making role in government processes. Kim and Lee reported when e-government entered the government offices that provided social media services, citizens

expressed more favorable ratings. The results led to the conclusion that e-government participation had an indirect relationship with citizen trust, inasmuch as social media participation increased perceptions of personal development and transparency, which consequently led to more trust in the government (Kim & Lee, 2012). However, significant limitations to this study exist, because Kim and Lee only measured public trust in one Korean city government, and only through a single survey item. Furthermore, the response rate was low, and females were underrepresented in the sample.

Myeong et al. (2014) found a weak correlation between trust in government and the quality of e-government services. Furthermore, level of trust varied depending on the users' experiences with technology. Individuals who reported a desire for additional information showed the highest levels of trust. The passive information group exhibited the lowest level of transparency. This finding suggested that simply making hardware and information more accessible is not sufficient to increase transparency in government. It is also necessary to increase the understanding of citizens regarding the importance and significance of information provided by the government. Although the sample used by Myeong et al. was from Korea, the group that desired information may be the closest to many United States citizens (Shadbolt et al., 2012). This explanation suggested that the quality of e-government may also have a similar influence within the United States context.

Like Kim and Lee (2012) and Myeong et al. (2014), researchers within the United States similarly demonstrated an improved opinion of transparency through e-government and social media (Hong, 2013). Using survey data collected from 2200

United States citizens, Hong (2013) assessed whether individuals' experiences with government websites and social media influenced the perceived quality of e-government services provided by the government. Hong used data from a randomly-dialed survey regarding the use of the Internet conducted by Survey Research Associates International in 2009, and which was later released by the Pew Research Center. This representative sample contained approximately 2,200 adults. Within this sample, only 16.8% (261 out of 1,549 Internet users) had experience with government social media. Hong (2013) demonstrated that experience with social media positively increases use of the e-government system in local and state government. Although, transactional online experiences, such as registering a vehicle, improved citizens' perceptions of the e-government services used at previous experience with online transactions at the local level correlated better opinions of similar transactions with the federal government. Hong (2013) suggested that the existence of social media tools is not sufficient enough to improve the use of e-government. Rather, an individual's experience with the communication channel must be successful (from the individual's perspective), to be associated with more positive opinions of e-government services used by citizens. An unsuccessful experience, either a technological failure or the perception that the tool was being used for propaganda purposes, may decrease their opinion of e-government services (Hong, 2013).

Tolbert and Mossberger (2006) used 2001 Pew Research Center data from a random digit-dialed telephone survey of 815 people who had reported previous use of government websites. The researchers tested three hypotheses: (a) use of government

websites leads to improved perceptions of transparency and effectiveness of government, accessibility of government, and responsiveness of government; (b) improved evaluations of government institutions and processes lead to greater trust in government; and (c) the translation of positive attitudes toward government websites into increased support of the government is more likely for the federal government, followed by the state government, then local government. The researchers conducted the analysis in two stages. The first stage was an attempt to predict attitudes about government processes, and the second stage attempted to predict the level of trust in government.

Tolbert and Mossberger (2006) reported that increased support for e-government services used by the government follows improved e-government interactions at the local level. The federal government rated highest on positive citizen attitudes about government processes, but these attitudes did not lead to increased use of e-government services. Attitudes regarding improvements of supported e-government services used by citizens, such as diminished transparency, did not lead to increased social media usage by any level of government, suggesting that process-based influence was more significant. However, considering process-based influence made significant changes that have happened since 2001, such as the Edward Snowden affair in 2011, Tolbert and Mossberger's data may have become obsolete. Tolbert and Mossberger (2006) also did not consider social media, because it did not have a significant presence in 2001. In addition, Pew survey data does not allow for an in-depth investigation of citizens' perceptions and lived experiences with e-government.

The research regarding how citizens feel about social media and the government

has offered only mixed results (Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer, 2014; Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2013; Hong, 2013; Kim & Lee, 2012; Moon et al., 2013; Myeong et al., 2014). The body of literature is limited in its scope regarding studies of the influence of e-government on social media within the United States (Hong, 2013; Tolbert & Mossberger, 2006). The research that does exist suggests that bottom-up interventions, such as social media and e-participation, were more effective in promoting the use of e-government services than were top-down interventions from the government, even when these interventions involved providing more information to citizens (Moon et al., 2013). Hong (2013) noted that the influence of social media was nonetheless limited to local government. In addition, process-based support for e-government services may be most important for measuring the influence of e-government on citizens (Tolbert & Mossberger, 2006); a process, such as social media sharing, is therefore an important consideration that continues to be under-explored (Hetherington & Husser, 2012). The following section included a review of additional literature on the influence of government social media use and citizen trust.

Social Media Use and Influenced Support in Government

Social media use may be one method for continuing to meet e-government goals (Bertot et al., 2010; Bonson et al., 2012; Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer, 2014; Lee & Kwak, 2011). Best practices and recommendations for effective use of social media by government agencies and employees included the RESPECT principle: “Reply promptly to public comments; Enhance public value when posting messages; Simplify your message; Protect public privacy and agency reputation; Ensure validity of information

sources; Correct problems immediately and effectively; Tell the truth all the time” (Lee & Kwak, 2011, p. 502). Through these best practices, Lee and Kwak (2011) suggested that e-government use, specifically social media, may increase citizens’ accessibility to e-government service of choice. However, as these specific prescriptions suggested, the government must focus its attention on meeting social media goals if these goals are to be met (Moon, 2002). This finding demonstrates the importance of information reporting and framing effects and implies that the government’s use of social media to frame events and create transparency may have a significant effect on the use of e-government services by citizens. Few researchers have examined citizens’ perceptions of social media with regard to its effects on transparency in, and accessibility of, government (Franks & Evans, 2015; Hong, 2013).

Researchers have supported the claim that social media use can improve the relationship between the government and its citizens. According to Rawan, Khasawneh, and Abu-Shanab (2013) the online presence of the Jordanian government began in 2006, and its e-government site facilitated more than 1,800 government services. Jordan’s rank in the 2012 UN Global E-government Survey was 98th out 100 countries examined Rawan, Khasawneh, and Abu-Shanab (2013). The government launched its Facebook page in November of 2011, and this article is based on analysis of metrics for August 7, 2012. (Rawan, Khasawneh, and Abu-Shanab 2013). Rawan, Khasawneh, and Abu-Shanab (2013) found increased positive interactions between Jordanian citizens and the government through the Facebook page. This increased participation was especially observed among men, ages 18–34. Relevant to the present study, Rawan, Khasawneh,

and Abu-Shanab (2013) suggested that Facebook can increase transparency and facilitate positivity between citizens and the government, although social media's influence may be affected by government particularities, cultural beliefs, and local preferences (Al-Hujran et al., 2015; Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2013; T. Khan et al., 2011).

Park, Kang, Rho, and Lee (2015) collected 398 usable surveys from South Korean citizens who followed more than one governmental agency's Twitter account, and who also followed more than one officer's (spokesperson, secretary, etc.) account. Park et al. used a probability sampling method to reflect the demographics of Twitter users in South Korea. The researchers determined that the use of Twitter by leading officers established support for the officer—support that citizens transferred to the department and government in general. This effect was particularly evident among officers who responded to citizen requests directly. However, if an officer provided inaccurate information or demonstrated a lack of consideration for citizens, it caused a loss of credibility, nonsupport, and indifference among citizens. However, the findings of this study may lack generalizability because of the specifically Korean organizational culture factors. Even within South Korea, the findings are limited because of weak consideration of these factors (Park et al., 2015).

Franks and Evans (2015) conducted a study to determine if the use of social media by local law enforcement agencies increased in local law enforcement. The theoretical foundation for the study was adapted from behavioral trust theory, resource-based theory, social capital theory, and social network theory. Franks and Evans developed social media profiles for 20 North American law enforcement agencies, 10 of

which were located in Canada and 10 that were in the United States. In addition, Franks and Evans performed a sentiment analysis of official Twitter accounts belonging to the police departments, cities, and mayors of these same 20 cities. The researchers collected data from January 2, 2013, through August 24, 2014. Franks and Evans also conducted a descriptive analysis of the social media response to four of these cities to a specific police event. The four city and event pairings were, (a) Boston, MA USA Police Department and the 2013 Boston Marathon Bombing; (b) Riverside, CA, USA Police Department and a 2013 officer shooting; (c) Vancouver, Canada Police Department and the 2011 Vancouver Hockey Riot; and (d) the Calgary, Canada Police Service and the 2013 Calgary Flood. Although the findings of this study did not definitively show that social media increases citizen trust in local law enforcement, increased participation and positive comments on social media sites occurred in response to effective social media use by the local agencies. However, Franks and Evans did not specifically interview social media users regarding their perceptions of the government after such interactions.

As with Franks and Evans (2015), Hong (2013) reported the use of social media increased citizens' trust in the U.S. government. However, Hong (2013) did not find that social media influenced perceptions of transparency at the federal level. In addition, the success of the transaction was essential (Hong, 2013). According to Hong, few citizens seem to be interacting with the government's social media profiles. Hong's findings echoed those of Bonson et al. (2012), concluding that if the aim is to be successful in increasing support for e-government services, the U.S. government must make effective social media profiles for these interventions.

Using the same Pew Research Center randomly dialed survey of 2,200 adult U.S. citizens using the Internet in 2009 (see Hong, 2013), Song and Lee (2016) assessed the influence of government social media use on perceived transparency and support for e-government services. Song and Lee proposed because citizens do not distinguish between various dimensions of influence in government, political influence is one-dimensional. The researchers controlled for several variables that potentially influence e-government services by government. These variables included (a) political party, (b) political ideology, and (c) government employment. Song and Lee also controlled for several demographic characteristics: (a) age, (b) gender, (c) level of education, and (d) income. This study was designed to discover social media use by government that enables citizens to have easier access to government and to be better informed, thus increasing their perception of transparency.

The findings of Song and Lee (2016) were consistent with the findings of Lee and Kwak (2011) and Mergel (2013) regarding transparency. The findings did not support a relationship between the use of social media and perceived citizen support for the government. Instead, citizen perceptions of transparency were a significant mediator that influenced the perception of support (Song & Lee, 2016). However, as with Hong (2013), Song and Lee did not examine the influence of social media use on supporting e-government services by government.

