FACEBOOK USAGE BY SMALL-TOWN GOVERNMENTS: A MULTI-CASE STUDY IN

SOUTHWESTERN VIRGINIA

by

Adam Luke Tolbert

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University

2023

FACEBOOK USAGE BY SMALL-TOWN GOVERNMENTS: A MULTI-CASE STUDY IN

SOUTHWESTERN VIRGINIA

by Adam Luke Tolbert

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

2023

APPROVED BY:

Ronald J. Hy, Ph.D., Committee Chair

Greg L. Mathison, Ph.D., Committee Member

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this mixed methods multi-case study is to analyze (1) how small-town governments are using the Facebook social media platform to serve residents; (2) the results that are experienced by the small-town governments and residents in the town's use of Facebook; and (3) the factors that influence the small-town governments to use Facebook to serve residents. The setting for the study is three small-town governments (Abingdon, Lebanon, and Marion) located in Southwestern Virginia. The theoretical framework guiding this study is the T3 Framework for Innovation by Dr. Sonny Magana. This theoretical framework, originally created to assess the use of technology in education, can be applied to public administration in the study of the adoption and utilization of Facebook by small-town governments. The T3 model can be used to understand the exact level (T1: translational, T2: transformational, or T3: transcendent) at which small-town governments are utilizing the Facebook social media platform as part of their e-government services.

The study highlights the similarities and differences among the three small-town governments in their approach and the experiences in the use of the Facebook social media platform to serve residents. Data was collected through analysis of documents (Facebook page content and Insights reports) and interviews. Recommendations are provided to the towns that will strengthen each town's use of the Facebook social media platform to serve residents.

Keywords: social media, local government, Facebook, e-government

Dedication

First and foremost, I dedicate this dissertation to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. With Christ all things are possible.

Secondly, I dedicate this dissertation to my family.

Finally, I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to all the faculty and staff of the schools and educational institutions that I attended throughout my educational pursuits who supported and encouraged me with my education, goals, and aspirations.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

John 3:16 (KJV)

I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

Philippians 4:13 (KJV)

Acknowledgments

I would like to extend my utmost appreciation to Dr. Ronald J. Hy and Dr. Greg Mathison for serving as the chair and reader of my committee, respectively. Each spent countless hours critiquing and offering feedback on my study and project plans and reviewing countless submission drafts. At times, I thought it was going to be impossible to make it through to the end of this process. However, because of the support and encouragement of Dr. Hy and Dr. Mathison, my initial ideas for this study were refined and resulted in the final product herein. Dr. Hy and Dr. Mathison were invaluable to the success of my study, and I greatly appreciate their commitment and dedication to me and my study. Thank you for agreeing to serve as my committee members.

Further, this study would have not been possible without the cooperation and assistance of the employees and officials from the towns of Abingdon, Lebanon, and Marion. All were very prompt in answering my questions, fulfilling several requests for data, and participating in the interviews portion of the study. I greatly appreciate the towns making time for me and my study. It is my sincerest hope that the towns will benefit from this study.

Additionally, I would like to thank my employer, the Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center, and more specifically Executive Director & Agency Head David Matlock, for making it possible for me to pursue my doctoral degree while working full-time in a significant managerial position. Without this support, pursuing my doctoral degree would not have been possible. Thank you for making this opportunity possible for me.

Finally, I also would like to thank my family, friends, and co-workers for their support and encouragement. This meant a lot and helped keep me motivated to see this study through to the end, and I thank you.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Governments must continually adapt to change to serve residents efficiently and effectively. An example of one of these areas of ongoing change affecting public administration is the field of technology, one of which is the rise of social media in recent years as a technological tool to facilitate information distribution and engagement. Many residents are accustomed and experienced in using social media to engage and obtain information from and communicate with other individuals, businesses, schools, governments, and other organizations. Today, Facebook is one of the most popular and widely used social media platforms with over one billion total users (Marshall, 2018). Like individuals and the private sector, many governments and governmental organizations at all levels (federal, state, and local) are adopting and using social media platforms like Facebook to serve and engage residents and other interested parties. These governments adopting Facebook include small-town governments.

The purpose of this mixed methods multi-case study is to analyze (1) how small-town governments are using Facebook to serve residents; (2) the results that are experienced by the small-town governments and residents in the town's use of Facebook; and (3) the factors that influence the small-town governments to use Facebook to serve residents. The specific small-town governments analyzed in this study are the towns of Abingdon (Washington County), Lebanon (Russell County), and Marion (Smyth County) located in Southwestern Virginia. The population of Abingdon is 7,867, Lebanon is 3,147, and Marion is 5,559 as of July 1, 2019 (United States Census Bureau, 2020). The study highlights the similarities and differences among the three town governments in their approach and the experiences in the use of the Facebook social media platform.

Background and Study Context

Historical Context

Technology has transformed the way that government conducts business and has led to the rise of electronic government, or e-government (Chapman, 2017; McNeal et al., 2008; Thomas & Streib, 2003). Residents, public administrators, and elected officials rely heavily upon Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to participate in the functions of public administration. This reliance has resulted in the rise of e-government as a phenomenon (Skargren, 2020). E-government interactions among public officials and residents has resulted in the creation of the "digital city hall" to complement the services and functions of the traditional city hall that is a physical place where governmental business is conducted. ICTs allow for the relocation of governmental services from governmental offices to be closer to residents (Gichoya, 2005). This relocation is accomplished through the ability of residents to use devices such as personal computers and smartphones to access governmental information and to perform transactions. For example, social media platforms are conveniently accessed through personal electronic devices, which have become a mainstay of daily use by most individuals.

Over time, new ICTs such as personal computers, the World Wide Web, email, and cellular phones have provided both opportunities and challenges for public administrators in the delivery of public services. The same is true with social media as both an ICT and tool of e-government. Social media is a relatively new technology (Straus et al., 2013). Social media is also an understudied area within the e-government realm and has many potential benefits along with potential risks (Gao & Lee, 2017; Gintova, 2019). As social media usage has been widely embraced by individuals, residents expect that the government will embrace and adopt social media as a service offering (Fusi & Feeney, 2018).

Governments, not just individuals and businesses, can gain the benefits of using social media (Hao et al., 2016). To put this into perspective, residents are the customers of the government, and government is a customer of residents. ICTs are usually implemented to improve efficiency, quality, and transparency (Zimmerman & Finger, 2005). Social media platforms such as Facebook can be leveraged as an ICT to increase access, efficiency, and transparency in government and public administration and to improve the government-to-resident and resident-to-government relationship. A benefit of social media utilization is that the relationship between residents and government organizations can become more open (Picazo-Vela et al., 2012). Residents seek information from the government, and the government often has a need to seek information from residents. This interaction can lead to a two-way exchange of information and ideas while also allowing for increased transparency.

Facebook is an example of a common social media tool being utilized by individuals, organizations, and governments. Many municipalities have begun to use these specific social media tools in recent years (Guillamón et al., 2016). There exists much variation in the usage of social media tools by different types of local governments. Larger local governments tend to embrace and adopt social media more than smaller units of local government. Therefore, disparities may exist in the availability and use of social media as an e-government component for both residents and public administrators dependent upon geographic or population concerns.

Social Context

Social media platforms like Facebook allow individuals to interact with each other and organizations via written comments and multimedia (video or audio) methods. The advent of social media has changed the ways in which many can access information about what is occurring in their communities and in the nation and world (Kavanaugh et al., 2012). Individuals

are accepting social media usage, and many utilize social media daily in a personal context. Individuals are using social media platforms, such as Facebook, to interact with and seek information about personal acquaintances, businesses, schools, and other organizations that include governmental agencies.

The existence of social media tools in government is changing the landscape of agencies and bureaucracies (Criado et al., 2013). Governments and public administrators are adapting to provide information via social media tools. Part of this adaptation may be making the decision or taking the impetus to utilize social media tools to provide governmental information or services. Social media tools, such as Facebook, are another avenue by which governments can serve residents and the public.

From the governmental and residental perspective, it would be naturally assumed that residents would consult social media tools when looking for governmental information and services at the local level as residents often do when seeking out non-governmental information services. Social media is another medium, not unlike the use of email or web sites, in which information can be obtained and collaboration can occur. Residents expect the government to embrace social media (Fusi & Feeney, 2018). In fact, the availability and residents' use of government social media could impact their perception of transparency in government, which ultimately impacts resident trust of government (Song & Lee, 2015).

There are several areas in which local governments can utilize social media to serve residents. These areas include crime prevention and police assistance, emergency alerts and severe weather updates, activities and class registrations (such as parks and recreational events), town halls and council meetings, public service announcements, information on construction updates and road closures, and open job positions (CivicPlus, 2016). Suciu (2019) relates that

local governments can use social media to send out information on routine items such as

breaking news on events to more urgent announcements such as transportation impacts and

emergency information. Further, there are benefits to using social media for local government,

which include communicating during a crisis, engaging residents, building public trust, setting

the record straight, testing messaging, and saving money on the distribution of information and

notices (Tran & Bar-Tur, 2020).

Theoretical Context

The theoretical concept guiding this study is the T3 Framework for Innovation by Dr.

Sonny Magana. The model was originally created to assess the use of technology in education.

Magana Education (n.d.) states:

> The T3 Framework is designed to tighten up the process of integrating technology into
>
> teaching and learning by providing a clearer, more precise, and actionable framework to
>
> guide teachers and leaders in self-assessing current uses of technology, setting
>
> professional growth goals, and achieving continuously higher levels of mastery. (para. 3)

The T3 Framework, depicted in Figure 1, is a simple and easy-to-understand model that

can be adapted for use in public administration and in the context of this study that examines the

adoption and utilization of social media, a component of technology, by small-town

governments. There are three components to the T3 model: T1) Translational, T2)

Transformational, and T3) Transcendent (Magana Education, n.d.). Each level represents a stage

of progression in use and impact from the simple (T1), to the moderate (T2), to the advanced

(T3). The T3 model is adapted to determine the extent to which small-town governments are

using social media tools as part of their e-government services. There may be cases in which a

small-town government is using social media tools as a one-way form of communication

(representative of the T1 level). An example of the T1 level would be the town simply posting a meeting public notice to social media. In other cases, small-town governments may be utilizing social media for two-way communication (representative of the T2 level). An example of the T2 level usage would be the town posting on social media a police request for information on a crime that has occurred in a particular area of the town and asking for feedback from those who may have information useful in solving the crime or locating suspects. Finally, in some cases, small-town governments may be at an advanced level in utilizing social media tools for a collaborative approach (representative of the T3 level). An example of the T3 level of usage would be the town posting on social media a request for ideas on improving a park and inviting residents to collaborate with the town government on the project.

Figure 1

The T3 Framework for Innovation
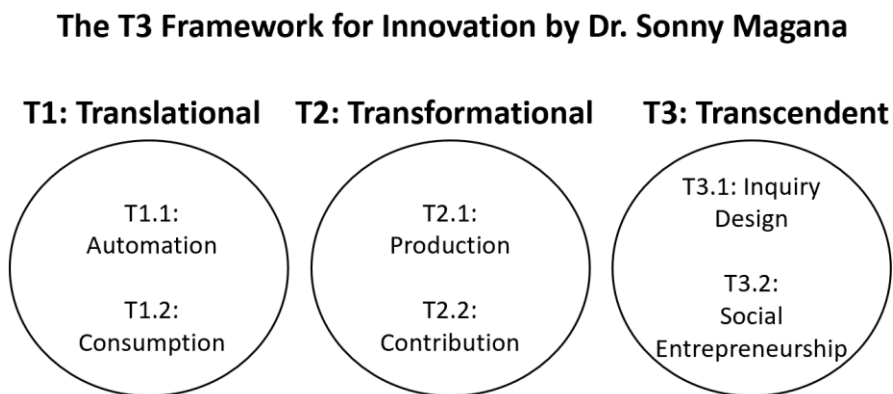
Note. Figure depicts the elements of the T3 Framework for Innovation as presented by Sonny Magana, Ed.D.

Problem Statement

Small-town local governments provide varying degrees of e-government services and offerings. Maintaining a presence on social media platforms such as Facebook is one of them.

Social media is a newer and evolving communications tool that can be used by governments to

inform and engage residents (Straus et al., 2013; Gao & Lee, 2017). Local government adoption

and utilization of Facebook needs to be studied to identify how small-town governments are

using Facebook to serve residents, the results that are experienced by the small-town

governments and residents in the town's use of Facebook, and the factors that influence the

small-town governments to use Facebook to serve residents. This study highlights the

similarities and differences among the three small-town governments in their approach and the

experiences in the use of the social media platform Facebook.