Examining the relationships among social media, e-government, and influence, Porumbescu (2015) sampled 1,100 representative citizens of the Seoul Metropolitan Government in 2012 by email survey for those under the age of 60, and used structured

interviews for those older than 60. Porumbescu tested only one hypothesis: greater use of government social media accounts by citizens would be associated with more *positive* perceptions of government. Porumbescu found that respondents evaluated government competence more highly than government honesty. The respondents used e-government websites more than they used social media to obtain information. Overall, findings were mixed in terms of which hypotheses they supported. Hypothesis 1 was supported for the dimensions of benevolence and honesty, but not competence. Hypothesis 2 was strongly and negatively supported for honesty, but not for perceptions of competence and benevolence. Hypothesis 3 was supported for benevolence, but not for competence and honesty. Implications of the study were that the choice of medium influences user perceptions which is a consideration for future researchers. Another implication was that social media may be most useful for citizens as way to improve the perceptions of those who trust government the least. These findings directly relate to the study.

In a systematic review of literature published between 2005 and 2013 about e-government and support for social media services from the United States and 10 other countries, Mahmood, Osmani, and Sivarajah (2014) found significant shortcomings in many of the articles regarding the complex relationships among multiple factors that influence social media. Moreover, Mahmood et al. determined that researchers in this area have used small and relatively similar groups of users (e.g., Rawan et al., 2013; Park et al., 2015; Porumbescu, 2015).

The Pew Research Center (2010) identified government use of social media data to potentially reach currently underserved populations, such as minority groups that are

more likely than those in the dominant culture to say it is very important for government agencies to post information and alerts on sites such as Facebook and Twitter. Based on the users' expressed attitudes, these tools may offer the ability for government agencies to reach underserved populations in a way that is not currently occurring with other online offerings. To address this concern, this study was designed to fully acknowledge the complexity of these relationships and use a broader sample of data to assess the influence of social media.

Summary

Governmental organizations have promoted the use of e-government and social media as a method for increasing transparency, improving citizen participation, and meeting developmental goals of the government. The use of e-government and social media could also promote citizen trust. However, the existing literature was missing an exploration, through qualitative methods, of citizens' own perceptions of trust and accessibility, as well as how social media use has influenced their opinions.

Cultural differences, variations in the ways U.S. citizens use social media and e-government, and the distinction between government-led initiatives compared to participative use of e-government as well as countless other factors may influence citizen perceptions and responses to e-government. Thus, a significant gap in the literature relates to citizens' perceptions of whether U.S. citizens interacting with government agencies via e-government and social media increased their perceived levels of transparency and accessibility. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore U.S. citizens' perceptions of, and experiences with, social media use. Specifically, this

dissertation explored whether interacting with U.S. citizens through social media increases perceptions of transparency and accessibility. To maintain a specific context, the study was limited to people living within the United States. More specifically, this study was intended to investigate the use of e-government and social media interactions by the U.S. citizens.

The study was a case study. Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explored a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information, and reports a case description and case-based themes. Chapter 3 provides details regarding the methodology for the study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore the role social media plays in supporting citizen trust in government, with a focus on social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. This study was intended to analyze asymmetric information assimilation through the lens of the PAT. Specifically, in this study I explored the role of social media in supporting citizen–government relations. The research question guiding this study was, *what role does social media play in supporting U.S. citizens’ trust in government?* To help answer this principal research question, the following secondary question was posed: *How have citizens’ experiences with social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube influenced citizens’ perceptions of government information?*

Within this chapter, the research design and rationale for the selected methodology are described. This chapter presents the methodology, including the sample recruitment and data collection strategies. This chapter also details the data analysis and issues of trustworthiness related to the study. A description of the ethical considerations extended to participants is also included in this chapter. The chapter closes with a summary of the key points of the research.

Research Design and Rationale

The qualitative research design was deemed the most appropriate for this study given the nature of the topic, research questions, and the gap in the literature. The qualitative research method involves a naturalistic, exploratory, and interpretive approach to the research topic (Creswell, 2009). This method was suitable because it allowed for

my examination of how social media supports citizens' trust in government relations by exploring social media use and government engagement between two groups: citizens who use social media platforms regularly and information technology (IT) coordinators for a community-based organization (CBO). Creswell (2009) posited that qualitative research is an ideal interpretive medium through which the researcher can understand and interpret concepts. In the case of this study, I sought to understand how these groups engaged with social media. This engagement was explored to illustrate how the interactions might enhance trust in citizen-government relations, as influenced or by perceived transparency and accessibility of information. These experiences were represented from the perspective of the participants who were interviewed through an expert interview study approach.

Justification for Using Qualitative Expert Interview Study

I implemented an expert interview study approach within this study. Expert interviews provided the means of assimilating asymmetrical information through the lens of principal-agent theory to examine federal, state, and local governments' use of electronic methods to reach U.S. citizens. This information was collected through interviews with individuals considered experts in relation to the topic. Using an expert interview approach in this study provided a comprehensive and an in-depth approach to examining the social phenomena (see Yazan, 2015). One of the challenges inherent in expert interview study is the identification of experts who are representative of the population of interest the researcher seeks to explore (Creswell, 2009). This is so because of the uncertainty that appears in the selection of a purposeful sample and the

determination of whether the purposeful sample is satisfactory in support of the principle concept of the inquiry. By identifying the individuals with experience and knowledge of the social phenomena, I accessed a pool of participants who could contribute rich, thick data related to the topic. Although other research methods were considered when developing this study, the expert interview approach was best aligned with the intended topic and design.

A qualitative method was appropriate for this study because it afforded an opportunity to narrowly focus on how social media plays a role in supporting citizen trust in government. This study was designed to facilitate an examination of the construct of interest in its natural context (see Tracy, 2013). After considering a quantitative approach initially, I determined that an examination of numerical data would not offer the breadth and depth of information necessary to explore participants' perceptions. Research questions in qualitative studies should reflect the topic of study, the scope of the topic within the context of the study, and the intended participants for the study (Cleary, Horsfall, & Hayter, 2014). I opted for a qualitative examination of the perceptions of citizens who have experience related to interacting with the government through social media in alignment with the focus of this study.

Within a case study approach, the researcher typically poses a broad research question and uses multiple sources of data to address the research problem. For the present study, I broadly intended to understand how social media use among citizens might influence their trust in government. I examined this phenomenon using interview data gathered from clients and IT coordinators, and descriptive statistical data from the

Pew Research Center (PRC, 2019) Trust and Distrust in America surveys. This information was explored through the lens of the principal–agent theory to construct an understanding of whether and how U.S. citizens’ use of social media platforms influenced trust in citizen-government relations. The PRC 2019 descriptive statistical survey data were compared with the themes from the qualitative interview data to identify areas where the findings of both samples converged. In synthesizing findings across both data sources and their associated samples, I was able to provide additional depth to the findings.

This study was designed to use the case study approach to gather in-depth information from a small sample of participants using multiple data sources. According to Austin and Sutton (2014), a key aspect of qualitative research is that its practitioners do not seek to generalize their findings to a wider population. Instead, they attempt to find examples of behavior, to clarify the thoughts and feelings of study participants, and to interpret participants’ experiences of the phenomena of interest to find explanations for human behavior in a given context (Austin, & Sutton, 2014). To contextualize the focus of this study, I collected data through semistructured interviews and national survey data. A case study approach was appropriate because I intended to ask how and why questions, and I sought to understand participants’ context to gain insight into the phenomenon of interest (see Yin, 2014). Through this study, an exploration of participants’ experiences using how and why questions to understand the influence of social media use on citizens’ trust in government.

Role of the Researcher

Within this study, I functioned as the sole vehicle for data collection, analysis, and reporting. Although I conducted all interviews while also working as a social and behavioral worker, this study was structured to separate my professional role from my roles within the researcher. I did not hold any supervisory roles in relation to the participants.

My experience as a social and behavioral worker in the field was an asset in making connections with participants within the study. This ability to form connections with participants had the potential to increase their willingness to be open and honest during the interviews.

Methodology

Qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews with a sample of 23 IT clients and coordinators selected using purposeful sampling approach. Participants were affiliated with a CBO located in Oakland, CA. Secondary data from the PRC (2019) Trust and Distrust in America survey was also analyzed. Survey items that related to trust in government, communication, and social media use were reviewed to determine if the trends in this data converged from the themes that emerged from the interview data. This section describes the study protocol that guided the process of gathering data from participants to address the research problem. The study protocol outlines the location, the procedure, and the procedures for the interview sessions. This section presents the data analysis plan and the ethical procedures framing the study.

Participant Selection Logic

When conducting qualitative studies, researchers are not bound to strict guidelines on sample size, so they maintain the ability to tailor sample size to fit the needs of their research (Patton, 2002). In this study, the sample size was determined by several factors, including purpose of the inquiry and what was determined to be cost-effective, meaningful, credible, and current (see Patton, 2002). Pettus-Davis (2011) suggested that researchers should draw a sample large enough to make valid inferences about the population and adequate to address the research questions. For this study, I intended to conduct interviews with 30 participants; however, 23 clients and IT coordinators participated in interviews. These individuals provided sufficient data to establish emergent themes.

The target population consisted of adults, age 18 and over, with accounts on social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, or YouTube who used e-government services. Recruitment was conducted using purposeful sampling approach to access participants who met the inclusion criteria. These individuals were accessed through social media recruitment, email recruitment, and advertisements at the CBOs.

Potential participants were recruited through a CBO located in Oakland, CA. To participate, individuals had to be at least 18 years of age, have social media accounts on Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube, reside in Oakland, CA, and be either a client or an IT coordinator of a CBO. The agencies were considered CBOs if they were a 501(c)(3) nonprofit agency that provided services and programs for social and behavioral health, assistance with government service (i.e., filling out documents, etc.), clinical services, or

vocational skill development. Agencies were excluded from the study if they were not 501(c)(3) nonprofit certified and did not provide the outlined services.

Initially, I intended to gather a sample of 30 men and women to participate in the study during October and November of 2018. I established this threshold number of participants with the goal of reaching saturation during data collection. Saturation is achieved when the addition of new data does not reveal new themes (Clarke & Braun, 2013). A study reaches saturation when the researcher determines that the research questions have been sufficiently examined as evidenced by latter participants providing data and concepts similar to participants before them (Cleary et al., 2014). Sample sizes typically vary significantly within qualitative studies, with larger, broader studies requiring larger sample sizes, and smaller studies being more limited in scope because of smaller sample sizes (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Within this study, I began data collection and preliminary analysis for the purpose of member checking with participants. I found that saturation was apparent; during the process of reviewing audio recordings from the interviews, the data and topics the participants addressed were similar in nature. Once I determined that sufficient saturation was met, data analysis proceeded using the 23 interview recordings that had been gathered.

Data for the PRC (2019) Trust and Distrust in America report was gathered between November and December 2018. The survey had a response rate of 78% and a sample size of 10,618 participants (PRC, 2019). Many respondents were aged 50-64 years ($n = 3,190$, 30%) and characterized as 'medium trusters' according to the study data ($n = 4,377$, 42%). This trust category referred to how participants viewed institutions and

others on a three-tier system ranging from low to high trust (PRC, 2019). Respondents provided information via telephone-based and address-based surveying.

Instrumentation

Interview data included recordings, transcripts, digital audiotapes and written notes of all three sources (Tessier, 2012). Audio recordings, transcripts, and secondary data from the PRC (2019) Trust and Distrust in America were surveys data sources for this study. The audio recordings and transcripts were collected by two semistructured interview protocols, one for clients and one for IT coordinators. Interview questions were prepared to guide the interview and to ensure that the data collected addressed the research question. The interview protocol for clients consisted of 11 questions intended to explore how participants viewed social media platforms, how participants viewed credibility when using e-government services as active social media users, and which social media platforms they used the most. The interview protocol for coordinators explored similar dimensions and consisted of 10 questions.

Researchers are encouraged to test their interview questions with people who are like the intended sample participants to verify that the questions are easy to understand and align with the research questions (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). I sought feedback from government workers who used Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube. These individuals were selected to review because they were like the participants for the study. The reviewers were asked to determine whether the questions were aligned with the research questions and were easy to understand. Reviewers was asked to provide any relevant suggestions for the wording of the interview questions. I made modifications to the research questions

based on the feedback received to develop the final interview protocols (Appendix C).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Once Walden University IRB approval was obtained (IRB approval number 02-04-19-0230447), the process of recruitment commenced. Prior to beginning this process, I developed instructions for data collection and participant. This information was compiled into a recruitment letter and consent for to distribute to participants (Appendix A; Appendix B). Additionally, I prepared a letter of introduction, to accompany the recruitment information that would be provided to participants. Recruiting and accessing participants are an essential step in conducting research (Peticca-Harris, deGama, & Elias, 2016). In this research, three strategies were used to access participants. The first strategy was distribution of a recruitment letter to participating CBOs via email to secure permission to assist in the study. Contact information for CBOs located in Oakland was gathered online. CBOs that provided permission to recruit participants through their agencies allowed researcher to post flyers for participants interested in the study at the agency. Additionally, similar to the approach implemented by Jiang, Luo, and Kulemeka (2016) in their study on social media engagement and crisis management, I distributed emails to recruit participants a second strategy to access participants. These individuals were contacted directly through the CBOs listserv. Once individuals indicated their interest in the study, they were again contacted via e-mail to clarify intent of the study and the criteria for participation. I deemed email recruitment to be a viable recruitment strategy due to its use in other studies related to social media (Hall-Phillips, Park, Chung,

Anaza, and Rathod; 2016; Moreno et al., 2016). The third strategy consisted of social media advertisements through the CBO's social media accounts.

Following recruitment and completion of the consent form, I scheduled interviews with participants. Interviews were conducted in-person for 30-45 minute at a mutually convenient time. All interviews were conducted at the CBO. Prior to conducting the interview protocol, each participant consented to audio recording the interview. Following the interviews, the audio recordings were transcribed using Microsoft Word. Participants were provided the transcriptions via email for member checking. During their review, participants were encouraged to note any deviations from their intended message in the recorded data. All participants had 1 week to review the transcriptions and follow-up with me for any corrections or modifications. No participants provided notes for correction. Each transcript was coded with its own unique pseudonym. The pseudonym used to identify participants while masking their identities.

I sought access to the PRC (2019) data directly through the organization. These data were provided via email. All electronic files such as emails, audio-recordings, and transcriptions were stored on my personal password-protected computer for 5 years. At the end of this time, I will delete all electronic files and erase the computer drives.

Data Analysis Plan

The data was entered in NVivo Version 11 for management and organization. NVivo is a form of Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CADQAS) that was used to assist in this study qualitative research. NVivo allows researchers to complete a variety of tasks related to data management and organization, including data

segmentation and categorization, search and retrieval of data, and providing visual representation (Talanquer, 2014). The responses from the semistructured interviews and descriptive statistical surveys from the PRC (2019) data were stored in NVivo for this study. I intended to analyze, compare, and evaluate the data to glean common themes related to how citizens' trust in government might be influenced by their engagement on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, and then compare these findings with the PRC 2019 surveys. These two sources of data were considered in an attempt to broaden the range of insight gathered by drawing on a larger national survey related to the topic.

I implemented conservative content analysis within this study to develop themes directly from the qualitative data. These themes were aggregated from the codes and categories assigned to the text data. The emergent themes were then explored in conjunction with survey data from the PRC (2019). I explored the survey items aligned with the research question. These items focused on citizens' trust in government, trust in the information communicated by the government, and perceived ability to determine what is true when using social media. The intent of this examination was to understand how use of social media may influence the exchange of information between government and citizens, and how that information exchange supports citizens' trust in government.

During data analysis, I used the pseudonyms assigned to cases to arrange the interview data and maintain participant confidentiality. I proceeded to establish familiarity with the transcripts, in which I reread each of the transcriptions. Reading and remembering (Creswell, 2009) were important because they facilitated establishing

phrases or words that could later be used to determine codes. Following this process, initial findings which sent to participants for member checking.

I then coded participants' responses to each interview question to explore the responses. I adhered to Saldana's (2016) framework for coding, and defined a code as a word that represented a collective attribute or response for a portion of textual data. I coded as words, phrases, and sentences related to the research question and assigned a title describing the code. These titles were reviewed to begin the process of data reduction by searching for similarities. Codes that shared similar sentiments were placed into larger categories, and I gave these categories a descriptive title. Aggregation of similar codes and categories continued until I created larger, overarching themes to represent the findings and associated subthemes where applicable.

I then analyzed the PRC (2019) survey data. The survey items on trust in government, communication with government, and social media to determine where these findings aligned with or differed from the themes. These areas identified and reported to augment the qualitative findings with data from the larger national sample.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility. Credibility of the findings refers to how well the results reflect the responses of the participants, which is based on researchers' prolonged engagement in understanding participants' perspectives and on persistent observation to avoid researcher bias (Billups, 2012). Credibility of a study can be enhanced by minimizing researcher bias. To mitigate bias, I captured participants' responses in real time via audio recording.

In addition, I employed member checking to allow participants an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of the data collected.

Dependability. Dependability involves determining if the results have consistent themes, and if the same research process and data collection methods are being applied (Billups, 2012). Dependability can be enhanced by creating an audit trail of decisions made by the researcher throughout the study that shows the researcher's methodological rationale, contextual data, and interpretive judgment (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). I provided an accounting of the process of data collection, management, and preliminary data analysis plan as a part of the methodology. Additionally, the actual process of data analysis was documented as a part of the results reporting.

Ethical Procedures

A qualitative case study's method requires direct and concentrated communication between the researcher and the participants. Therefore, I planned to mitigate any ethical concerns caused by face-to-face interaction and develop plans to address any ethical concerns that might occur. Consequently, this study was designed to treat ethical concerns with the extreme implication and importance. Since some of these ethical considerations included ensuring that all participants fully understood the purpose of the study, they were informed in advance of any risks and benefits of participating in the study, and were also informed they were at liberty to continue with the participation or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or coercion. The concept of discretion and confidentiality of data were discussed in the informed consent which was signed as an agreement between researcher and participant prior to interviews.

I sought to avoid any perceived coercion to participate by recruiting participants with whom he had no prior relationship. Additionally, I did not hold any supervisory relationship in association with participants. Further, I did not personally send recruitment messages to the participants, rather they were posted and distributed via the CBO. This was done to ensure that the recruitment invitations were received through a neutral party. Participants were extended confidentiality through a masking of their identity in analysis and reporting (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). All cases were assigned a unique identifier to replace their name. By providing participants with confidentiality, I sought to foster comfort in sharing their honest, candid perceptions and to shield them from any possible negative repercussions. Finally, all data were encrypted, password protected, and were not shared with any third parties to further protect participants.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the role social media plays in supporting citizen trust in government, with a focus on social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube through the lens of the PAT. Specifically I explored the role social media plays in supporting citizen–government relations. The research question guiding this study was, what role does social media play in supporting U.S. citizens’ trust in government?

I conducted this study using a qualitative expert interview approach. Through this technique, expert interviews were conducted to examine the phenomenon of interest. I interviewed of 23 purposefully sampled clients and IT coordinators from a CBO located

in Oakland, CA. This qualitative data was analyzed in conjunction with data from the 2019 PRC Trust and Distrust in America survey.

Within this chapter, the research design and rationale for the study were described. This chapter presented the methodology, including the sample recruitment and data collection strategies. This chapter also detailed the data analysis and issues of trustworthiness related to the study. A description of the ethical considerations extended to participants were provided in this chapter.

In Chapter 4, the findings that emerged from the qualitative interview and quantitative survey data are presented. The setting and demographic overview of the sample are provided as well as the data analysis approach. The steps taken to ensure trustworthiness of the data are also detailed in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the role of social media in supporting trust in government. To address this purpose, a single overarching research question was posed: What role does social media play in supporting U.S. citizens' trust in government? According to Tolbert and Mossberger (2006) and Welch et al. (2005), social media platforms may be associated with trust in government directly through satisfaction with e-government services (e-satisfaction) whereas the use of social media in government is theorized to be related to trust in government indirectly through perceived transparency in government. The aim was to understand whether the U.S. citizens' trust in government was influenced by use of different social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, and YouTube) through the lens of PAT. Through a qualitative expert interview study approach, data were collected from a representative sample drawn from the target population of participants living in Oakland, California. In addition, I analyzed documents from the Pew Research Center (PRC, 2019). The interview and surveys from the PRC data were analyzed through a detailed descriptive and interpretive process with the goal of addressing the primary research question. I also explored a secondary research question: How have citizens' experiences with social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube influenced citizens' perceptions related to transparency and accessibility of government information?

This chapter presents the results of the study. As such, it includes a brief description of how the data were collected and coded within the study. Additionally, the

evidence trustworthiness of the study is addressed. Lastly, a narrative is included in this chapter to address the results of the study.