Local government traditionally is the level of government at which residents participate

the most and, thus, social media usage and interactivity at the local government level needs

additional study (Mossberger et al., 2013). Most inquiries into e-government trends involve

studying larger government entities instead of small governments (Cassell & Mullaly, 2012; Gao

& Lee, 2017). Studying social media usage by small-town local governments helps to

understand why there are variances in social media utilization and practices when compared to

other units of government. A general gap exists in literature regarding the use of social media as

an e-government tool by small-town governments. While social media has been studied at the

federal government level, more research is needed at the state and local government levels and

across different governmental agencies (Mergel, 2013b; Zavattaro & Sementelli, 2014). Despite

many e-government activities being focused on social media, dialogue and feedback mechanisms

have not been effective (Hao et al, 2016).

A study related to social media adoption by small local governments in Nebraska noted

that local governments are primarily using social media as another method to disseminate public

information to residents, and there is a need for more research on this topic in other regions (Gao

& Lee, 2017). Interestingly, a survey conducted by the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) in 2017 asked questions regarding the manner of social media communication (one-way or two-way) and the specific social media tools used by county and municipal governments (International City/County Management Association, 2017). However, a weakness of this survey is that it was only sent to county governments with a population of 50,000 or more residents and to municipal governments with a population of 75,000 or more residents. Therefore, little is known about local government units with a population below these numbers. Small-town governments with populations under 10,000 would be smaller units of government and thus ideal candidates for additional study into social media adoption and utilization as an e-government offering.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to analyze (1) how small-town governments are using Facebook to serve residents; (2) the results that are experienced by the small-town governments and residents in the town's use of Facebook; and (3) the factors that influence the small-town governments to use Facebook to serve residents. The study involves as its setting three small-town governments (Abingdon, Lebanon, and Marion) located in Southwestern Virginia and was conducted in 2022.

The theory guiding this study is the T3 Framework for Innovation by Dr. Sonny Magana. This theoretical framework, originally created to assess the use of technology in education, can be applied to public administration in the study of the adoption and utilization of Facebook by small-town governments. The T3 model can be used to understand the exact level at which small-town governments are utilizing the Facebook social media platform as part of their e-government services.

Significance of the Study

This study provides empirical, theoretical, and practical insight. Empirically, it adds to the literature on how local governments, particularly small-town governments, are utilizing the Facebook social media platform as part of their e-government offerings to serve residents and what results are experienced. Theoretically, this study relates the T3 Framework for Innovation to the adoption and use of Facebook by small-town governments to serve residents. The T3 model is used to assess the level at which the studied small-town governments are using Facebook and whether the usage level observed at simple usage, moderate usage, or advanced usage.

Practically, the results obtained from studying small-town governments in Southwestern Virginia can be looked to as a model for further study and inquiry on Facebook utilization in e-government by other smaller units of government in the United States or elsewhere in the world. This study builds upon the body of knowledge in understanding the usage of Facebook by local governments regarding smaller units of government. The results of this study provide a better understanding for those who work in public administration and to residents regarding the aspects of Facebook's role in assisting with the carrying out of public administration functions.

The study specifically shows how selected small-town governments in the Southwestern Virginia region are using Facebook and explores the experiences of these local governments in the usage of and results experienced in using Facebook as an e-government offering. The inquiry allows interested parties to develop a better understanding of Facebook's role in e-government and presents opportunities for improvement and to understand the challenges and barriers. Interested parties, such as residents, public administrators, and elected officials, may also find ideas for the implementation and advancement of Facebook usage as an e-government

offering and use these to improve resident access to governmental information and services. The study benefits stakeholders (such as residents, public administrators, elected officials) in Southwestern Virginia and beyond to have a greater understanding of the Facebook component of e-government.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide the study:

RQ1: *How are three small-town governments using Facebook to serve residents?*

RQ2: *What results are experienced by the three small-town governments and residents in the town's use of Facebook to serve residents?*

RQ3: *What are the factors that influence the three small-town governments to use Facebook to serve residents?*

Definitions of Key Terms

The definitions of key terms and concepts related to this study are included in this section:

1. *E-government* – The use of technology by a governmental entity, often including web-based applications, to provide enhanced access and delivery of governmental information and services to residents, businesses, other government agencies, and other interested parties via electronic means (United States General Accounting Office, 2002). E-government may also be referred to as electronic government or e-Gov (Hu, 2009).

2. *Small-Town Governments* – For purposes of this study, town units of local government that have a population between the range of 3,000-8,000 persons according to the most recent population data from the United States Census Bureau.

3. *Social Media* – Online tools that support social interaction and are a part of the Web 2.0 revolution (Hao et al., 2016). Often include applications that promote the speedy exchange of information among users, collaboration, and learning (Bonsón et al., 2012).

4. *Social Media Tools* – Specific online tools designed to facilitate the interaction of two or more people (Feeney & Welch, 2016). These tools allow for two-way information exchange between individuals and groups (Fusi & Feeney, 2018). Popular examples in 2023 include Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

Summary

This chapter includes an overview, background, the problem statement, the purpose statement, reasons for significance of the study, the research questions, and definitions for key terms and concepts used in the study. The purpose of this mixed methods multi-case study is to analyze (1) how small-town governments are using Facebook to serve residents; (2) the results that are experienced by the small-town governments and residents in the town's use of Facebook; and (3) the factors that influence the small-town governments to use Facebook to serve residents. The three towns analyzed in the study are the towns of Abingdon, Lebanon, and Marion located in Southwestern Virginia.

This study adds to the literature on how local governments, particularly small-town governments, are utilizing the Facebook social media platform as part of their e-government offerings to serve residents and what results are experienced. The study also analyzes the factors that influence the small-town governments to use Facebook to serve residents.

Chapter 2 provides the results of the review of relevant and pertinent literature that supports the study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The chapter reviews the theoretical framework for this multi-case study as well as the literature related to social media history, the advantages and disadvantages of social media use, the Open Government Initiative and Mergel's framework for evaluating social media, prior studies related to local government Facebook use, the factors influencing the use of social media by the private sector and government organizations, potential use cases for social media use by local governments, best practices for the establishment and refinement of a social media presence, and best practices in using social media for citizen engagement. The chapter connects these literature aspects to the current study.

The multi-case study investigates (1) how small-town governments are using Facebook to serve residents; (2) the results that are experienced by the small-town governments and residents in the town's use of Facebook; and (3) the factors that influence the small-town governments to use Facebook to serve residents. The three towns analyzed in the study are the towns of Abingdon, Lebanon, and Marion located in Southwestern Virginia. The current study builds upon the literature on how governments, particularly small-town local governments, are using Facebook in answering these research questions.

The foundational theoretical framework for the study is the T3 Framework for Innovation by Dr. Sonny Magana for reviewing and assessing the level at which the small-town local governments are using Facebook.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework guiding the study is the T3 Framework for Innovation by Dr. Sonny Magana. The framework designed by Dr. Magana was originally intended to examine

and assess the use of integrating technology in teaching and learning. However, as the framework is simple and easy to understand, it can be adapted to the study of the use of social media. Each town government's use of Facebook and the results were reviewed and assessed considering the T3 Framework for Innovation. The use of Facebook by local governments to serve residents is an example of innovation in that it is the use of a new technology in the field of public administration and governmental operations.

The three components to the T3 Framework for Innovation model are: T1) Translational, T2) Transformational, and T3) Transcendent (Magana Education, n.d.). The components are depicted in Figure 1 on page 17. To put these layers of the model into perspective, T1 usage can be seen as simple usage, the T2 level can be viewed as moderate usage, and the T3 level can be viewed as advanced usage. It is important to examine and understand each one of these levels of the model.

T1: Translational Technology Use

The first level of the T3 Framework for Innovation model is Translational Use of Technology. Magana (2017) defines translational technology use as:

> Translational uses of technology simply enable tasks that can be done in an analog or nondigital way to be done digitally. This is rather analogous to the task of translating from one language to another—say English to Spanish. (p. 20)

This component of the T3 Framework for Innovation is the most basic in that it can be viewed as one-directional information sharing, which is static (non-interactive) in nature. Magana (2017) goes on to further classify the T1 part of the T3 model into two stages, T1.1: Automation and T1.2: Consumption. T1.1: Automation is simply the automation of information

or processes using technology (Magana, 2017). T1.2: Consumption is the act of obtaining digital information using technology (Magana, 2017)

In the context of this study, the translational use of technology level of the T3 model would simply be one-way information sharing. For example, a small-town government posts a notice for a public hearing on Facebook for public awareness. In this case, by using Facebook, the local government is simply replicating its posting of the public notice to a digital format from a traditionally accepted posting manner (analog) that might be a newspaper ad or printed notice posted at the main entrance to the town hall. The local government has accomplished the two stages of the T1 level of the T3 model by posting the notice digitally, which satisfies the T1.1: Automation stage and allows for interested parties to view the notice electronically on Facebook, which satisfies the T1.2: Consumption stage. Translational use of technology does not lead to transformational use of technology since it does not bring about major change in the tasks (Magana, 2017). Therefore, the next level to consider is T2: Transformational Technology Use.

T2: Transformational Technology Use

The next component of the T3 Framework for Innovation is Transformational Technology Use. According to Magana (2017), transformational use of technology in the T3 Framework related to educational technology use is "the intentional application of digital technologies to unleash students' learning expertise, in ways not possible without technology, to achieve ever higher levels of knowledge and mastery" (p. 38). This definition can be adapted for use in this study of Facebook use by small-town governments. The adaptation is the use of digital technologies by small-town governments to facilitate information distribution and interactions between government and residents in ways that would not be possible without use of technology and to further accomplish the outcomes of having an informed and engaged citizenry.

Facebook, a social media tool, is the form of technology that can be used to facilitate this connection.

As an example of transformational use of technology, a small-town government may post on its Facebook presence a police request for information on a crime that has occurred in a particular area of the town and ask for feedback from those who may have information useful in solving the crime or locating suspects. Residents can provide feedback information via Facebook by posting on the original post or private messaging the town government or police officials through the Facebook comments or messaging function with specific information that may be of significance to the police investigation.

T3: Transcendent Technology Use

The final level of the T3 Framework for Innovation is Transcendent Technology Use. Magana (2017) defines this transcendent use of technology regarding its use in education as when students "achieve something well above and beyond the normal range of expectations, outcomes, and experiences in traditional classrooms" (p. 64). In the application of this level of the model to this study, students are analogous to residents and public administrators. Transcendent use of technology also results in original and unprecedented increases in knowledge and contribution and leads to value-generating performance (Magana, 2017).

The use of Facebook by small-town governments to serve residents and initiate a two-way or collaborative conversation about topics of interest to both parties would be an outcome of transcendent use of technology. For example, a small-town government may post on its Facebook a request for ideas on improving a park. Residents can then provide feedback through Facebook as to their desires or questions about the project. For transcendent use, the local

government and commenters on Facebook platform must engage in a two-way conversation with the small-town government intending for the dialogue to be two way.

Connection to the Current Study

The multi-case study investigates (1) how small-town governments are using Facebook to serve residents; (2) the results that are experienced by the small-town governments and residents in the town's use of Facebook; and (3) the factors that influence the small-town governments to use Facebook to serve residents. The theoretical foundation for the multi-case study uses the T3 Framework for Innovation by Dr. Sonny Magana, which is adapted from educational technology. This adaptation builds upon the model developed by Dr. Magana to determine its utility for Facebook use by small-town governments and residents. Small-town governments vary in the way the Facebook social media platform is used to serve residents, the results experienced by the towns and residents, and the factors that influence the towns to use Facebook to serve residents.

Each level of the framework represents a stage of progression in use and impact from the simple (T1), to the moderate (T2), to the advanced (T3). Some towns may simply provide information on Facebook that residents consume, and the interactions between the town and residents are minimal (which is the T1 level). Other towns may provide information and actively and directly engage residents in interactions about the information presented (which is the T3 level). As part of the study, each participating study town's level of Facebook use will be reviewed and assessed as T1, T2, and/or T3 in accordance with the adapted T3 Framework for Innovation model. Recommendations are provided on how each town can improve to achieve the T3 level, if not already categorized as such. In the T3 Framework for Innovation model, the T3 level is the optimal and desirable level for maximum innovation and leverage of technology beyond basic expectations.

Related Literature

A literature review to seek out pertinent literature related to e-government, social media, Facebook, the advantages and disadvantages of social media use, prior relevant studies, potential use cases for local governments, and best practices for using social media was conducted. The results of the literature review and the connection to the current study are presented.