Setting

Following approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board, an internet search of organizations that use social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, or YouTube) was conducted. I sent a copy of the recruitment letter to the community-based organization (CBO) to explain the purpose of this research study and to obtain authorization to conduct interviews at the location in a private setting. The CBO provided the permission to conduct interviews at the agency. Potential participants were contacted via email at which time they were provided consent forms. I scheduled and conducted interviews with 23 information technology (IT) clients and coordinators. The interviews occurred in the CBO's office in Oakland, California, using a secluded setting to facilitate a secure, private space to speak candidly. During the period in which the research study occurred there were no changes in the CBO personnel staff, budget cuts, or any other trauma that would influence participants. Additionally, there were no experiences during the interviews that may have influenced the interpretation of the study results.

Demographics

Participants were secured through a purposeful sampling approach that included social media recruitment using advertisements. I connected with potential participants through Twitter, Facebook, or YouTube. Participants were required to have a social media account on either Twitter, Facebook, or YouTube, be over the age of 18, and reside in the city of Oakland, California.

The final sample consisted of IT clients and IT coordinators at the CBO. The sample of 23 participants was comprised of 14 IT clients and nine IT coordinators. These individuals were recruited for participation because they were familiar with e-government and social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, or YouTube). Ten participants were female and the remaining 13 participants were male. All participants were over the age of 18.

Data Collection

Data collection processes were conducted in two phases. The first phase started immediately after Walden University Institutional Review Board approval to conduct research. This phase consisted of digital distribution of recruitment material through social media. Interested participants provided consent to participate via email. Interviews were scheduled at mutually beneficial times for the participants and me. With participant consent, I digitally recorded each interview session. A total of 23 participants consented to participate. Participants were informed that they could stop the interview, if needed, at any time without any pressure or penalty. However, no participant exercised this option. Additionally, survey data were collected from the PRC (2019) pertaining to the use of social media and perceptions of government among U.S. citizens provided in the data source triangulation. These data were reviewed and analyzed following the interviews. I examined the reported frequencies and percentages of survey participant responses to assess where the PRC findings aligned with and/or diverged from the themes that emerged within the qualitative interview data. The PRC Trust and Distrust in America survey evaluated U.S. citizens' trust in government, perceptions related to transparency,

and citizens' perceptions related to communication. Through the process of data source triangulation, the trends in the survey data were compared to the themes in the interview data to provide additional depth to the findings. In the reporting of findings, I used the quantitative survey data to triangulate the qualitative interview data and highlight how the two samples experienced social media and perceived its impact on government transparency and accessibility.

The interview process took 3 weeks to complete with an average of one to two interviews per day. I planned to conduct 30- to 45-minute interviews; however, due to the brevity of responses, some interviews decreased to 15 to 20 minutes in length. Some participants had to reschedule due to personal matters and others accepted the proposed time for the interview. After completing the interviews, follow-up sessions were conducted with participants to clarify their answers and ensure I accurately captured their responses. Each response was transcribed from the audio recording into a Microsoft Word document. After participants verified their transcribed interview responses, the data were coded using NVivo software. NVivo facilitated coding and categorization of participants' responses.

Data Analysis

A data analysis approach was used to extract themes from the data. The themes were then explored compared against the survey data from the PRC (2019). I examined the survey for items that aligned with the purpose of the study and related to citizens' trust in government, trust in the information communicated by the government, and perceived ability to determine what is true when using social media. The data sources

were examined to determine what participants thought about the role social media plays in supporting citizen trust in government, with a focus on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube platforms. This examination was then examined through PAT lens to understand how information asymmetry with US citizens' and government officials and/or politicians associated with social media, could influence perceptions of trust in government.

Saldana (2016) explained that data analysis and data collection should commence concurrently if the researcher is to avoid being overwhelmed during the data analysis process. Data analysis includes collecting, preparing, and organizing data, breaking up the data into themes through coding, and presenting findings using statistics and tables provided in the NVivo key codes. During data collection, audio recordings were organized into digital files and subjects were assigned pseudonyms. I assigned systematic codes using letters and numbers to represent the subjects as locators for easy analysis and reporting (see Creswell, 2009). This process of classifying the data using pseudonyms was essential to the data analysis process as participants had been assured confidentiality.

Data analysis then proceeded with a review of all transcripts, in which I became familiar with the contents of the transcriptions provided in the NVivo key codes table. I read the interview transcripts numerous times until familiarity was gained with the data NVivo key codes table. Additionally, during this stage initial findings emerged, which were sent to selected participants for member checking.

After completing this, coding of the transcripts began. I managed the data files in NVivo 12 to maintain all study related data within one system. Within this study, NVivo

was leveraged as a document repository to house the data. All participants' responses to each interview question were coded so I could explore the range of responses within each interview. The coding practice for this study followed Saldana's (2016) guidance, wherein a researcher defined *codes* as a word that represents a collective, conspicuous, essence capturing, and/or suggestive attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data in a NVivo codes table.

Passages of text such as words, phrases, and sentences related to the research question were then coded. All codes were assigned a brief title describing the code. A key list of codes was generated from NVivo and created from the PRC (2019) study in Table 1; this code listing was reviewed, and I began the process of data reduction by searching for similarities in the codes. Codes that shared similar sentiments were placed into larger categories, and I gave these categories a descriptive title. This was done for all codes until data were reduced into larger categories based on similarity. Aggregation of similar codes and categories continued until I created larger, overarching themes to represent the findings. Where appropriate, subthemes were also identified to render more easily understood categories that fit within a theme.

Table 1

Codes Generated from Interviews and Pew Research Center (2019) Data

Consumer/client interviews	Information technology professional interviews	Pew Research Center (2019) Survey Trust and Distrust in America survey
Mixed feelings about trusting social media	Trusting information depends on different factors	Discerning what is true
Hard to know what is true	Must do own research	Lack of trust
Factors contributing to trust of government	Depends on who is posting	Transparency
Direct communication to people	Factors contributing to trust of government	Communicating current events
Security	Accessibility	Depends on who is posting
Authenticity/truth telling	Direct communication	
Must do own research	Can reach wide audience through social media	
Screening information		

Following the development of themes, I proceeded with the integration of the PRC (2019) data. The data were secured through the PRC website for analysis. I then examined the survey items related to trust in government, communication with government, and social media to determine areas of convergence or divergence from the themes established using the interview data. These areas were then noted and used to provide depth within the report of the findings. Because I used the quantitative portion of the PRC study findings, no coding was necessary; however, I was able to use the PRC findings to provide additional context in the results reporting.

Table 2

Study Themes From Interview Codes and Pew Research Center (2019) Data

Interview codes	Pew Research Center (2019) Survey Trust and Distrust in America survey codes	Study themes
Discerning what is true	Discerning what is true	1: Truth Telling
Lack of trust	Lack of trust	2: Trust from Source- Driven Credibility
Must do own research	Authenticity/truth telling	3: Factors Contributing to Security and Accountability
Depends on who is posting	Must do own research	
Direct communication to people	Depends on who is posting	
Security	Screening information	
Accessibility	Transparency	
Authenticity/truth telling	Direct communication to people	
Can reach wide audience	Security	
Communicating current events	Accessibility	
Screening information	Can reach wide audience	
Transparency		

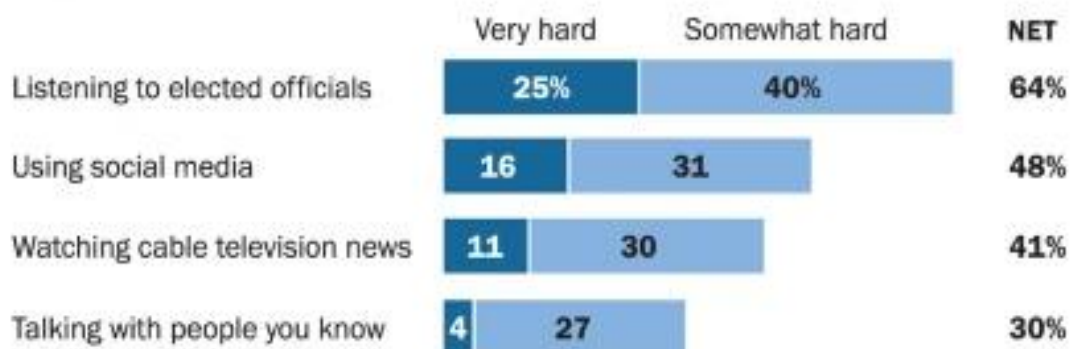
Data Triangulation With Pew Research Center Survey

The PRC (2019) Trust and Distrust in America survey was used to triangulate the thematized findings of this research study. In my study, participants' trust of social media and government was found to be dependent on who posted the information. Findings from the PRC (see Figure 2) indicated that survey respondents demonstrated some level of trust in fellow citizens that those individuals would act in procivic ways, which may

include the sharing of information through communication platforms such as social media.

Nearly two-thirds of adults find it hard to tell what's true when elected officials speak

% of U.S. adults who say it is ___ to tell the difference between what's true and what's not true when ...



Note: Figures may not add up due to rounding. Respondents who gave other answers or no answer are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 27-Dec. 10, 2018.

"Trust and Distrust in America"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Figure 2. Trust and Distrust in America (Survey I)

Note. From *Trust and Distrust in America*, by L. Rainie, S. Keeter, and A. Perrin, 2019, Pew Research Center (<https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2019/07/22/trust-and-distrust-in-america/>).

Figure 2 included that nearly 50% of respondents would consider changing their perspective on the government based on hearing views and perspectives different from their own (Rainie et al., 2019).

The PRC (2019) survey also supported the finding in the present study that participants have a difficult time discerning what is true or not, lack of trust, transparency, communicating current events, and depends on who is posting when

government officials communicate with them. However, when it comes to social media use, PRC research findings (see Figure 3) indicated that more survey respondents found it difficult for participants to discern the truth when listening to government officials than they did discerning the truth via social media.