Social Media History

Social media is a relatively new technological innovation that has developed and attained widespread adoption and usage by individuals and organizations within the last 20 years. From 2003 and onward, many new social media networks came into existence (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Social media platforms are third-party applications that allow users to socially interact and create content (such as text, video, or pictures) and to share status updates and news (Mergel & Bretschneider, 2013; Brynielsson et al., 2018; Barton, n.d.).

Many individuals use social media platforms, representing many demographics that include the rich, poor, young, old, and everyone in between (Feeney & Welch, 2016). These demographics include millions of Americans in both rural and urban communities (Hatcher & Gallardo, 2014). According to Pew Research Center (2021), 72 percent of American adults use some form of social media, which is dramatically up from the 5 percent of American adults using social media in 2005. Pew Research goes on to report that of those American adults currently using social media, 76 percent reside in urban areas, 71 percent in suburban areas, and 66 percent in rural areas. Interestingly, from these numbers, there appears to be a gap of 10 percent in the usage of social media among adults in urban areas compared to rural areas. Small towns are often located in rural areas, which is the specific setting for this study.

These users of social media can be creators, editors, or consumers of the content found on social media (Brynielsson et al., 2018). Once a user joins a social media platform, the user is prompted to establish relationships with other users or entities on the platform. These relationships may be referred to as "friends," "contacts," "fans," or "followers" (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). As this study focused on how small-town governments are using Facebook to serve residents and the results that are experienced by the small-town governments and residents, it is important to understand the founding and basic history of Facebook to gain a better perspective on its use and abilities.

Facebook

Facebook has come to be known as one of the most popular and widely used social media platforms. Facebook began in 2004 as a social media network exclusively for Harvard University students (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Nations, 2020). Shortly thereafter, Facebook began expanding to users affiliated with other colleges, universities, high schools, corporate networks, and ultimately everyone (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). By 2006, Facebook was open to all users aged 13 years or older (Nations, 2020). Facebook allows users to maintain a personal friends list, share photos, chat with other users, stream videos, and post links to content such as news (Nations, 2020).

Key terminology related to use on the Facebook tool are "friends" and "likes." A user may send a "friend" request to another Facebook user and when the other user accepts the request, two users become "friends" on Facebook. Like the friending process, a user may also "like" a brand page established by a business or other organization. According to Facebook (n.d. -a), when someone "likes" a page they are showing support for the page and want to see content from it. However, it's important to note that the assertion by Facebook on support is not always

the case as critics or non-supporters may "like" a Facebook page to keep up with information and happenings posted there. Also, it is important to understand that unlike "friend" requests, page "like" requests do not require approval from the page administrator before being completed.

Government entities—such as federal, state, and local governments—can establish pages on Facebook that then can be "liked" by Facebook users. Indeed, social media platforms such as Facebook lend themselves well for the creation of a "digital city hall" that is accessible to residents and allows for collaboration between government and residents. Residents and other interested users of Facebook can "like" pages created by governmental entities to see content and interact with the content posted by the page administrators. These interactions may include commenting on the posts, viewing the content, or reacting to the content by expressing approval, disapproval, or feelings using emojis to express a reaction to the content. Posts on Facebook by users may include simple text entries, photos, or videos. Photos and videos may also be posted with text comments.

It is important to remember that those who are "friends" on Facebook may not be "friends" in the conventional sense. Similarly, "liking" a page does not necessarily always imply a favorable perception or endorsement of the entity represented by the page. "Friends" and "likes" are simply terms used to imply a connection on the Facebook platform in the social sense.

As of July 2021, there are 200 million users of Facebook in the United States (We Are Social, et al., 2021). Facebook remains the most significant social media site today with over one billion total users globally (Marshall, 2018).

Advantages and Disadvantages of Social Media Use

Social media presents both advantages and disadvantages to its use by organizations, including governmental organizations of all types and sizes. These advantages and disadvantages can be contemplated by organizations when deciding to establish a social media presence along with maintaining it.

Advantages

First, a particularly appealing advantage in most cases is that social media platforms are free to use (Matthews, 2015). This free use means that governmental organizations at the minimum can establish a social media presence without having to pay access or subscription fees for the service. Government organizations may even realize cost savings as traditional advertising and communication methods such as the use of advertising and call centers is expensive (Tran & Bar-Tur, 2020). Additionally, the use of social media in government can be a "game changer" and allow for people to engage in direct dialogue with politicians, civic officials, and government agencies (Tran & Bar-Tur, 2020). Most interactions with politicians, civic officials, and government agencies have traditionally taken place through formalized or planned channels. Social media is often the fastest and least cumbersome way to reach a large group of people while encouraging feedback and interaction (Barton, n.d.).

An advantage of social media platforms, such as Facebook, is that the platforms present the opportunity for two-way and collaborative interactions in addition to increased transparency. Traditional media forms, such as television, radio, and print media, only offer one-way interactions (Bonsón et al., 2017). However, the way a governmental entity sets up and maintains its social media presence will largely define if the relationship is one way, two way, or collaborative.

The largest benefit of social media usage by local governments may be that of transparency. Social media provides governments with an opportunity for enhanced transparency (League of Oregon Cities, 2015). All residents and citizens demand and expect transparency from governmental entities at all levels, including local governments. By using social media platforms, governments can actively promote transparency by disclosing information about governmental activities and decisions that are being made (Song & Lee, 2015; Mergel, 2013b). By disclosing this information in a transparent way on social media, governments enable citizens to access, monitor, and evaluate its activities (Song & Lee, 2015).

By using social media platforms in a transparent way, governmental organizations can allow for collaboration in preparing decisions or solutions for government problems (Mergel, 2013b). A social media presence can allow government to access knowledge and information from stakeholders that can make governmental processes more effective and efficient (Mergel, 2013a). Those stakeholders may include citizens or residents in the jurisdiction of the governmental entity.

As an advantage, social media allows an organization to raise awareness of the brand (the entity or organization) or to humanize the organization (McLachlan & Newberry, 2021). Both of these efforts allow for building trust with the community and stakeholders. As Beveridge & Tran (2022) state, governmental organizations can also share relevant and valuable information with their followers, which allows for engagement.

Another potential advantage is leveraging social media for crisis communication. Whether these crises be manmade or natural disasters, social media is a platform that can be used by governmental organizations to perfect its response on the communications front. For crisis communication management, governments can share important updates, support those who need

help or information, and listen and learn from what followers are observing (McLachlan, 2022).

Using social media during times of crises is an effective way to communicate with both those

affected and other stakeholders such as the media.

Finally, an advantage of using social media is that it supports customer service efforts. In

the case of governmental organizations, customer service can be provided to residents who have

questions or concerns about government operations and services. According to Andrews (2022),

social media administrators can monitor questions, comments, and complaints from followers on

social media and work to resolve them. Resolving customer issues via social media is an

effective and advantageous use of social media. For example, a resident may post about a

missing road sign on a governmental social media platform, and the government can then

respond to fix the problem.

Disadvantages

A potential disadvantage to using social media is that social media platforms are

maintained by third parties outside of direct governmental control (Mergel, 2013a; Mergel,

2013b). Contrary to social media platforms, many established e-government services provided

by governmental entities (such as web sites or online information tools) are usually controlled by

the government organization hosting or providing the service. When the platform is maintained

by a third-party, like social media platforms, the government organization has little control or

influence over what happens with the management and direction of the platform or its associated

service offerings.

An additional potential disadvantage related to social media platforms are liability issues

and potential for political embarrassment (Lewis et al., 2016). An officially sanctioned

governmental social media presence is an extension of the communications arm of a

governmental entity and reflect upon the government and those associated with it, such as elected officials and public administrators. If an account administrator makes a mistake and posts information that is inaccurate or controversial, that can reflect negatively and spread quickly throughout the area served by the governmental entity and beyond. The ability of social media platforms to quickly spread information, which ordinarily would be an advantage, serves as a major liability and disadvantage in a situation such as this.

Another similar potential disadvantage is that organizations must be ready to be "called out" and to be the focus of negative publicity on social media. Beveridge & Tran (2022) state that social media is a harsh reality and it's important to remain truthful. Those who are not happy with the organization, or its decisions, are likely to resort to social media to express their displeasure. Organizations must expect this and respond to diffuse the situation where appropriate. Social media is a powerful forum and allows for setting the record straight on misunderstandings.

Evaluation of Advantages and Disadvantages

While social media use presents both advantages and disadvantages, each must be weighed carefully. The net result of social media usage for an organization is generally positive and outweighs the negatives or not doing anything at all with social media. For example, Mergel (2012) states that governments should focus on connecting with citizens and the issues they care about on social media, and not be too concerned to jump to conclusions with the risks. Millions and millions of people around the world use social media, and maintaining a presence on social media is a very effective way to reach them. To be absent is a concession that most organizations, including governmental organizations, cannot make. Otherwise, organizations are foregoing an effective way to serve or represent their constituents whether these be customers,

clients, or residents. Social media is where customers, clients, and residents are so organizations must also be present or a void is created along with missed opportunities.

Open Government Initiative and Mergel's Framework

The use of social media by governments to serve citizens parallels the Open Government Initiative and a resulting framework developed by Ines Mergel. In 2009, the Obama Administration directed federal government agencies to harness the power of new technologies, such as social media, to share information with the public (Mergel, 2013a; Mergel & Bretschneider, 2013). This was part of the Obama Administration's Open Government Initiative. The Open Government Initiative outlined three principles: transparency, participation, and collaboration (Mergel, 2013a). This focus upon social media at the federal level may have been predicated upon the success of the use of social media by the Obama Campaign in the 2008 United States presidential election (Mergel, 2013b; Mergel, 2016; Barton, n.d.). The Obama Campaign's web site listed 16 different social media sites on which the campaign had a presence (Barton, n.d.).

According to President Obama's Open Government Initiative, transparency efforts "promote accountability by providing the public with information about what the Government is doing" (Orszag, 2009, para. 2). Participation efforts "allow members of the public to contribute ideas and expertise so that their government can make policies with the benefit of information that is widely dispersed in society" (Orszag, 2009, para. 2). And finally, collaboration efforts "improve the effectiveness of Government by encouraging partnerships and cooperation within the Federal Government, across levels of government, and between the Government and private institutions" (Orszag, 2009, para. 2).

Mergel (2013a) advances the principles of the Open Government Initiative as a method for measuring social media interactions in the public sector. These principles can be used regardless of the level of government (federal, state, or local). In Mergel's (2013a) framework, "transparency is therefore interpreted as broadcasting of government information via social media sites" (p. 330). Mergel (2013a) goes on to define participation in her framework as "citizens can engage in preparing policy-making decisions by providing their feedback through social media channels" (p. 330). Finally, Mergel (2013a) states that for collaboration in her model, "social media channels can therefore be used to increase exchanges with citizens or collaboratively work with government stakeholders on innovative ideas to fulfill the mission of government" (p. 330).

Mergel (2013a) goes on to further relate each principle to a mission of government, a goal, and a tactic of government in using social media. See Figure 2 for Mergel's (2013a) framework.

Figure 2

Mergel's Framework for Measuring Social Media Interactions in the Public Sector

Mission	Goal	Tactics	Social media mechanisms	Outcome
Transparency	Information education	One-way push	• Number of followers & likes/friends (change from start) • FB likes • Twitter followers • Unique visits to blog • Time spend on page <30 • Visits only home page • Views on YouTube & Flickr • "Read more"	Accountability trust
Participation	Engagement	Two-way pull	• Click-throughs from social media sites • Reach: demographic data (gender, location, cities) • Bookmarking & digging content • Twitter retweets, hashtags • Posting ratings & reviews • Spend more than 1 min on site • Comments on blog & Facebook • Ratings on YouTube • Number of links & trackbacks • Frequency of check-ins on Foursquare	Consultation, deliberation, satisfaction
Collaboration	Cross-boundary action Two-way interactive	Networking Co-design of services	• Request for membership in a LinkedIn group • Subscriptions to blog, YouTube channel • Facebook shares • Twitter direct messages • Creating their own content • Downloads of videos, documents • Conversations • Volunteering, donations • Offline actions	Community building Creation of issue networks

Note. From "A framework for interpreting social media interactions in the public sector," by Mergel (2013a), *Government Information Quarterly, 30*(4), p. 332.

(https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2013.05.015).