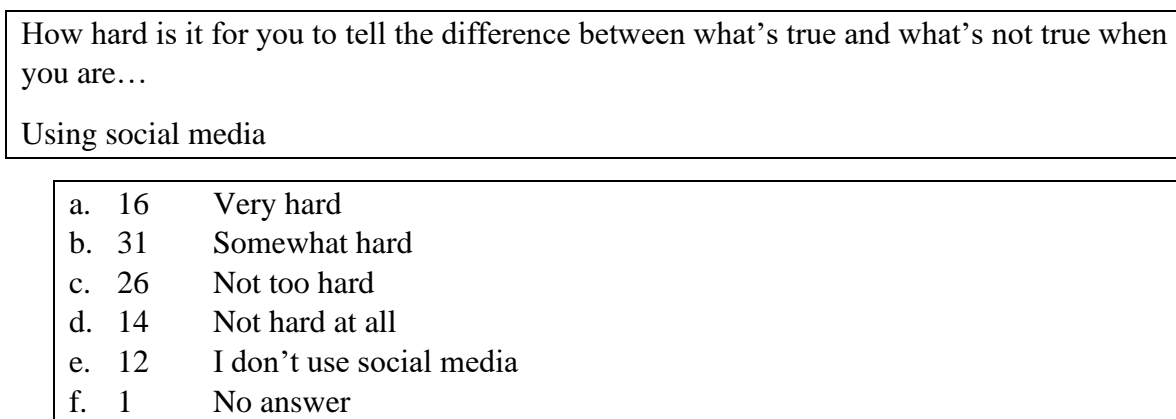


Figure 3. “Trust and Distrust in America” (Survey II). *Note.* From Survey conducted November 27–December 10, 2019. “Trust and Distrust in America” Pew Research Center.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in a qualitative research study requires reliability in the study (Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2014). Thus, it requires that issues of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are addressed. Therefore, checking the accurateness of the data collected from each research participants during and after the interviews, referred to as member checking is a sure way of establishing trustworthiness (Smith, 2011).

Accordingly, transcripts of the transcribed data were discussed during the latter part of the interview by the study participants for confirmation and assurance that they were not misinterpreted or misleading

Credibility

The credibility of a study is ensured if the study has minimal researcher bias and if sufficient time has been spent on understanding participants' responses (Billups, 2012). Credibility in this study was to establish all findings in this study as honest, reliable, and factual. Accomplishing integrity in research requires originality, expertise, and skill of the researcher (Billups, 2012). The process of data source triangulation was the strategy used in this study to ensure credibility of data. Triangulation is an important technique that establishes the credibility of data through cross verification from two or more sources. It refers to a combination of several research methods in the study of the same phenomenon (Billups, 2012). According to Yin (2009), the process of triangulating data sources also minimizes bias. A data case study design ensured the collection of multiple data sources. This study was designed to involve audio recording to ensure participants' responses were captured as they communicated their responses. In addition, this study employed member checking to allow participants an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of the data collected.

Participants were provided with the interview questions and the informed consent form prior to the interviews. To fulfill transcript review procedures, each participant was given enough time to authenticate their responses to the interview questions. All transcribed data were verified by participants as accurate, and no participant amended interview responses. This study was intended to explore the research questions through analysis of interviews and survey data from the PRC (2019). These sources were used to triangulate findings to enhance credibility.

Transferability

Research should be so detailed that readers can determine easily if the study or results can be transferred to another context (Houghton et al., 2013). The procedures for this research study were detailed thoroughly in Chapter 3. This thorough detail was intended to present how I recruited and contacted participants from the CBO's website. The recruitment procedures and how I conducted interviews were also described. Processes for data transcription and analysis were provided to enhance transferability. Finally, I utilized a method to analyze and summarize the study results in detail.

Dependability

To ensure dependability of the study, the transcribed data from the participants had to be accurate before being coded with NVivo software (Houghton et al., 2013). Before coding the transcribed data from each participant, I provided each participant with a copy of their interview responses. Participants were asked for clarification and elaboration, and participants received enough time to verify their transcribed data for accuracy after interviews. After the interviews were conducted, I coded each transcribed data in NVivo qualitative software to develop main themes from the coded nodes and sub nodes.

Confirmability

A study is confirmed when the responses presented are confirmed by the participants after the interview process (Billups, 2012). Each participant completed the interview process and confirmed their interview transcriptions were accurate.

Additionally, each interview was digitally recorded, and handwritten notes were taken for comparing and contrasting.

To achieve confirmability steps were taken to ensure findings appeared naturally from the collected data, and not from personal preferences. Therefore, it was important to recognize that personal feelings and experiences could potentially bias and influence the process unless they were moderated. In so doing, a conscious effort was made to directly quote the study participants rather than paraphrase their words or attempt to modify or change the views they expressed. After affirming the trustworthiness, the collected data were stored, and I maintained sole access to the data.

Results

The results of this study were based on the interpretation of the data using an iterative approach to determine the codes, categories, and themes to display correspondence and patterns. The analysis focused on the identification and interpretation of the relevant themes that occurred during leading interviews questions (1–9) to focus on answering interview questions (10-11), which in turns helps to examine the lens of PAT may influence social media exchange of information between government and citizens. The results are organized by the three themes that were developed from the coding of the data.

The principal research question for this study, What role does social media play in supporting citizen trust in government? was intended to explore if citizens' engagement with social media platforms influenced their perceptions of government agencies that they interacted with online. Specifically, participants used platforms such as Twitter,

Facebook, and YouTube, with some noting that they also used blogs and Instagram. This was conducted through the lens of PAT to situate a discussion regarding the information exchange between government and citizens and to determine if that exchange via social media influenced perceptions of transparency and accessibility in citizen relations.

In the leading interview protocol questions, clients in the sample embraced internet use with 11 (85%) clients of the 13 who provided a frequency of use indicating that they used the internet daily. Similarly, most clients ($n = 10$, 77%) reported that they used social media to access information hourly, daily, or weekly. These findings are congruent with the data received from the IT coordinators, with five (56%) respondents stating that platform users access information through social media platforms daily and the remaining indicating weekly usage. When queried about the purpose of their internet use, the most frequent responses were for research ($n = 5$) and to remain in contact ($n = 5$). P3 discussed his use of Facebook to keep in contact stating, “I like Facebook because it helps me keep in contact with people. Instead of Facebook, I call it Nose book.” As a whole, these findings reflect a sample that exhibited familiarity with the internet and social media use.

Despite the apparent comfort with using the internet and social media, few clients used social media to access government websites. When asked about their use of social media to connect with government sites, five participants (38%) reported engagement with government through social media. Although most clients did not engage with government using social media, 56% ($n = 5$) of IT coordinators connected with government or government officials using social media. P3 provided an example of using

Instagram to stay informed, stating, “Like, so, clicking a link to social media, mainly Instagram, have a really good friend who’s the Mayor of Compton. So, a lot of times I connect to her. Like go see what she’s doing based on Instagram.” For those who connected with government using social media, links placed on websites provided the vehicle to guide citizens to connect with government.

Search Engines, Social Media Platforms, and Ratings

In the leading interview protocol questions most participating clients ($n = 10$, 71%) identified Google as their preferred search engine. Facebook was the most frequently used social media platform among clients ($n = 13$) and agencies as posited by coordinators ($n = 9$). YouTube was also popular among clients, with six respondents indicating that they used the platform. Similarly, IT coordinators illuminated the prevalence of Facebook as a popular platform that citizens use within their agency ($n = 9$). However, although Facebook was one of the most popular platforms for clients to use, many participants used a combination of social media platforms ($n = 10$). This trend of Facebook and YouTube popularity was emulated in the client and coordinator ratings of social media platforms. Facebook and YouTube were the highest rated social media platforms among participants in the study. P1 provided the following insight regarding Facebook:

I would rate Facebook an 8. I really think it does provide a service and it is a way to be able to communicate[—to] not only socialize but [also] do business. It’s a very useful tool [that] doesn’t cost anything. It also is a big thing when you’re exposed to greater business starting out trying to get the word out or something is

happening. You can get out to so many people [with just] one entry. I think that that's a benefit.

P2 opined, "Facebook I would rate an 8 because of the communication with [distant] family." Facebook's high ratings were linked to the ability to connect people and businesses, and the ability to provide a variety of information. Akin to this, YouTube was rated highly because of the vast availability of information on the platform. P6 rated YouTube highly because of her perception of the platform as a source of "accurate information." P11 provided, "I would also rate YouTube an 8, easy to use and educational." Respondents valued how the social media platforms were able to facilitate connections and this value was apparent in their reported ratings.

It is important to note in the leading protocol questions that although many participants rated the social media platforms highly because they perceived them as robust sources of information, several participants rated the platforms negatively because they doubted the information posted to the sites. P9 rated Facebook as a 5 "because of the integrity." Regarding challenges to trusting information communicated through social media, P13 stated, "We don't know as users how much to believe or not." When looking for what can be considered truth on the internet, P7 illustrated how doubts of the veracity of information affected rating with the following:

I would rate Facebook 7 and the reason why I say 7 is because [when] we get information, you have to do your research to locate to find out if the information is true, so that the 3% is me trying to find other sources to coordinate information so I may determine what is true and false.

However, the findings indicate that despite the negative impact from inability to trust information without sourcing it across platforms, clients and coordinators still frequently engaged with the internet and social media platforms.

These sentiments from respondents echoed the findings of the PRC (2019). This study from the PRC highlighted trends in Americans' trust in government and elected officials. The PRC data showed that nearly two thirds of adults found it hard to determine the truth from elected officials. This lack of trust was also present in interviewees' responses related to social media. Within the PRC study, Americans admitted that at times they had trouble distinguishing the truth from falsehood from certain sources. For example, 50% of respondents asserted that it was hard to tell the difference between what was true and what was not true, transparency, communicating current events, and depends on who is posting when government officials communicate with them when using social media (PRC, 2019). As such, analysis of the interview data from the present study indicated that communication was a factor when considering the influence of social media on citizens' trust in government.

Theme 1: Truth Telling

Theme 1 was generated based on the codes discerning what is true, lack of trust, and authenticity truth telling. IT client participants expressed mixed feelings when asked if they trusted social media and information posted on social media sites. These statements led to the creation of this subtheme. IT client participants highlighted that it was not necessarily the case that they did not trust the social media site itself, but rather, who was posting the information they accessed. When asked about trust in social media,

P2 said, “Yes and no. It depends on the source, just like anything else.” P3 also felt that trusting social media depended on the information being posted. “It comes down to what type of information, how personal or confidential it may be,” said P3. According to P6, trust in social media also relied on the trust a person has for the individual providing information. P6 said, “It depends upon who it is—like, when most people make historical claims about different things that happen. Black history, African history, Holocaust, and political tragedies I search for myself.”

Participants were concerned with the security of social media platforms. P3 indicated that trust in these sites could be compromised by lack of data security. P3 stated, “Because of past security issues surrounding social media and that’s with all of the platforms. There’s been some type of security breach.” P5 believed that trust depends on the social media platform, stating, “Some you don’t trust.” Similarly, P9 did not trust social media because of security and privacy concerns, saying,

I know they’re watching; they’re gathering data on Facebook. They did the grand social experiment to see if they started injecting stuff into Facebook to see if they could get people to be depressed. So that made me very distrustful of Facebook.

Other participants did not trust the people posting on social media platforms. “No, I don’t trust,” said P10. “The reason is because as I’ve grown, I have learned that before I believe information, I have to do my research on the information.” P10 does not believe secondhand information and does research to “find out what’s real and what’s not.” P13 stated, “No, because people lie on purpose at times.” The PRC (2019) survey also supported the finding at 50% in the present study that participants have a difficult time

discerning what is true or not, and lack trust when government officials communicate with them when it comes to social media use.

Theme 2: Trust from Source-Driven Credibility

Citizens must do their own research, depends on who is posting, and screening information led to the creation of this theme, as these codes illustrated passages in participants' interviews that spoke to the reasons why participants may trust or not trust information. IT professional participants described the different factors leading them to trust information presented on social media. According to P1, trust of social media "depends on current news and advertisement." P4 took a pragmatic approach to trusting social media. "I take everything with a grain of salt," said P4. "You know, because, like I said, again there's so much stuff out there, I would say it depends on the sources. "I'll have to check on it myself." P12, also an IT professional, said that trust of information on social media "depends on who it is from [,] . . . who is posting it." Like P4, P12 would have to follow up with independent research to know whether something an individual posts to a social media platform is true. P22 said, "I do trust a lot of the content that I see on social media when it's coming from people who I trust." P24 felt the same way, stating that "it depends on the relationship" that someone has with the person sharing information on social media. The PRC (2019) survey finding showed 50% of survey participants having difficulties discerning what is true or not, transparency, and communicating events when using social media directly with government officials using social media.

Theme 3: Factors Contributing to Security and Accountability

The third theme was created around the following codes: direct communication to people, security, accessibility, and can reach wide audiences. These codes all illustrated those factors that led participants to trust the government through social media channels. IT client participants identified the factors that contributed to their trust of government when social media sites were involved. IT client participants' responses to the question "If social media platforms play a role in trusting government, what would be the contributing factors?" took two broad forms: authenticity and knowing there is a real person behind the computer. "It would be validity and authenticity," said P6. "People look at it as a source of accurate information. So . . . the whole thing is how . . . you know what the information you get is authentic and that's the whole problem today." P14 also felt that authenticity was important, saying, "The contributing factor is accountability to the general public through Facebook." To ensure this accountability, P3 felt that "the social media platform would have to provide me with some type of evidence to support trust."

IT client participants also felt that a real person behind the social media site they used was important for gaining their trust. P7 said, "The contributing factor is . . . the person responding to your social media platform." P8 felt similarly, wanting to know that a person was behind the information on social media. "A direct person getting information out to the public" was important to P8. "That would be a reason why it could play a role in the population's trust," P8 continued. P10 also said that having someone trustworthy on the inside of the social media platform was important. "We would need

some person inside of government—local or federal level—who uses Facebook [whom] we can trust with reliable information,” continued P10. Participants 18 and 20 agreed, believing the contributing factor to be their ability to speak to people directly.

Both IT clients and IT professionals were asked what the positive factors were that impact social media platforms in citizens’ trust of the government. For some IT client participants, an important factor was security. P3 stated, “The impacts are accountability by ID and password,” indicating that the social media site should be secure for individuals to trust it. P5 also thought that “secure accounts, passwords, and IDs” were important for enhancing trustworthiness. P13 believed that trustworthiness was enhanced when social media platforms are “difficult to hack.” “Some of the positive factors that impact citizens’ trust in government are passwords to secure accounts,” said P14. Interestingly, IT professionals did not talk about the importance of security on social media platforms as impacting trust in government.

One positive factor that both IT clients and IT professionals spoke of was direct communication. Five IT client participants believed that social media platforms were important for communicating directly with politicians. None of the IT client participants elaborated this point, but IT professional participants did. P4 could not think of a better tool for communication between a politician and the public than social media platforms. P4 said,

Social media will be a tool for that person to be able to use to connect with civilians, I guess you could say. But it will be based on the individual, the person that’s placed as representative of a certain agency of the government. So I guess

they will need to put themselves out there of, like, in a transparent way. So it will be based on the individual, not on social media.

P17 thought social media could be very effective for direct communication as well because, “you can’t just typically walk in [to a meeting with a politician], so having a direct connection with the individuals” was an easy way to facilitate meeting through social media. P18 also believed social media platforms helped citizens and government officials and politicians build relationships and connect with one another. P24 referred to this as “building a bridge between citizen and government directly for real-time communication.”

Through government officials’ use of social media, participants believed that this positive direct communication could impact a wide audience and thereby instill more trust in the government. P20, an IT client, shared, “I think the positive factors that impact social media platforms are it may inform a mass of people and the information is transferred quickly.” IT professional participants felt the same. P21 said, “The role platforms play is [to] reach out to multiple people and we can trust the information will get to the masses.” P25 believed this direct communication of information to many citizens at the same time was “a positive cause for the common good for healthy communities.”

Finally, IT client participants believed a positive factor influencing their trust was when government officials told the truth through social media platforms and were held accountable for this. P7 said it was important that government officials are “telling the truth and saying what [they] mean” on social media platforms. P6 described a way to do

this through disclosure. P7 equated this to old news broadcasts in which for each political viewpoint expressed, there was a counterpoint. P6 thought that this could be enacted on social media platforms as well to “authenticate equal access to different political paradigms.” P18 wanted to see “clear transparency for all citizens” using social media platforms. The PRC (2019) survey supported the finding at 50% in the present study that participants have a difficult time discerning what is true or not and depending on who is posting when government officials communicate with them when it comes to social media use.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the role social media plays in supporting citizen trust in government, with a focus on social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. This study analyze asymmetric information assimilation with US citizens’ and government officials and politicians through the lens of the principal–agent theory. Specifically, in this study, I explored the role of social media plays in supporting citizen–government relations. The research question guiding this study was, What role does social media play in supporting U.S. citizens’ trust in government?

This chapter provided a presentation of purpose of this study and the research questions the study sought to answer. It also identified the description of the research participants, a detailed description of the settings, and the data collection and data analyses procedures. The data were content analyzed to allow the placement of related data into categories. This analysis method allowed me to expound on themes based on their occurrences from specific responses. The results of the study were developed from

interview data and surveys from the PRC (2019) Trust and Distrust in America survey. From the three data sources, I identified factors in participants that were similar to support trust in government through social media platforms playing a role in U.S. citizens' and government relations.

With the principal question, participants were asked what role social media platform (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, and YouTube) played influencing transparency and accessibility. Additionally, I examined factors that contributed to citizen trust in government relations through social media.

IT clients, IT coordinators, interviews, and survey results from the PRC's (2019) study indicated that participants demonstrated trust in social media platforms, and these platforms did inform participants' views on their trust in government (see Figure 4). IT clients and coordinators addressed security concerns related to trust in social media platforms. The interviews with both consumers/clients and IT professional as well as the PRC data indicated social media platforms could be useful in enhancing trust in government, with considerations made for how communication was structured and building relationships between parties. Overall, the data sources suggested that with more government transparency through the public communicating directly with government officials and politicians, citizen trust in the government could be improved. Moreover, direct interactions between the agent and the principal, such as through social media platforms, may increase perceptions of trust and enhance citizen–government relations. This trust is predicated on using PAT to gauge authenticity of those officials or politicians on the other end of the social media platform. Participants believed that if they

could trust the official or politician using the social media platform, they could trust the information that person was providing.

Figure 4

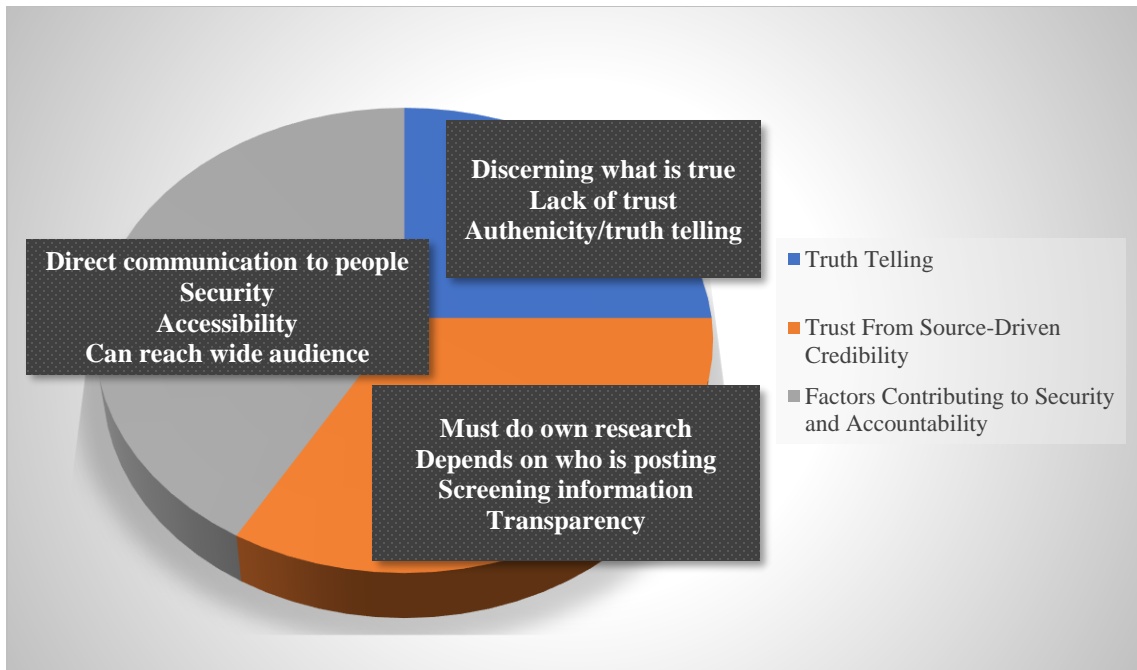


Figure 4. Pew Research Center (2019) Data and interview code sharing by study theme on perceptions of trust through social media

Chapter 5 contains an interpretation of the findings from the research, and a conversation about the limitations of the study and inference related to social change. The chapter concludes with a recommendation for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the idea of trust in government relations through asymmetric information assimilation through the lens of the PAT. There was limited research on trust in government relations through social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, blogs, and YouTube) and asymmetric information assimilation using the lens of PAT. Thus, this case study included focus on the three social media platform groups, clients/consumers and information technology (IT) coordinators, and data from the Pew Research Center (PRC) 2019) Trust and Distrust in America survey to explore citizen–government trust relations. The virtual nature of social media influences citizen trust in ways that are not fully understood and that researchers still need to explore. Therefore, the study was designed to explore and add to understanding of citizen trust in government related to the use of government social media platforms. A qualitative case study approach was used to explore the role that social media plays in supporting citizen trust in government.