In the framework of Mergel (2013a), governments are using social media in a one-way push fashion by putting out information to residents that informs and educates them, which is part of the transparency initiative. Mergel (2013a) goes on to further relate that governments are using a two-way pull tactic when seeking to engage residents as part of the participation initiative. Finally, Mergel (2013a) relates that the cross-boundary action of two-way interactive goals is seen when government uses social media to encourage conversations and co-creation of content and community building.

The early success of the Open Government Initiative and the move by federal agencies to join social media has been quantified. Mergel (2012) states that social media technologies have been adopted at a rapid pace in the federal government, particularly within the executive branch, due to the initiative. Mergel (2013b) goes on to state specifics in that by April of 2012, 699 organizational units of the federal government were present on social media, and many of these agencies highlighted their social media applications on their official web sites. Specifically, these organizational units had created 2,956 Facebook accounts, 1,016 Twitter accounts, 695 YouTube channels, and 498 Flickr accounts representing the federal government (Mergel, 2013b, p. 123). As evidenced in the numbers, some units created multiple presences on each platform. Also, in reviewing the numbers, it is evident that Facebook was the most popular social media account type created by federal organizational units. To further indicate the diffusion of social media in the federal government, Snead (2013) found that of 25 federal government agency web sites reviewed in 2013, 21 (84 percent) featured at least one social media platform link, and in most cases, multiple links were found to services such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc.

Mergel (2012) mentions that in addition to the Open Government Initiative, citizen expectations also drove the adoption of social media technologies within the federal government. Citizens expect to receive government information and services "where they are" on social media (Mergel, 2012b). Therefore, it can be assumed that the Open Government Initiative served as an effective catalyst, along with citizen expectations for access, to move federal government agencies to establish an online presence using social media tools and platforms.

Connection to the Current Study

Social media use has become an accepted practice in the United States federal government and around the world (Mergel, 2013b). While federal and state governments may use social media more predominantly, understanding the significance and use habits of social media at all levels of government, particularly with small local governments, is important to expand the body of knowledge on the topic of social media use by governmental organizations. Local government is especially important as it is the level of government closest to the people and is most responsible for fulfilling their service needs (Rutledge, 1974). One might naturally assume that local government has many possibilities to rely on when using social media to fulfill the service needs of residents. Indeed, Mergel (2013b) states that future research is needed at the state and local government levels to understand the diffusion of social media.

The Open Government Initiative principles can be used as a framework as suggested by Mergel (2013a) to evaluate social media interactions in the public sector. It has utility to many social media platforms, including Facebook. It also is applicable to any governmental organization, not just the federal government. The principles also align well with the T3 Framework for Innovation theoretical model guiding the study. Transparency and the one-way push tactic are analogous to the T1 level (translational) with the goal being education and

presentation of information. Participation and the two-way pull tactic are analogous to the T2 level (transformational) with the goal being engagement. Finally, collaboration and the tactics of networking and co-design or services are analogous to the T3 level (transcendent) with the goal being to go beyond engagement and including residents in the social media process in a bi-directional manner.

Although both the Open Government Initiative and Mergel's framework have weaknesses in that they are dated and that technology rapidly changes, they can still both serve as models for improving access to government information for all levels of government from federal to state to local in all things related to e-government. In 2022, their principles are still meaningful and can apply to social media platform usage, like Facebook. This study seeks to understand the results of the use of Facebook by small-town governments and the factors that influence small-town governments to use Facebook. The result of the study thus builds upon the body of knowledge in this area. The Open Government Initiative principles and Mergel's framework align well with each of the phases of the T3 Framework for Innovation. Mergel (2013a) argues that the highest level of citizen engagement is collaboration via social media. This would complement the T3 level of transcendent use of technology in the T3 Framework.

Prior Studies on Facebook Use by Local Governments

Bellström et al. (2016) conducted a single case study of the content of Facebook posts for the city of Karlstad, Sweden municipal Facebook page. The study analyzed Facebook posts for the period of May-July 2015. The study analyzed both posts by the municipality and posts from users that followed the page. Bellström et al. (2016) presented 11 categories (as depicted in Figure 3) for use in categorizing the posts from the municipality along with a description for each.

Figure 3

Bellström et al. (2016) Categories for Municipality Posts

Category	Description
Educating citizens	Municipality educating citizen or helping citizens to educate each other
Marketing events in the municipality	Municipality promoting different happenings in the municipality
Marketing events outside of the municipality	Municipality promoting different happenings outside the municipality
Marketing the municipality	Municipality promoting the municipality as a good place to live or work
Marketing services	Municipality promoting municipal services as such
Requesting assistance from citizens	Municipality asking citizens for assistance that is beyond providing information
Requesting information from citizens	Municipality asking citizens to provide information
Service information	Municipality informing of service status that does not include marketing or maintenance
Service maintenance information	Municipality informing of service break-downs and ongoing repairs
Meta information on the Facebook service	Municipality informing on how to use the Facebook service
Automatic Facebook posting	Automatic posting by the Facebook service as a result of municipality changing its Facebook site

Note. Adapted from "Facebook usage in a local government: A content analysis of page owner posts and user posts," by Bellström et al., 2016, *Transforming Government, 10*(4), p. 555. (https://doi.org/10.1108/TG-12-2015-0061).

In the study conducted by Bellström et al. (2016), the three most popular municipality posts categories were *marketing events in the municipality* (43 percent), *marketing the municipality* (14 percent), and *service maintenance information* (9 percent). The results of the study by Bellström et al. (2016) suggest that local governments are using their Facebook for marketing purposes for both events and for issues related to the municipality. This result would also suggest that by using the T3 Framework, the municipality is using Facebook at the T1 level (translational), by simply posting the information in an automated mechanism (Facebook) for consumption by the page's residents or followers.

Bellström et al. (2016) presents categories for categorizing posts made by users (citizens) on the municipality's Facebook page. Bellström et al. (2016) defined 13 categories for these user posts and made a distinction between the type of user and defined the two types of users as citizens and organizations along with a pertinent description. These are depicted in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Bellström et al. (2016) Categories for User Posts on Municipality Facebook Page

Category	User type	Description
Marketing event	Citizen	Citizen promoting event in the municipality that is not directly connected to a commercial organization
		Citizen promoting event outside the municipality that is not directly connected to a commercial organization
	Organization	Organization promoting event outside the municipality that is not directly connected to a commercial organization
Marketing service	Organization	Organization being part of the municipality promoting its own service
Sharing information	Citizen	Citizen sharing information including text, link, picture, Facebook group, text and picture, text and link, text and movie
	Organization	Organization sharing information including Facebook event, link, text and movie
Complaining about the municipality	Citizen	Citizen holding government responsible
	Organization	Organization holding government responsible
Expressing opinion	Citizen	Citizen stating point of view of a municipal matter
Identity or community building	Citizen	Citizen promoting self or the municipality
Praising the municipality	Citizen	Citizen giving positive feedback to the municipality
Informing about service	Organization	Organization being part of the municipality informing about status of its own service
Requesting existing service	Citizen	Citizen appealing for improvement in present service
Requesting future service	Citizen	Citizen appealing for launching non-existing service
Requesting information	Citizen	Citizen asking a question to the municipality or other users
	Organization	Organization asking a question to the municipality or other users
Reporting service breakdown	Citizen	Citizen informing the municipality of problems with its services
Automatic Facebook posting	Organization	Automatic post by the Facebook service as a result of organization mentioning the municipality in a post

Note. Adapted from "Facebook usage in a local government: A content analysis of page owner posts and user posts," by Bellström et al., 2016, *Transforming Government, 10*(4), p. 556. (https://doi.org/10.1108/TG-12-2015-0061).

Bellström et al. (2016) found that the three most popular categories for user posts on the municipality's Facebook page were requesting information (33 percent), sharing information (20 percent), and expressing opinion (15 percent). This would suggest that residents are predominantly using Facebook to make inquiries for information or share information. Interestingly, expressing opinion on matters via Facebook is significantly lower in the study's findings.

Like Bellström et al. (2016), Lappas et al. (2018) conducted a study in which a content analysis was done of the Facebook posts of Greek local governments from January through September 2017. Lappas et al. (2018) sought to find the communication strategies of the Greek local governments and presents categories like Bellström et al. (2016) for categorizing posts on Facebook from local governments. A difference between the two studies is that Bellström et al. (2016) studies one local government and Lappas et al. (2018) studies numerous local governments. A similarity found by the study conducted by Lappas et al. (2018) to the study of Bellström et al. (2016) was that Greek local governments are primarily using the Facebook pages to provide marketing of events (45.5 percent of posts coded), followed by provision of information (24.6 percent of posts coded), and then transparency-related posts (8.9 percent of posts coded).

Connection to the Current Study

The current study builds upon the research of Bellström et al. (2016) and Lappas et al. (2018) in a few ways. First, the study is a multi-case study involving three small-town local governments that are in the same geographic area instead of solely being a single-case study of one local government as was done by Bellström et al. (2016). Although, the study was similar to the one by Lappas et al. (2018) since it involved a review of numerous local governments in

Greece. Second, the time period analyzed will be a full year, 12 months, instead of two months as done by Bellström et al (2016) and the nine months as done by Lappas et al. (2018). Third, the results of the study are compared to the Bellström et al. (2016) study for similarities and differences to see if the findings of Bellström et al. (2016) are still comparable to Facebook usage in 2022 in a different region of the world.

The categories developed by Bellström et al. (2016) will be used to classify the posts made by the town page administrators on each of the Facebook pages. A weakness of these categories developed by Bellström et al. (2016) is that they were developed over seven years ago and uses of social media change rapidly as with any technology. The current study will reveal the categories' utility and application in the year 2022.

The first research question (RQ1) of the study seeks to determine how Facebook is being used by small-town governments to serve residents. The results from the categorization of posts from each town's Facebook page will show the specific types of use for serving residents and can further inform at which level of the T3 Framework the town is operating. The second research question (RQ2) of the study seeks to determine the results that are experienced by the small-town governments and residents in the town's use of Facebook. The methods of categorization developed in the study by Bellström et al. (2016) will assist in answering RQ2 with respect to the results experienced by the small-town governments and residents in showing which categories are the most and least found among the Facebook posts.

Factors Influencing Social Media Use

There are several factors that influence the private sector and governmental organizations to adopt and use social media platforms like Facebook. Some of these factors are similar in nature and divergent in nature. Factors that are similar include the need for marketing and

bringing about awareness of the organization, its activities, and important information to customers, clients, or prospects. In the case of government organizations, the factors influencing the use of social media are slightly different in that the customers or clients of government organizations are residents or others having a connection with the governmental entity. Governments have a need to communicate with residents and others impacted by government actions and services.

Private Sector Organizations

A key reason that private sector entities may use social media platforms like Facebook is to connect with customers, clients, or those who may be prospective customers or clients. Simply put, these uses of Facebook are chiefly for marketing purposes. According to Pec (2022), it is likely that customers and competitors of businesses are already present on social media. Not having a presence on social media may adversely affect the organization because consumers may make purchasing or involvement decisions based upon what they see on social media.

Further, Pec (2022) goes on to state that using social media is a great way to get seen by new people, build community, and appeal to those who already have interest in a business. If someone follows a social media presence, it is because they have some degree of interest in the organization's products or services. Finally, Pec (2022) goes on to state that using social media is a great way to build a connection, hence the nature of being social. Followers of businesses on social media can directly engage with the business by asking questions or stating opinions. Likewise, the business can do the same.

One major company, Netflix, has over 84 million Facebook page followers. According to Topkin (2020), Netflix uses their Facebook page to provide exclusive video content to

supplement their offerings on their streaming service. Some of the videos include interviews with actors and actresses from popular shows on Netflix. This is a way in which Facebook can be used to supplement the company's traditional media offering. It also gets Netflix's users to follow its Facebook platform.

Topkin (2020) goes on to state that another innovative use of Facebook is being used by National Geographic, which has over 49 million Facebook page followers. National Geographic uses the Facebook Live feature to enable real-time engagement of followers as they go on safaris. Followers are allowed to ask questions of the team that answers them in real time on Facebook. This is an example of National Geographic realizing the tremendous power of two-way engagement on social media.

In the case of Netflix and National Geographic, the companies are using Facebook and social media to add value to their traditional service offerings. Facebook is a way to share more information and to expand the conversation with followers. Facebook can be used to drive more interest to the products and services of the companies.

Governmental Organizations

In the twenty-first century, governments worldwide are under pressure to change and innovate the way in which bureaucracies interact with citizens (Bonsón et al., 2012). This includes governmental units of all population sizes and geographic locations. Of note, between 2009 and 2011, adoption of social media by the largest cities in the United States increased as much as six times over (Mossberger et al., 2013). One way that governments and public administrators can adapt to change and innovation is by establishing and maintaining a presence on social media platforms like Facebook. Governments worldwide are joining social media each day mostly because the costs are low and the potential lost opportunity is perceived as being high

(Mickoleit, 2014). In the case of governments in using social media, the factors influencing its use are likely to highlight the services, activities, and functions of government.

A benefit of the usage of social media is that it can be used by governments to inform and engage residents (Straus et al., 2013; Gao & Lee, 2017). Further, social media in the governmental usage context allows public agencies to foster engagement with citizens and other organizations (Criado et al, 2013). Likewise, Tran & Bar-Tur (2020) posit several areas in which social media can be beneficial to government. These areas include communicating during a crisis, engaging citizens, building public trust, setting the record straight on misunderstandings, testing messaging, and saving funds on public outreach since social media is free or low cost. Similarly, Mahajan-Cusack (2016) states that social media can be used by governments for responding to emergencies and disasters, building community, improving access to services, ensuring public safety, and informing and empowering citizens. Particularly, local governments using social media is an effective and efficient way to communicate with and participate in the larger community (North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 2010). Just like businesses, residents can use social media to communicate with governmental organizations, ask questions, and express opinions.

There are some real-world examples of the usefulness of social media, particularly Facebook, by governmental agencies to address unique situations. At the federal level, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) uses Facebook as a customer service tool along with using it as a nexus to communicate authentically with followers (GovLoop, n.d.). The Facebook page for the department has several hundred thousand followers and presents innovative content such as highlighting a veteran on the page each day to humanize the agency (GovLoop, n.d.). Many people think of agencies such as the VA as faceless and lacking in

personality bureaucracies. However, social media, like Facebook, can add personality and humanize the agency so that it makes a human connection. The VA also uses Facebook to provide customer service and refer inquiries to the correct offices and divisions for follow-up (GovLoop, n.d.). In another example of a federal agency using Facebook innovatively, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) used Facebook live video to answer questions on how to spot common scams and fraud (Milcetich, 2017).

Larger state and local governments can also successfully use Facebook to advance their services and public persona. For example, the Florida Department of Health used Facebook for a tobacco-free campaign. Using Facebook tools, the Department was able to target the demographic (adults aged eighteen and up) it was seeking with the campaign so that it had the chance for the most impact (GovLoop, n.d.). Florida's smoking rate for adults and youth is lower than the national average (GovLoop, n.d.). The Facebook campaign may have assisted with this result by bringing awareness to the issue.

Examples of local governments using Facebook effectively and innovatively include Henrico County, Virginia to provide inclement weather updates to residents; the city of Burnsville, Minnesota, which conducted a virtual ride along with its fire department to highlight its services and work; the city of Evanston, Illinois, which held a question-and-answer session with the mayor; and the city of Menlo Park, California, which used a video posted on Facebook to diffuse concerns about a well-regarded tree that was cut down by the city (GovLoop, n.d.). All of these uses for Facebook are innovative and help advance the governmental organization and bring information and services closer to residents.

Connection to the Current Study

The current study seeks to understand the factors that influence the small-town governments to use Facebook to serve residents. Little research has been done on why or the factors that influence small local governments to use social media platforms, such as Facebook, to serve residents. A third research question (RQ3) of this study is to understand what factors influence the small-town governments involved in the study to use social media, specifically Facebook. Answering this research question regarding the factors that influence small-town governments to use Facebook as part of the study will add to the body of knowledge in this area. In sum, social media use endeavors by government can be categorized into transparency, participation, and collaboration efforts.

Potential Local Government Social Media Use Cases

Social media platforms like Facebook lend themselves well to several use cases in which local governments, such as small-town governments, can serve and engage residents. These use cases include possible ones such as providing public notices, requesting public input and feedback, broadcasting or providing video links to local government board meetings, providing advisories on service outages and disruptions, communicating transportation impacts, and coordinating public safety and emergency situations. Each of these cases presents opportunities for local governments to serve residents and for residents to engage in potential collaborative discussions with the local government.

Public Notices and Requests for Public Input

Local governments can use social media to post public notices and requests for input from residents. Social media can be a powerful tool to inform and engage the community on

issues before and services provided by local governments. Today, most residents expect social media platforms to be bi-directional and less formal (Wood, 2019).

Most local governments have frequent needs to provide notices to the public to inform the public or present opportunities to receive public feedback. These notices may include such topics as meetings of governmental bodies, job opportunities, public hearings, invitations to bid or requests for proposals (RFPs), or other miscellaneous legal notices. Social media can be an effective tool to provide these notices to the public and interested parties.

Traditionally, these types of public notices may have been given by posting at the entrance to a government building or by being published in a local newspaper. People now are increasingly turning to reading news online from many different sources (Brynielsson et al., 2018). One of these sources is provided by social media platforms. Social media platforms improve the interactivity between local government and the public, often reaching populations that do not consume traditional media (North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 2010). By publishing these notices to social media platforms, in addition to any required physical posting requirements, local governments can reach a broader audience that may not visit government buildings often, read newspapers, or watch television.

Most local governments have a need to post job announcements for governmental positions. Social media platforms can be an effective tool for recruitment. These vacancy announcements can be posted on social media platforms with links to position descriptions and details or links to information on how to apply (CivicPlus, 2016). Social media use to promote job opportunities is a great way to reach certain demographics, such as millennials (Marabella, 2018).

Another potential use of social media by local governments is to provide updates and cancellation information regarding events being held in the local community (Marabella, 2018). These events might be sponsored by the local government or other organizations. For example, if a parade must be cancelled due to weather or other factors, using social media postings would be a quick way to get the word out about the cancellation.

Social media can be used by local government to provide opportunities for public input and feedback. Examples include city or town planning, land use, transportation plans, and other questions and issues of public concern. Local governments make many decisions that impact the daily lives of residents. Receiving feedback and providing ways for residents to send feedback helps government officials make more informed decisions.

Local government can use social media to invite residents to meetings and to participate in the process in-person (Marabella, 2018). For example, local government may post a notice inviting residents to attend a meeting at which the local government's comprehensive plan will be reviewed and discussed.

Broadcasting of Government Meetings

All local governments have a council or board that governs the locality and enacts legislation through the adoption of ordinances, rules, or policies. Usually, this body is elected by the qualified voters of the locality. The council or board may also appoint other subordinate bodies to carry out the business of governing. Making available videos of governmental meetings is a way in which governing bodies can increase transparency and access to information for residents.

Cinus (2018) states that making videos available on social media is a great way to encourage citizens to participate in local government matters. Offering the videos after meetings

allows residents to watch the governmental meetings as their schedules permits. Oftentimes, a citizen may not be able to attend a governmental meeting at the time it is held due to personal or work commitments. Offering the video through social media allows citizens to be able to see and hear what took place (Mahajan-Cusack, 2016). Offering the videos via social media may even encourage the viewers of the recordings to participate in local government matters (CivicPlus, 2016).

Depending upon the setup and configuration used to provide the video, residents may be able to leave comments on the video or inquire with questions or requests for additional information. This feature can begin a two-way or collaborative conversation between the local government and residents. The ability to engage in feedback via the videos will be dependent upon the process established by the local government and how the social media tools have been configured with regards to feedback mechanisms.

Advisories on Transportation Impacts and Service Outages

Like service outages and disruptions, most residents are intently concerned about any impacts to transportation in their daily lives as they commute to work, school, businesses, or other locations of significance. Particularly, road construction can be frustrating and posting updates about delays or routes to avoid can ease the frustrations of citizens (CivicPlus, 2016). Therefore, it is wise for local government to use social media to share information on transportation impacts and disruptions.

Another example is sharing information about road closures (Suciu, 2019). These road closures may be the result of accidents, road construction, or other incidents taking place. Or, the information might be about a planned major event such as a sporting event that might cause congestion and impact travel. The local government might post information on routes or modes

of transportation to use for attendees as well as information on routes or modes of transportation to take for those not attending the event.

Finally, sharing information about disruptions in municipal-provided services such as city hall operating hours or water, sewer, or trash pickup services are important use cases. Residents heavily depend upon these key services and need to be informed in the event there are disruptions so that alternate plans might be made.

Public Safety and Emergency Management

Public safety and emergency management are core functions of local government. Mahajan-Cusack (2016) states that disaster and emergency response and public safety management are some of the most frequent uses of social media by local governments. Social media platforms like Facebook can indeed be a valuable tool when used by local governments to provide and receive critical information on public safety, law enforcement, health, and emergency management concerns. Many stakeholders in emergencies and crises already use social media (Brynielsson et al., 2018). Thus, Facebook lends itself naturally to use by public safety or emergency managers to reach key stakeholders during times of emergencies or in planning for emergency responses. During an emergency or crisis, the main motive for alerting the population is to save lives and to prevent or limit dangers associated with the emergency or crisis (Brynielsson et al., 2018). Social media can help local governments communicate safety information to the affected areas quickly (CivicPlus, 2016).

Local governments can post alerts to Facebook about emergency situations such as gas leaks, severe weather, or civil disturbances to alert the public and provide recommendations on how to remain safe. Similarly, the public can also post information to their personal social media accounts or those of government about observations and encounters with crisis or emergency

incidents. This scenario helps both government and residents receive insight and information on emergency events. Residents can be an additional set of "eyes and ears" for the local government. Local governments may find value in reposting information shared on social media platforms maintained by federal and state authorities related to large-scale emergencies or weather events such as posts from the National Weather Service (NWS) or the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) (Mahajan-Cusack, 2016). If this sharing strategy is used, local governments can tailor the shared items to the local community (Mahajan-Cusack, 2016).

Facebook and other social media platforms can be used by local governments for law enforcement functions of public safety to seek information on wanted individuals, missing persons, or unsolved crimes. In fact, information posted on social media by law enforcement can circulate faster and reach larger audiences than with sources such as the traditional news media (Boateng & Chenane, (2020). One of these examples is sharing information about AMBER Alerts, which are alerts issued regarding abducted children (CivicPlus, 2016). Law enforcement officials can also use social media to share audio or video files with social media users to request information on the identity or locations of the individuals depicted. Social media can assist law enforcement with controlling crime and disorder, investigating crimes, and obtaining tips and information (Boateng & Chenane, 2020).

Social media use by law enforcement need not be limited to sharing information on crime and disorder (Boateng & Chenane, 2020). Facebook can also be used to highlight the responsibilities of law enforcement, present educational information, and increase trust and transparency in law enforcement. These types of postings can establish good relationships between law enforcement and the community.

It is important that local governments using social media to convey emergency information have a plan to listen to the concerns of stakeholders and reply to requests from victims for any assistance needed in a timely manner (Lin et al., 2016). Otherwise, social media use for public safety and emergency management events will not be ideal or accomplish acceptable outcomes. Social media must be given sufficient time and regard for development and maintenance when used for providing and receiving emergency related information.

Connection to the Current Study

The first research question (RQ1) of the study seeks to determine how Facebook is being used by small-town governments to serve residents. The methods Bellström et al. (2016) used to categorize Facebook posts by will assist in answering how Facebook is being used by the small-town governments to serve residents. Many of the categories developed by Bellström et al. (2016) would be inclusive of the possible use cases for local governments to use in serving their residents.

The third research question (RQ3) of this study is to understand what factors influence the small-town governments involved in the study to use social media, specifically Facebook. Some of these factors for using social media may include the potential use cases for local governments. Additionally, as this is a multi-case study, recommendations are provided to the towns that will strengthen each town's use of Facebook to serve residents. These recommendations are built upon the literature reviewed in this study along with the results of this study.

Best Practices in Establishing and Refining a Social Media Presence

The general best practices for the use of social media across all businesses and organizations—not just governmental organizations—must be explored to develop an

understanding of how the various levels of government can use social media to inform and engage residents effectively. These practices would be important for levels of government such as small-town governments. Today, all brands and most companies understand the need to have a social media presence and realize that by doing so, they agree to have a two-way conversation (Yeomans, 2018). No matter if an organization is starting out or has a longstanding history in using social media platforms, best practices can assist with the management and refinement of their presence on social media.

All types of individuals and organizations utilize social media (Picazo-Vela et al., 2012). An organization considering a presence on social media platforms should take into consideration several areas of concern. These areas include determining the purpose and plan, getting to know the customer or consumer, determining which social media platforms to use, engaging the customer or consumer, monitoring use, and refining and improving the presence. By considering these areas, the organization will be better prepared to serve those who may be prospective or actual consumers or customers of the organization.