Key findings from three different data sources showed consistency with prior research. Kim and Lee (2012) concluded that government website participation had an indirect relationship with citizen trust, since social media participation increased perceptions of personal development and transparency, which consequently led to more trust in the government. Instead, the three data sources shared similar perceptions of understanding relationships with citizen trust and government through the lens of principal–agent theory (PAT) such as discerning what is true, lack of trust, and authenticity/truth telling. Identifying data sources through the PAT lens revealed

similarities such as citizens must do their own research, information depends on who is posting, citizens must screen information given on social media, and transparency of information. In addition to viewing data sources through the lens of PAT, similarities included citizens having direct communication to government officials or politicians, citizen security based on social media, citizens having accessibility, and can reach wide audience using social media. After comparing the three data sources, the findings were found consistent with PAT. The consistency was identified through the direct relationship in an asymmetrical context existing from adequate information in a direct relationship with government officials or politicians reducing negative citizen perceptions of trust concluded in the finding from each three data sources. Additionally, citizen trust in government and social media participation led to increased perceptions in all three data sources. The positive social change in this study reflects a direct relationship existing with citizens and government officials or politicians through social media platforms. However, all three data sources indicated that if a citizen does not have adequate information about the government, it may produce negative citizen perceptions of trust in the government. This was due to the capacity of the PAT approach to gauge authenticity of those officials and politicians on the other end of the social media platform providing information of trust to build a holistic picture of accountability based on the elements from PAT. In return, how citizens respond to information can significantly determine how effective these government social media efforts are and how these efforts may potentially affect the ongoing relationship between a government and its citizens. The

findings also revealed citizens trust government information if they trust the officials providing the information.

These data sources included both interviews and data from the PRC (2019) Trust and Distrust in America survey specified social media platforms usage enhanced trust in government, with considerations for how communication is structured and relationships building processes are created and interpret through the lens of PAT.

The goal in discussing the findings of this research was to interpret the findings as indicated by the responses of the participants to the research questions. These findings provide the bases for preliminary conclusions drawn from the research study. The discussion in Chapter 5 concludes by offering recommendations for further studies on similar topics that this research study may not have covered. The conclusion of this qualitative study is also presented in this chapter.

Summary of Key Findings

According to Kim and Lee (2012), access to and participation in government can help establish mutual trust between citizens and government, which may lead to increased trust on a more individual level. According to this perspective, overall public support for the government can be improved by bridging the gap between public expectation and public perception of governmental functions, which may include transparency, better access to online information, and an interactive platform that helps citizens to understand and respond to changes in economic policy, political scandals, policy failures, and social climate and culture (Welch et al., 2005).

However, researchers have not used PAT to understand the role of social media in developing citizens' perceptions of trust and perceptions that government is acting in their interest. This theoretical foundation is appropriate for the interdisciplinary nature of government websites and social media research (Bannister & Connolly, 2011).

I focused on three themes coming from interviews with the study participants compared to the PRC (2019) survey: Truth Telling, Trust from Source-Driven Credibility, and Factors Contributing to Security and Accountability.

Interpretations/Discussion of the Findings

The findings suggest that there is a great need to increase government interaction with citizens through social media. However, previous researchers theorized that government websites and social media can influence citizen trust (see Tolbert & Mossberger, 2006; Welch et al., 2005). These services have been shown to influence the level of trust in government indirectly through satisfaction with the e-government services (e-satisfaction). Likewise, researchers believe the use of social media by the government is related to indirect trust in the government through perceived transparency of the government (e-transparency; Tolbert & Mossberger, 2006; Welch et al., 2005). Kim and Lee (2012) concluded that government website participation had an indirect relationship with citizen trust, since social media participation increased perceptions of personal development and transparency, which consequently led to more trust in the government.

The findings from this study extend the knowledge in the discipline by what has been found in the peer-reviewed literature described in Chapter 2. For example, PAT has

been used to define federal and state government digital utilization, which led to greater transparency and trust (Barber, 1983). However, using PAT to describe government website participation for an indirect relationship concluded that social media usage may increase perception of personal development and transparency, which could lead to more trust. My findings confirm similar outcomes to prior research. For instance, truth telling, trust from source-driven credibility, and factors contributing to security and accountability consist of having to citizens discern for oneself what is true from what is not true is defined as (*when discussing or examining trust*), lack of trust is defined as (*the expectation of good intentions or fairness and good faith*), and authenticating/telling the truth that is obtain from information gather from social media platforms is defined as (*trust is multidimensional*). Furthermore, citizens must do their own research is defined as (*context is important*) authenticating information from social media platform depends on who is posting is defined as (*relational trust*), screening information and transparency for reliability is defined as (*whether looking at responsibility or more generalized trust*). Finally, data sources specified citizens direct communication to government official and/or politicians to direct build relationships is defined as (*relational trust*), citizen security based on social media usage is defined as (*good intentions or fairness and good faith*), citizens having accessibility, and reaching a wide range audience is defined as (*context is important*).

Participants felt social media platforms are useful for communicating directly with government officials and politicians, which provided understanding for creating direct relationships using a social media platform. In creating a direct relationship with

government officials researcher concluded that there is a correlation with the elements of PAT as participants considered themselves as the principal and the politician as the agent interacting digitally with a more direct relationship communicating information of trust, one to another which was a positive factor influencing their trust in government. This was supported by analyzed surveys from the PRC (2019) indicating that trust did not involve the social media site itself but rather who was posting the information of trust.

Through prior work of principal–agent models provide a foundation for understanding contracts under asymmetric relationships, Pérez-Castrillo and Macho-Stadler (2018) provided the conceptual framework by which the study’s elements of analysis were examined, defined, and conceptualized. Then, through their collective work, Broadbent et al. (1996) offered another conceptual perspective by which the problem of the research was examined and explained. PAT is referred to as *relational trust*. This trust based on the expectation of good intentions or fairness and good faith. Tyler and Degoe (1996) cautioned Barber (1983) that trust is multidimensional and when discussing or examining trust, whether looking at responsibility or more generalized trust, context is important.

Limitations of the Study

As mentioned earlier, limitations are integral characteristics of any qualitative case study research design. Recognizing their reality and directness in discussing them before they are pointed out by a reader is not only prudent but also exemplifies a clear and thoughtful analyses of the research problem, and a thorough review of the pertinent literature, and the assessment of the suitable method chosen for studying the problem. It

is therefore significant to note that the limitations listed here did not deteriorate the validity of this research nor did they impact the results and conclusions in any way. One of the limitations is discussed within the context of methodological limitation.

Methodological limitations, called *sample limitations*, are those limitations involving the relationship between concepts of analyses and the sample size (Ellard-Gray et al.'s 2015).

For example, the 23 IT clients and IT coordinators participants interviewed and PRC (2019) surveys may not consistently and/or proportionally represent the targeted groups.

This was due in part to the changeability of internet and social media users. By changeability, I mean there were few participants in this study who claimed truth telling was due to trusting internet and social media and deciphering what is true within this study. Accordingly, few participants in this study defined their concerns through similar influences using social media such as lack of trust, authenticity/truth telling, must do own research, depends on who is posting, screening information, and transparency. These limitations were anticipated and overcome by proper vetting and the norms set for inclusion. However, because the quality of the findings was dependent on the quality of data collected, a purposive sampling strategy was used in selecting participants very carefully for interviewing.

Other limitations were that study participants may not have been honest and truthful during interviews, or willing or able to communicate effectively to share their perceptions and lived experiences regarding the phenomenon. Additionally, trustworthiness of information can pose a limitation for qualitative studies. Also, limitations are the essential nature of qualitative research, as mentioned by those who

analyzed qualitative studies. Accordingly, there were prejudice and individual interpretations in the planning, management, execution, and evaluation of the study (see Yin, 2014). The issue of subjectivity was fundamental given the fact that, as a social and behavioral worker in the field, I had a predetermined idea in regard to the social and behavioral field as it relates to the political environment. Consequently, these prejudices may have predisposed the direction of the study and its conclusion. However, these prejudices and/or biases were alleviated by discriminating between observations and reality. In this regard, I limited active participation on internet and social media forums pertaining e-government. This was done to reinforce the accuracy of the study and its findings (see Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002).

Data collected from these participants through informal interviews and surveys allowed conclusions to be made with assurance while also providing recompense for the size limitation. This supports (Creswell, 2009) dispute for sampling strategy used in selecting study participants, and settings for the study, enhance the understanding of the purpose, problem and research question. As such, it was hoped that careful vetting and selecting the participants certified quality of the data collected. Data collection occurred through semi structured interviews and detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, social networking material, documents, and reports) to help triangulate results and enhance credibility.

Credibility of a study can be enhanced by reducing researcher bias. This study audio-recorded to ensure that it captured participants' responses as communicated by them. In addition, participants were afforded an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of

the data collected. This study was designed to demonstrate these actions throughout all collaboration with research participants.

Acknowledgment of these limitations not only is transparent but also, as Patton (2002) stated, provides an opportunity for further research. Additionally, it has academic integrity accommodations as it provides an opportunity to demonstrate to the audience that limitations were anticipated in advance and steps were taken to reduce their impact on the integrity of the study.

This study was conducted exclusively in the United States. Because the study was about social media platforms users in Oakland, California, it would have been plausible to conduct the research on location in Oakland, California. However, because this was a case study of the sociopolitical behavior of participants and not an observation of their culture, as in an ethnographic study, the locale had no bearing on the findings and conclusions of the research.

Clients/consumers and IT coordinators participated without any problems except for five clients/consumers who did not show. This study was not designed to interview five clients/consumers, so this study anticipated interviewing additional clients/consumers and IT coordinators in my study due to no call, no show. In this study, there were no challenges conducting the interviews with the remaining 23 participants. The clients/consumers may not have been as straightforward about some negative facts regarding internet usage compared to IT coordinators from community-based organizations, who may have wanted to share their frustration about their social media platform experiences, which could have become an issue of confirmability (Billups,

2012. Challenges with confirmability may have appeared in the study if each participant completed the interview process and not confirmed their interview transcriptions were accurate.

Recommendations

As previously discussed, this study only focused on City of Oakland, California, IT clients and IT professionals as well as researcher-analyzed surveys from the PRC (2019). There is a need for further research to better understand the impact of social media platforms and other factors of other groups at other political levels. A more robust research on key elements of PAT such as trust is multidimensional, when discussing or examining trust, whether looking at responsibility or more generalized trust. Future qualitative research might also focus on additional extending the scope of study across the United States and social media platforms (LinkedIn, Tumblr, and Snapchat) to increase understanding of perceived levels of digital government information as they relate to issues of trust in government. The present study was not designed to examine the impact of additional social media platforms such as LinkedIn, Tumblr, and Snapchat. Therefore, further research on additional social media platforms as related to the role that social media plays in supporting citizen trust in government is highly recommended.

Further research was recommended on different demographics such as age, gender, ethnicity, and social economic status. More research was recommended on social media platforms and citizens' trust in government in relation to security concerns. Further qualitative research was also recommended on how and why individuals conduct informal research on government officials and information that supports their trust in

government. Additionally, online government services have been shown to influence the level of trust in government indirectly through satisfaction with e-government services (e-satisfaction). For instance, Lee and Kwak (2011), in *An Open Government Implementation Model: Moving to Increased Public Engagement*, argued against not having expanding communication as related to trust within digital environment. Lee and Kwak suggested that e-government use, specifically social media, may increase citizens' accessibility to e-government service of choice. However, as these specific prescriptions suggested, the government must focus its attention on meeting social media goals if these goals are to be met (Moon, 2002). Likewise, researchers believe the use of social media by the government is related to indirect trust in the government through perceived transparency of the government (e-transparency; Tolbert & Mossberger, 2006; Welch et al., 2005). Welch et al. (2005) reported a significant relationship between government websites, social media, and trust in government.

Additional research was recommended on how officials' political ethos, or personas, are perceived in social media platforms and how this support trust. Finally, longitudinal research is recommended to examine how trust in government via social media platforms changes over time in relation to topical issues and changes in social media use. Also, the sample size of 23 may not have adequately represented the population of interest, particularly for reasons which limit on demographics as previously cited. Although a qualitative research places no limits on sample size, increasing the sample size could compensate for the for the demographic limitations of the study.

Implications

Practical or scholarly, national, and local level the implications for social change in this study are focused on improving citizen–government relations in the age of social media platforms for the achievement of strengthening trust in democracy in the digital era. However, these implications can only be comprehended if government’s major contributing agents found common grounds whereupon their interests may converge on increasing efficiency and transparency within its citizens’ trust and government relations. In that respect, Barber’s (1983) interest merging principle reinforced both the theoretical and principled bases for the accomplishment and achievement of these common implications.

However, one could argue that Barber’s (1983) interest merging principle was premised on economic, political actions, and perceptions that individuals benefit from in the political environment. Therefore, its implications for trust in government post internet and social media context would seem remote and incomparable. The common feature among all the social media platforms mentioned is that they form the ability to impact directly communicate with individuals positively or negatively by way of the internet.

Barber’s (1983) interest merging principle, PAT, provided the lens through which understanding the relationship between a principal, or governed party, and the agent, or governing party were evaluated, planed, guided, and directed toward the collective interest of the groups upon which they could promote positivity trust in democracy for the greater nation and/or world interest.

Therefore, examining through Barber's (1983) theory, this study contributes to positive social change by identifying a direct relationship exists, in which a citizen does not have adequate information about the government, then it may reduce negative citizen perceptions of trust in the government. On the other hand, direct interactions between the agent and the principal, such as social media platforms allow, increase positive perceptions of trust and enhance citizen–government relations. This is because Barber's interest theory provides a theoretical basis for understanding those factors that are reciprocated within groups of interest upon support justifiable for building trust efforts.

Findings from the study show three data sources two different IT users and PRC surveys having similar government trust relations. Nonetheless, IT users and PRC surveys have a PAT interest in a supportive way, which is needed to enable the development of appropriate trust and enhance to ensure a stable and comfortable citizen–government trust relationship. This information provides invaluable information about IT users and PRC surveys engaged with social media and government through the lens of PAT, of which there was little knowledge as it related to trust in government. It also provides invaluable information regarding government social media platforms and citizen–government trust relations.

Taking everything else into account, citizen's trust in government through PAT, would not only break down barriers between adversaries but also create opportunities for citizens' and government officials' seizing the moment of change within the context of trust by eradicating social media platforms and e-government line of differentiations. This gesture a pledge to citizens' trust in government and a revival to transparency and

the reestablishment of citizens and government relations that may deter future mistrust efforts on a digital platform of communication.

Conclusion

This study was designed to explore to what extent the use of social media platforms support U.S. citizens' trust in government. A secondary purpose was to explore how the use of social media platforms impact citizens' perceptions of government information online with a focus on U.S. citizens' use of social media platforms. There were many instances where authors theorized applying PAT in the study of a democratic system led to increased government domination and control through its analysis of relationships with out a PAT lens, which in turn led to prescriptive choices being made for citizens. PAT allows for examining citizens' belief that government is acting in their interests with this in mind researchers found encouragement in ideas supported by citizen trust relationships in government. Upon the discovery of this information, an aggressive literature review on the concept of PAT was conducted.

Results indicate the three data sources, two IT users and PRC surveys as related to government trust relations believe direct communication through social media platforms creates direct relationships with government officials and politicians. However, IT clients, IT professionals, and PRC surveyors believed social media platforms could be useful and that trust can be improved. They also believed that the government can be directly more transparent with digital communicating with government officials, which were positive factors that supported their trust in the government. This trust is predicated on using PAT to gauge authenticity of those officials or politicians on the other end of the

social media platform. Participants believed that if they could trust the official or politician using the social media platform, they could trust the information that person was providing.

Although the findings have added meaning and understanding to the concept of PAT the citizens' and government relations issues highlighted but not discussed in detail due to the studies delimitations, they are suggestive of the participants who were from the same narrow geographical region. This may be especially true of those results specific to interactions with a local government. As such there is an opportunity for further research on numerous social media platforms not included in this study.

Justifiably, social media is comprised of many different components. However, information online has remained the most predominant issue in the use of e-government and social media. Citizens, politicians, and policymakers must all understand that reliance on social media platforms and e-government is an externality. So, in this research it is primarily the trust in political information conveyed on social media platform that affects the citizenry who choose to engage in governmental political processes. Enhancing U.S. government social media platform capacity so that the benefits will affect parties who choose to incur them would be the prudent thing to do. The United States is gifted with great digital resources. However, mismanagement of these resources remains the single most important challenge facing social media.

Finally, this was a question of online information and what is nationally in the best interest of all citizens regardless of internet and/or social media affiliation and whether all citizens should engage in government politically. The result leads to more

positive perceived levels of about citizens' trust in government. The results would change the *how* and *why* questions to understand the support of social media on citizens' trust in government. The results of this study have illustrated that IT users and PRC surveys bear the greatest responsibility for exploring the role social media platforms play in U.S. citizens' trust in government relations through the lens of PAT as reflected in the study as supporting trust in government with the opportunity of stabilizing trust in a political climate.

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Appendix A: Recruitment for Identifying Participants

Dear (Name),

My name is Terrence M. Cole and I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am conducting dissertation research on what role does social media play in supporting U.S. citizen's trust in government. This study seeks to provide information about whether and how interacting with U.S. government through the role of social media impacts and mediate the link between the implementation process of policy goals, effectively providing services, and levels of citizen trust in government. The purpose of the study is to explore the role social media plays in supporting citizen trust in government, with a focus on government social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, and YouTube) using an asymmetric information assimilation through the lens of the PAT. The findings of this study could serve to improve the understanding of whether and how government can use social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, and YouTube) to support trust in citizen and government relations. Increased understanding about the role social media play in creating social change can increase the ability government agencies have to improve the impact of trust citizens have of government by using social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, and YouTube).

I understand that your time is imperative to you and I appreciate your consideration to contribute in this study. However, any information collected during our meetings will be set aside as sternly confidential.

Please feel free to contact me at your earliest convenience to schedule a date and time that we can meet below by telephone. I look forward to hearing from you.

Doctoral Candidate
Walden University

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

Date: _____

Location: _____

Name of
Interviewer: _____Name of
Interviewee: _____

Interview Number: 1

1. Do you use the internet, how often and why?
2. Which internet search engine is important to you?
3. Which social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, and YouTube) do you have an account?
4. How often do you use your social media platform (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, and YouTube) to access information?
5. Which social media platform (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, and YouTube) tools, processes, resources are the most important for effective transparency and accessibility?
6. In your opinion, what are the biggest challenges social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, and YouTube) hindering effective transparency and accessibility?
7. If you had to rate 1-10 with the lowest score being 1 and the highest being 10 social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, and YouTube) how would you rate and why?
8. Do you trust information shared on social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, and YouTube) and why?
9. Do you use social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, and YouTube) to access government websites and why?
10. If social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, and YouTube) played a role in trusting government, how and what would be the contributing factors?
11. What are some positive factors you think that impact social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, and YouTube) in citizens trusting government?

Appendix C: Interview Protocol
(Non-Profit Agency Information Technology Coordinator)

Interview Protocol

Date: _____

Location: _____

Name of
Interviewer: _____

Name of
Interviewee: _____

Interview Number: 2

1. Which social media platform (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, and YouTube) is frequently used by citizens with your agency?
2. Which social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, and YouTube) have the most account?
3. How often do users access social media platform (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, and YouTube) to access information?
4. Which social media platform (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, and YouTube) is most important for effective transparency and accessibility?
5. In your opinion, what are the biggest challenges social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, and YouTube) hindering users effective transparency and accessibility?
6. If you had to rate 1-10 with the lowest score being 1 and the highest being 10 social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, and YouTube) how would you rate and why?
7. Do you trust information shared on social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, and YouTube) and why?
8. Would you use social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, and YouTube) to access government websites and why?

9. If social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, and YouTube) played a role in trusting government, how and what would be the contributing factors?
10. What are some positive factors you think that impact social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, and YouTube) in citizens trusting government?