Determine Purpose and Plan

Determining the purpose of being present on social media platforms and planning for that presence are especially important considerations. As with most projects, proper planning is key and will lead to greater success. If no plans or goals are outlined, it will be difficult to measure success and the return on investment (Newberry & LePage, 2021). Therefore, the organization should devote time to understanding its purpose and plan for the use of social media. Having a plan with social media usage will allow the organization to know if it is succeeding or failing with its intents and purposes (Clarke, 2019). It is not acceptable for most organizations,

including governmental organizations, to devote time and financial resources to a project without having a means to determine the return on investment and the outcomes.

Planning areas that should be considered include establishing organizational leadership support, determining the objective of social media presence, understanding the resources available, and staffing considerations (University of California, Santa Barbara, n.d.). Before embarking on a social media presence, the organization should have the support of key leaders and decision makers. In the case of governmental organizations, these decisionmakers may be elected officials, city or town managers or administrators, and department heads of the government. One or more objectives for the use of social media platforms should also be identified. Additionally, understanding the platforms and technology availability should be considered.

In addition, as part of selecting the platforms, the organization should determine policies and procedures for the use of the platforms. For example, determining which employees or agents are allowed to post on behalf of the organization should be considered. Also, security procedures, such as those to prevent unauthorized use or takeover, must be considered. Newberry (2023) recommends that policies be developed covering security, staff training on security issues facing social media, an approval process for postings, and a designated person in charge of all social media platforms. These steps will help to mitigate the security risks that social media presents.

Finally, a key concern is staffing. Some organizations have dedicated social media staff. The larger an organization is the greater the number of staff assigned to social media management roles (Cover, 2020). It is likely that smaller organizations may make social media management a shared effort involving multiple departments or individuals who may be tasked

with other primary job duties. The implementation of an effective social media presence will likely require coordination among multiple departments or employees.

Know the Customer or Consumer

Like understanding its purpose and developing a plan for being present on social media, the organization must also seek to know their customers or consumers. In the case of a governmental organization, the predominant customer or consumers are likely to be its constituents or residents. They represent the organization's audience on social media. Providing information to the audience is the entire purpose of being on social media. Therefore, knowing the customer or consumer will help the organization cultivate and share information that is useful to them and meet the organizational strategic reasons for using social media platforms.

If the organization does not know who its audience is, the organization cannot give them the content they want (Clarke, 2019). Some of the datapoints an organization may wish to know about its consumers or customers may be age, location, job title or industry, average income, or interests (Newberry & LePage, 2021). All these metrics will help the organization tailor its social media messaging and engagement strategy to best fit its social media strategy. These metrics will help the organization to define its target audience, which is the group of people most likely to be interested in the organization's product (Riserbato, 2020).

As part of understanding the target audience, the organization should assume the customer or consumer persona (Riserbato, 2020). Doing so will help the organization to determine the audience's needs that need to be addressed for product or service information. It would be difficult for an organization to provide content or services via social media if they are not tailored to the needs of the customer or consumer. This failure would in fact likely run afoul of the organization's purpose and plan for using social media.

Determine Which Social Media Platforms to Use

The organization must determine which social media platforms to use for its presence on social media. A large part of this endeavor will involve using information identified in the planning and understanding of the customer or consumer phase. Additionally, the organization's audience expects different types of content depending on the social media platform (Gogolan, 2020; Aboulhosn, 2019). Customers and consumers choose to be on particular social media platforms for various reasons such as the intent of the platform or the popularity of the platform with certain gender or age range demographics. For example, a consumer who is younger in age may use Instagram or TikTok instead of Facebook. Even though Facebook is the social media platform with the most users, it might not be the best for all organizations and their purposes (Shaw, 2018).

There are numerous social media platforms with each having their own purposes, advantages, and disadvantages. The organization must evaluate the social media platforms and select the tools that are the best fit for the organization by taking into consideration its desired plans and outcomes. It is not a good idea to establish a presence on many social media platforms just to have a presence because the organization runs the chance of spreading itself too thin (Clarke, 2019). Doing so leads to neglect of the social media tool and is counterproductive to the organization's social media program. The bottom line is that the organization should select the social media platforms that are the most appropriate and maintain the presence well (University of California, Santa Barbara, n.d.).

Engagement

One of the foundational best practices for an organization utilizing social media is for it to be active on its social media platforms (Hatcher & Gallardo, 2014). Simply establishing a

static presence is not enough. Organizations must engage the customer or consumer. The organization must cultivate and grow its social media presence to be successful. The organization should be creative in drawing attention to itself on social media (Hatcher & Gallardo, 2014). This creativity might include such themes as weekly questions or opportunities that invite the audience to participate.

A foundational practice is to timely reply to all inquiries received from consumers or customers. Organizations should reply to messages received from customers or consumers, answer their questions, and, in cases where appropriate, re-share content belonging to the customer or consumer (Shaw, 2018). Responding is particularly important for governmental organizations as constituents and residents are the customers. It would be detrimental for an organization's social media presence to consistently ignore the customer or consumer. In fact, this might harm the organization's reputation or standing and in effect cause the organization's use of social media to be counterproductive to its mission.

Failure to engage makes the organization look lazy or unwilling (Clarke, 2019). This potential outcome is certainly contrary to successful social media engagement. Organizations must value the input of their social media followers and listen to their questions and concerns. Clarke (2019) states that social media is analogous to a dinner party. The host of the dinner party (such as an organization on social media) should converse in a two-way conversation as opposed to being a speaker at a podium that orates one-way (Clarke, 2019). Not listening to social media followers is detrimental to the entire purpose of establishing a social media presence. In fact, it could be said that it takes the "social" part out of social media.

Another element of engaging the customer or consumer is transparency. The organization must maintain transparency and authenticity about its products and operations

(Zote, 2021). Honesty is an essential element of trust. An organization that is not honest or transparent runs great risks to its integrity and respect. Governmental organizations can achieve much goodwill by being transparent, and social media can assist with this goal.

Monitoring

Monitoring, evaluating, and assessing are vital to the success of a social media presence. Significantly, measurement and analytics are the keys to success of the organization in using social media (Tufts University, n.d.). Organizations should monitor their social media platforms by routinely reviewing reports and analytical data provided to the administrators by the social media platform provider. According to IBM (n.d.), social media analytics "is the ability to gather and find meaning in data gathered from social channels to support business decisions — and measure the performance of actions based on those decisions through social media" (para. 2). By reviewing analytical and metrics reports, the organization can match this data to posts and interactions to determine what caused certain results (Tufts University, n.d.).

Each social media platform has built-in analytical and insight tools. There are also commercially available tools from external providers that help aggregate social media analytical and insight data (Baker, 2023). Regardless of the tool, some of the datapoints the organization will want to monitor include reach and engagement, "retweets," "likes," "follows," and "impressions" (Aboulhosn, 2019). These data metrics should be tracked weekly, monthly, and quarterly (Aboulhosn, 2019). The data metrics can be reported to organizational leadership (e.g., elected officials or administrators in a government organization) to support the operation of the social media program, point out areas that need improvement, and identify additional resources.

Refinement and Improvement

Establishing and maintaining a social media presence is not a "set it and forget it" proposition because it requires ongoing review and finetuning. Social media marketing requires constant learning in order to stay on top of the latest trends and best practices (Gogolan, 2020). If the organization wants to be successful and add value to its social media presence, the organization must refine and improve its presence and maintain that presence. Governmental organizations must also engage in consistent refinement and improvement of their social media platforms and presence.

The organization should periodically review and audit its social media presence and program. This audit should include elements such as if the consumer or customers are present, how consumers and customers are using the platform, and if specific social media tools are allowing the organization to meet its goals (Clarke, 2019). It is important to also note that success and building community on a social media platform is not an end result but a process (Tufts University, n.d.). Therefore, the organization must continue to refine and improve its message and desired outcomes in its social media plans.

Part of the refinement and improvement process also includes keeping an eye on what the competition or similarly situated organizations are doing with their social media presence. This type of monitoring is known as performing a competitive analysis (Newberry & LePage, 2021). The competitive analysis will help the organization become aware of new trends and new ideas and see what other organizations and their customers or consumers are doing on social media. The competitive analysis will also help the organization spot strategies that are working well and strategies not working well (Newberry & LePage, 2021). In the case of governmental organizations, an analysis may include looking at what other government organizations are

doing. For example, a small-town government might look to nearby towns similar in size for ideas on improving or maintaining its social media presence.

Connection to the Current Study

The first research question (RQ1) of the study seeks to determine how Facebook is being used by small-town governments to serve residents. As part of answering this research question, it is important to understand some of the best practices for using social media by all types of organizations, not just governmental organizations. These best practices include planning, understanding the customer or consumer, selecting the social media tools to use, engaging with customers and consumers, monitoring the platform, and engaging in the process of refinement and improvement.

Following social media best practices is likely to lead to better outcomes for both the government and its citizens. These best practices, applicable to small-town governments, are the focus of this study. Because this is a multi-case study, recommendations are provided to the towns on how to improve and expand their use of Facebook. The recommendations draw upon the overall best practices.

The second research question (RQ2) of the study seeks to determine the results that are experienced by the small-town governments and residents in each town's use of Facebook. Answering this research question will provide insights and key metrics into the age ranges and genders engaging with the Facebook pages of the small-town governments. Knowing this information will assist the small-town governments in understanding their consumers better and allow them to seek out those who might not be following their Facebook pages for possible engagement.

Best Practices in Using Social Media for Citizen Engagement

Engagement is a major factor in using social media platforms. Social media presents the opportunity for multi-directional and deeper conversations and engagement. When government uses social media platforms, it is paramount to consider citizen engagement. Governmental organizations can implement and follow best practices to engage citizens and provide customer support via social media platforms such as Facebook. Best practices include use cases and explanations of how social media platforms are setup or maintained by the governmental organization.

Use Case Best Practices for Engagement

Noonan et al. (2023) highlight five use case areas in which local governments can use social media to engage citizens: increasing awareness of community programs, services, resources, issues, and events; highlighting the good work your municipality does; connecting with the community and building trust; receiving feedback; and increasing transparency and accessibility. Similarly, Devgan (2022) outlines four use case areas in which governmental organizations can use social media to engage citizens: communicating with the public about services, sharing public documents and data, providing customer service, and promoting campaigns and initiatives. Social media platforms like Facebook lend themselves well to the areas mentioned by Noonan et al. (2023) and Devan (2022) for citizen engagement, and small-town governments can take advantage of these best practices to engage citizens.

Local governments can easily provide opportunities to engage citizens by using Facebook or other social media platforms to meet the use cases advanced by Devgan (2022) and Noonan et al. (2023). For example, a small-town government might post information about trash pickup or water and sewer utilities to inform residents about what services are available and any changes to

those services. Likewise, a small-town government can engage residents by sharing agendas and minutes for governmental body meetings to keep residents informed of public business. Posting these types of documents increases access, bolsters transparency efforts, and assists in establishing trust between the government and residents.

Social media can also be used to engage residents in customer service related functions. For example, a resident may submit via social media a maintenance request (e.g., streetlight outages) that needs to be addressed by the proper town department. The town can then respond to the resident with updates regarding the request or ask for more information, if needed. Additionally, social media can be used to inform residents of important campaigns and initiatives such as upcoming elections and voting information. Finally, social media can be used to engage residents by highlighting the successes of the local government. For example, social media can be used to celebrate a major accomplishment such as the completion of a new building project that will serve the community. Another example of highlighting successes may be to humanize the town government by highlighting town employee accomplishments (e.g., new hires, promotions, retirements, new educational attainments).

Operational Related Best Practices for Engagement

There are operational best practices that governmental organizations can implement for managing their social media platforms to provide opportunities for citizen engagement. Barnhart (2022) outlines specific best practices for governmental organizations on managing their social media presence which include emphasizing visual content, getting conversational with constituents, responding to messages in a timely manner, and publishing content to multiple social media platforms. By following these best practices, it is likely the governmental social media presence will have more of an ability to engage with citizens and followers. This

enhanced engagement leads to a more effective use and positive impact in using social media platforms to serve residents.

Small town governments can meet these best practices advanced by Barnhart (2022) with their social media platforms like Facebook. For emphasizing visual content, items such as photos and videos can be posted on social media to present information to residents and followers. For example, a small-town government might decide to post a video of a town council meeting on its Facebook page instead of posting a text summary of the actions taken during the meeting. The Facebook Live feature is also a great way to potentially increase engagement in real time. A major benefit of using Facebook Live is that "viewers can react, comment and share in real time, and agencies can quickly respond to questions and concerns" (Smarsh, n.d., para. 10). The posting of videos and visual content is likely to stand out more to social media followers than simple text. Of course, text along with visual content can be used to draw more attention to postings. For example, the town might provide the text summary of actions taken during a town council meeting along with the full video of the meeting so that the viewer can have a more complete understanding of how the meeting transpired.

To meet the conversational best practice, small-town local governments could engage in two-way or collaborative conversations. Afterall, social media is social in nature and multi-directional conversations would be expected and an ideal outcome. For example, a small-town government might make it a frequent effort to post on social media asking residents how they are using a specific town government service to get an idea of utilization or possible improvements. Residents and town government personnel can converse back and forth about the question and the input provided. By getting conversational, governmental organizations and constituents alike will benefit from a potentially collaborative dialogue.

Responding to constituents via social media in a timely manner is a substantial best practice. It is important that inquiries made via social media are responded to in a timely manner and style like they would be in traditional communications (such as mail, phone, and email). Governmental organizations should make it a habit to respond to messages and inquiries as soon as possible by either providing an answer or directing the question to the proper person or department for a response. Just because the inquiry is received via social media should not make a difference in determining whether a response is made. To assist in providing timely and complete responses, templates for responses can be used to respond to common inquiries or complaints (Hood, 2019).

As another best practice, governmental organizations should use more than one social media platform to get out their message. Those who are older or younger in age may be following different social media platforms. For example, a small-town government should consider establishing a presence on other platforms (such as Instagram or Twitter) in addition to Facebook. Using more than one platform is part of a comprehensive strategy to assist in communicating with residents and other interested parties. Research may be necessary to determine which social media platforms are being used by the target audience and desired demographics (Hood, 2019).

Connection to the Current Study

The first research question (RQ1) of the study seeks to determine how Facebook is being used by small-town governments to serve residents. To answer this research question, it is important to understand some of the best practices for using social media by governmental organizations. These best practices are use case and operationally related. Part of the reasons for this study is to provide recommendations for the towns studied to improve and expand their use

of Facebook. Providing recommendations is especially important since this study is based upon a case study foundation. Following best practices can improve the use of social media by governmental organizations for both the government and citizens. Best practices apply when determining what types of content to post on social media along with how the social media presence is operationally setup and maintained.

Summary

This chapter reviewed the theoretical framework for the multi-case study, which is the T3 Framework for Innovation by Dr. Sonny Magana, for reviewing and assessing the level at which the small-town local governments are using Facebook. This chapter also included a review of the literature related to social media history, the advantages and disadvantages of social media use, the Open Government Initiative and Mergel's framework for evaluating social media, prior studies related to local government Facebook use, the factors influencing the use of social media by the private sector and government organizations, potential use cases for social media use by local governments, best practices for the establishment and refinement of a social media presence, and best practices in using social media for citizen engagement. The chapter connects these literature aspects to the current study. The current study builds upon the literature regarding the reasons governments, particularly small-town local governments, are using Facebook to serve residents, the results, and the factors influencing small-town governments to use Facebook.

The foundational theoretical framework for the study is the T3 Framework for Innovation by Dr. Sonny Magana for reviewing and assessing the level at which the small-town local governments are using Facebook.

Chapter 3 presents the research design and methods for the study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this mixed methods multi-case study is to analyze (1) how small-town governments are using Facebook to serve residents; (2) the results that are experienced by the small-town governments and residents in the town's use of Facebook; and (3) the factors that influence the small-town governments to use Facebook to serve residents. The study highlights the similarities and differences among three town governments (Abingdon, Lebanon, and Marion) located in Southwestern Virginia in their approach and the experiences in the use of the social media platform, Facebook.

Design

This section details the research design, approach, and methods used in the study. The case study design is utilized in the study to measure, explain, and understand the extent to which the town governments use the Facebook social media platform to serve residents and the results of using Facebook to serve residents.

According to Creswell & Poth (2018), a case study design is one:

"...in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case themes." (p. 96)

The three main case study methodologists are Robert K. Yin, Sharan Merriam, and Robert E. Stake (Yazan, 2015). According to Merriam (1998), a case study is "an intensive,

holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a

person, a process, or a social unit" (Location No. 44).

Case studies help researchers search for meaning and understanding (Merriam & Tisdell,

2016). A case study may be made up of entities such as individuals, a small group,

organizations, or partnerships (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, the town units of local

government are organizations, and each is suited to be a case for study regarding their approach

and experiences with Facebook. Thus, the case study design is an appropriate research tool.

The specific type of case study utilized for the study is a multi-case (sometimes referred

to as collective) study. A collective case study involves collecting and analyzing data from

multiple cases (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016.) The researcher selected a collective case study since

it best allows for the use of Facebook by local governments to serve residents to be examined

across the three towns. Each town is a case, and the collective case study approach allows for

similarities and differences to be drawn among the town governments across the three cases.

The study uses a mixed methods approach that includes both quantitative data and

qualitative data to supplement the quantitative findings. According to Leavy (2017), mixed

methods research "...involves collecting and integrating quantitative and qualitative data in a

single project and therefore may result in a more comprehensive understanding of the

phenomenon under investigation" (p. 164). In this case, the phenomenon is the use of Facebook

by towns as part of e-government to serve residents and the results experienced by the town

governments and residents.

Questions that call for an understanding of use, measurement, or results are appropriate

for a quantitative research method. According to Watson (2015), quantitative research

"encompasses a range of methods concerned with the systematic investigation of social

phenomena, using statistical or numerical data" (p. 1). Simply, according to Patten & Newhart (2018), quantitative research "collects data that will be analyzed as numbers" (p. 69). Data generated by the Facebook reports resulting from each town's use will be used to address the research questions.

Questions that call for an understanding of an issue are appropriate for a qualitative design (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As such, a qualitative research component is used in the study since not all the information about the town's use of Facebook and results can be gleamed from a quantitative component alone. Qualitative research can also be used to understand how many different people cope in real-world settings in many different circumstances (Yin, 2016). A qualitative approach as a part of the study's method—which will take the form of semi-structured interviews—allows for greater depth of understanding and meaning to be interpreted from the data collected, particularly the quantitative data.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide the study:

RQ1: *How are three small-town governments using Facebook to serve residents?*

RQ2: *What results are experienced by the three small-town governments and residents in the town's use of Facebook to serve residents?*

RQ3: *What are the factors that influence the three small-town governments to use Facebook to serve residents?*

Setting

The study involves three small-town units of government (Abingdon, Lebanon, and Marion) that are in the Southwestern region of the Commonwealth of Virginia. This region of Virginia borders West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, and North Carolina. Each of the three

towns used in the study has populations of under 10,000 residents. Abingdon is in Washington

County, Lebanon is in Russell County, and Marion is in Smyth County. Each town is the county

seat and the most populated town of their respective counties. The setting and the towns were

chosen for geographic convenience, as the researcher is a resident of this area. It is assumed that

the small-town units of local government in this region are likely to experience the same

opportunities and challenges related to Facebook usage as small units of local government

located elsewhere in the United States or the world. The collection of data from three sites also

assists in providing triangulation.

Each of the three towns have a council-manager form of government. In this form of

government, which is the most popular form of local government, members are elected to the

council and oversee general administration, set policy, and adopt a budget (National League of

Cities, n.d). The council has appointed a professional manager to oversee day-to-day

administrative operations (National League of Cities, n.d). In all three of the study towns,

members of the town council are elected on an at-large basis. In two of the three towns

(Lebanon and Marion), the mayor is separately elected at-large instead of being chosen by the

council from amongst its members (as is the process in Abingdon). In all three towns, the mayor

presides at council meetings and exercises certain ceremonial functions. The town manager is

the day-to-day operational manager of each town and is appointed by the town council.

Participants

The towns and participants were selected by purposive sampling. In purposeful

sampling, the researcher selects locations and participants because these can best provide

information about the research questions and the central phenomenon under study (Creswell &

Poth, 2018). The towns of Abingdon, Lebanon, and Marion each maintain a page on the

Facebook social media platform that represents the town government. The town maintaining a

Facebook page is an essential element for inclusion in the study. The participants in the study are

employees or officials of the towns with experience or some degree of knowledge in how their

town uses Facebook to serve residents. Having this knowledge or experience is essential to

involve the participants in the study. The participants, by virtue of their position, are likely to

provide integral insights and perspectives about the research questions guiding the study

regarding their respective town's experiences with Facebook usage.

       Employees or officials serving in the following roles with each town are the participants

in the study:

- Primary town Facebook page administrator (employee)

- Town manager (executive official)

- Mayor (elected official)

Procedures

       The first step of the research process is to receive commitment from the three town

governments to participate in the study. The researcher contacted the appropriate officials of the

towns of Abingdon, Lebanon, and Marion by email to invite them to take part in the study. For

each town, a town government contact was identified to serve as a liaison between the researcher

and the necessary employees or officials of the town for the study data collection phase. The

purpose of the study and the benefit of participation in the study was explained to the liaison and

other town employees or officials as needed as part of the process to secure commitment and

willingness to participate.

Data Collection and Analysis

Following approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), data was collected. The study uses document analysis and interviews as data collection methods. These are appropriate methods for a case study. The primary data collection tool used in the study is analysis of each town's Facebook page content and associated Insights reports, supplemented by interviews to obtain a deeper understanding of the data. Data are collected to cover the study period of January 1, 2022 through December 31, 2022. This section details each data collection method used in the study along with the data analysis methods for each respective method.

Following data collection, the data was analyzed. The purpose of data analysis is to draw meaningful inferences about the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The data analysis process involves preparing and organizing the data for analysis, identifying themes through the coding process, and finally providing a representation of the data such as in tables, figures, and discussion (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The data collected in the study via the collection methods was organized and analyzed by categorization, themes were identified, and the findings are presented. It is also important that data analysis occurs simultaneously with the data collection process. Without simultaneous data collection and analysis, the data collected can be unfocused, repetitious, and simply overwhelming in the sheer volume of materials that must be processed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The simultaneous process also assists the researcher in focusing the study and understanding the themes that become evident from the data.

As the study is a collective case study, *within-case analysis* and *cross-case analysis* was performed. For within-case analysis, each case is treated as a case within itself (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In the study, each town comprises an individual case for within-case analysis.

Considering all cases together is cross-case analysis and begins once all within-case analysis has finished (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In cross-case analysis, similarities and differences are drawn involving all the cases together to relate the cases to each other. In the cross-case analysis, each town case was analyzed to show the similarities and differences among the three town governments in their approach to Facebook and the results. It is also important to note that since a cross-case analysis is performed, the categories established do appear in the analysis of each case.

Document Analysis of Facebook Page and Facebook Insight Reports

As part of the study's data collection, the researcher obtained and analyzed documents that contain details and offer insights into each town's use of Facebook to serve residents. These documents allowed for important details such as demographics and measures of use to be categorized into presentable results. The data gathered from the documents allowed for the creation of tables and figures to present the findings and was supplemented with interviews.

The specific documents obtained from the towns and analyzed along with the significance of each document type and the research question(s) it addresses are outlined as follows.

Facebook Page

The first set of documents collected and analyzed were each town's main Facebook page from the public perspective. Pages and content were publicly accessible and viewable to users on the Facebook platform. As such, the researcher reviewed the appropriate town Facebook pages and collected data for analyses. This data collection and analysis method was used by the researcher to determine how the town governments were using Facebook to serve residents (RQ1). A page is the electronic presence established on the Facebook social media platform to

represent an entity or organization. The town Facebook page shows the public content posted by the town and the reactions and comments from the page's followers. The public postings on each town's main Facebook page are demonstrative of how the town publicly uses Facebook to communicate in serving residents.

For analysis, each post on each town's main Facebook page made by the town occurring during the research study designated time period (January 1, 2022 through December 31, 2022) was analyzed and categorized by the researcher to specific use case categories representing the apparent purpose(s) of the post. As a result of these categorizations, tables and figures are produced to quantify and summarize the dataset. The data show the total number of posts made by the town categorized by category and the frequency of posts per use case category over the study time period. A narrative was generated to describe the findings for each town and to compare the findings across each town to answer RQ1.

Facebook Insights Reports

The next set of documents collected and analyzed by the researcher were the Facebook Insights Reports for each town. This data collection and analysis method was used by the researcher to determine the results experienced by the small-town governments and residents in the town's use of Facebook to serve residents, and it addresses answering RQ2. The reports were requested from the Facebook page manager of the primary page for each town for the research study designated time period (January 1, 2022 through December 31, 2022) since the reports are not publicly accessible. These reports are online metrics/performance indicators from the Facebook platform that are automatically generated by Facebook and only accessible to page administrators. These reports provide insights over specific time periods into the users following or engaging with the page, such as demographics of the followers (gender and age ranges which

comprise the page's audience) and the performance of the page (number of page visits, how many users saw specific posts, new "likes" of the page). The reports also provide data on the total number of page followers ("likes"), visit rates, and the reach of the page on the Facebook platform.

After the main Facebook page for each town was analyzed and the posts and interactions categorized, the Facebook Insights reports were analyzed after being provided by each town. These reports provide insights over specific time periods into the users following or engaging with the page, such as the total number of followers ("likes"), the demographics of the followers (gender and age ranges), and the performance of the page (number of page visits, the reach of the page content, new "likes" of the page). Tables and figures were produced to show the following elements: age ranges and gender of followers (Facebook page audience), total followers for each page (those who "like" or follow the page), number of visits, the reach of the page (how many users saw specific posts), and the number of "new" likes received by the page over the study time period. A narrative was generated to describe the findings for each town and to compare the findings across each town to answer RQ2.

Interviews

To gain a greater understanding of Facebook use by the towns that goes beyond the document data analysis, interviews were used to supplement the quantitative findings of the document analysis component of the study. Interviews are an indispensable data collection method used in the study and are an indispensable part of the qualitative component of the research process. In fact, interviews are one of the most important sources of case study evidence (Yin, 2018). Interviews are when one person elicits information from another (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The interviews used for a case study resemble guided conversations

and are not structured queries (Yin, 2018). Interviews allow the researcher to discover themes and similarities that may not be easily detectable through other means, such as document analysis. Semi-structured interviews are used in the study. The semi-structured format of the interviews used in the study allowed for flexibility, follow-up questions, and probing the participant's responses when needed for clarifications. Interviews occurred after the document analysis data collection phase had been completed. The researcher provided in advance of the interview to each interviewee the preliminary findings of the study's quantitative component (document analysis findings) to allow the interviewee to reflect upon the findings.

Interviews took place between the researcher and participant at a mutually agreeable time and place. Interviews were estimated to last no more than 30 minutes in duration. All interviews were recorded by audio and subsequently transcribed. The participant was made aware of the recording and asked to sign an informed consent form and return it to the researcher before the interview took place. The same set of questions were asked by the researcher of each interview participant. The room or space used for the interview allowed for both privacy and a distraction-free environment for the interview process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher made reflexive notes after each interview to record impressions and other notable observations.

The following open-ended and semi-structured interview questions gathered the participants' insights and perspectives into the research questions of the study. The research questions to which each interview question pertains are also noted.

1) Which factors encouraged your town to create and maintain a Facebook page? (RQ3)

2) What are some specific reasons your town uses Facebook? (RQ1)

3) How does the town determine what types of posts or content it posts or shares on its Facebook page? (RQ1)

4) Is the town satisfied with the results of its Facebook usage? (RQ2)

5) Do you see the town's use of Facebook as part of its core service offerings or a supplemental tool to complement traditional governmental services? (RQ3)

6) Any plans to increase marketing or public awareness of the town's Facebook page to get more views, followers, or engagements in general or from certain demographics? (RQ2)

7) Any plans to expand, enhance, or otherwise increase presence and usage of Facebook or its features? (RQ1)

8) Any other feedback or comments that you would like to share?

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness involves addressing the credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability of the study. Trustworthiness is an especially important consideration for research. The study used triangulation, member checks, thick descriptions, and a multi-site design to support trustworthiness.

Credibility

Credibility, also known as internal validity, is the most important aspect of trustworthiness. Credibility refers to the ability of a study to be taken as a serious one that has undertaken best practices in the research process. Hence, the study is credible and adds to the body of knowledge on the subject. One method used to establish credibility was member checking.

Member checking is used as a method to establish credibility of the study. Member checking is also known as "respondent validation" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Each participant was given a copy of their transcribed interview and asked to confirm the transcript is correct or to indicate if changes were needed. The use of the member-checking strategy enhanced

confidence in data interpretations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Thus, member checking served as a check to increase the level of credibility of the study.

Another way to establish credibility is by using triangulation. According to (Creswell & Poth, 2018), by using triangulation, researchers "make use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence for validating the accuracy of their study" (p. 328). In the study, three sites (the towns of Abingdon, Lebanon, and Marion) were used for data collection. Thus, triangulation was established in the study.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability and confirmability are important considerations in a study. Dependability and confirmability are looked at to judge the ability to replicate the study in different settings, places, or environments. Dependability and confirmability can be accomplished through auditing the research project (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the study, the researcher kept an audit trail documenting all relevant actions in the study phase. The audit trail was a method that allowed for the dependability and confirmability of the study to be established (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Transferability

Transferability, also known as external validity, is the extent to which the findings in one study can be applied to another study or situation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher can enable transferability by using "thick, rich" descriptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By providing thick and rich descriptions, the researcher enables readers of the study to replicate the information to other settings and allow for a decision to be made regarding transferability (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Thick and rich descriptions include providing detailed descriptions of

the setting, participants, and the findings, along with adequate evidence from interviews, field notes, and examined documents (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

In the study, a collective case study approach (multiple sites) was used. This use of a collective case study approach assisted in establishing the transferability of the study. The researcher was able to identify trends, patterns, themes, similarities, and differences regarding the use of Facebook to serve residents and the results across all the sites involved both individually and collectively.

Ethical Considerations

A researcher must be cognizant of ethical considerations when conducting research, especially in cases that involve human subjects. In research, ethical dilemmas may arise concerning the collection of data and dissemination of findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, before data collection took place from individual participants (human subjects), an application was submitted to the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to approve this study. The purpose of IRB review was to provide an independent evaluation of the proposed research to see that it is ethically acceptable, check for possible researcher bias, and evaluate compliance with laws and regulations designed to protect human subjects (Grady, 2015).

The IRB process was also designed to ensure that human subject research participants were treated with respect and that any risks experienced by participants were justified (Doernberg & Wendler, 2016). Obtaining approval from the IRB was a key part of this process that helped the researcher understand ethical considerations regarding human subjects. An informed consent form was presented to each prospective participant to request their agreement to take part in the study. The template informed consent form provided by the Liberty

University IRB was adapted and used for this purpose. Before data collection took place involving individual participants, a signed informed consent form was returned to the researcher.

The study was performed by the researcher to fulfil a legitimate purpose: the requirements for earning the Ph.D. in Public Administration from Liberty University. Participation in the study was voluntary and participants were provided information as part of the informed consent process on how to withdraw from the study or on how to address and report concerns regarding study participation. The risk level for participation in the study was expected to be low. Participants were treated professionally and with respect by the researcher. Due to the nature of the study, focusing upon three specific towns, the names of the towns and the town employees or official positions participating in the study were important and, thus, appear in the findings. However, the actual names of the study participants are confidential and not reported.

At all times during the study, data and personally identifiable information was kept confidentially and securely stored in both electronic systems and in any physical storage and handling of materials produced. All study data and research records were kept in a secure manner during and following the study and data collection processes. Electronic storage is password protected, and physical records storage is kept under lock and key. After three years, following the conclusion of the study, all study data and research records will be destroyed.

Summary

This chapter provides an overview of the research design, setting of each case study, participants, procedures, data collection methods, data analysis methods, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations for this multi-case study. The purpose of this multi-case study is to analyze (1) how small-town governments are using Facebook to serve residents; (2) the results that are experienced by the small-town governments and residents in the town's use of Facebook;

and (3) the factors that influence the small-town governments to use Facebook to serve residents. The study highlights the similarities and differences among the town governments in their approach to the use of Facebook. The methods set out in this chapter detail the methodology used for the study.

Chapter 4 provides the results of the study in accordance with the research design and methods outlined in this chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this mixed methods multi-case study is to analyze (1) how three small-town governments are using Facebook to serve residents; (2) the results that are experienced by the three small-town governments and residents in the town's use of Facebook; and (3) the factors that influence the three small-town governments to use Facebook to serve residents. The study highlights the similarities and differences among three town governments (Abingdon, Lebanon, and Marion) located in Southwestern Virginia in their approach and the experiences in the use of the social media platform Facebook. Data from the towns are presented and compared to each other.

This chapter includes a description of the setting and participants, a general overview of the findings, the data analysis process details, the results of the data analysis presented in tables and charts along with a descriptive narrative, the research question responses, and a summary of the chapter.

Setting and Participants

The specific small-town governments analyzed in this study are the towns of Abingdon (Washington County), Lebanon (Russell County), and Marion (Smyth County) located in Southwestern Virginia. The population of Abingdon is 7,867, Lebanon is 3,147 and Marion is 5,559 as of July 1, 2019 (United States Census Bureau, 2020). The towns of Abingdon, Lebanon, and Marion each maintain a page on the Facebook social media platform that represents the town government. The town having and maintaining a Facebook page is an essential element for inclusion in the study.

The individual participants in the study used for the interviews are employees or officials of the towns with experience or some degree of knowledge in how their town uses Facebook to serve residents. For each town, three individuals were interviewed, which resulted in a total of nine individual interviews being conducted. The following were the roles held by the interviewees in each town:

- Primary town Facebook administrator (employee)

- Town manager (executive official)

- Mayor (elected official)

General Overview of Findings

The overarching purpose found by the study is that the towns are using Facebook to get information out to residents in primarily a one-directional manner. As for use cases for posting, each town is predominantly using Facebook to highlight events and happenings, both public and privately sponsored, taking place in the town. To an extent, the towns are also using Facebook to highlight the municipality as a good place to live or work. The towns are less likely to use Facebook to request information or assistance from residents through their public Facebook posts. Overall, the towns are viewing the use of Facebook as a supplementary tool to complement core government service offerings. Notably, two of the three Facebook page administrators (Abingdon and Marion) interviewed ranked using Facebook as a core service offering for their town.

As for demographics, the study found that by a wide margin (between 70-80 percent), women are following each of the town Facebook pages more than men. Additionally, the age range of 35-54 was the largest age range following each of the town Facebook pages. Younger (ages 18-34) and older (age 55+) residents are largely not following the town Facebook pages.

Younger residents may be using other social media platforms. Older residents may be following traditional media sources (newspaper, television, and radio) as their information sources.

The towns are also generally experiencing growing numbers of followers, page reach, and new page "likes" when calendar year 2021 was compared to 2022 Facebook Insights reports data. From the interviews, it was learned each town is satisfied overall with the results of their town's Facebook page usage. For the most part, the town interviewees are happy with their present usage and do not have any current plans to dramatically alter the way Facebook is currently used to serve residents or to deliberately seek out any new demographics to follow or engage with the Facebook page.

Data Analysis

The researcher used the steps outlined in Chapter 3: Methodology to analyze the data for the study period January 1, 2022 through December 31, 2022. First, to answer RQ1 (*How are three small-town governments using Facebook to serve residents?*), the public posts on each town's respective main Facebook page were analyzed and coded to use case categories. The data from these categorizations were analyzed, and tables and charts were produced to show the results, along with a narrative to describe the results.

The use case categories created by Bellström et al. (2016) for a similar study were used as the basis for deriving the categories in this study. Table 1 depicts these categories along with a description of each. For this study, an additional category of *Other/Non-categorized* was used to classify posts which did not clearly fit into one or more of the Bellström et al. (2016) categories.

Table 1

Post Categories Used in Study

Category	Description
Educating citizens	Municipality educating citizen or helping citizens to educate each other
Marketing events in the municipality	Municipality promoting different happenings in the municipality
Marketing events outside the municipality	Municipality promoting different happenings outside the municipality
Marketing services	Municipality promoting municipal services as such
Marketing the municipality	Municipality promoting the municipality as a good place to live or work
Requesting assistance from citizens	Municipality asking citizens for assistance that is beyond providing information
Requesting information from citizens	Municipality asking citizens to provide information
Service information	Municipality informing of service status that does not include marketing or maintenance
Service maintenance information	Municipality informing of service breakdowns and ongoing repairs
Other/Non-categorized	Posts that do not fit into any category or were unable to be categorized (content missing, expired)

Note. Adapted from "Facebook usage in a local government: A content analysis of page owner posts and user posts," by Bellström et al., 2016, *Transforming Government, 10*(4), p. 555. (https://doi.org/10.1108/TG-12-2015-0061).

To answer RQ2 (*What results are experienced by the three small-town governments and residents in the town's use of Facebook to serve residents?*), the Facebook Insights Reports were obtained for each town's main Facebook page. These reports are online metrics/performance indicators from the Facebook platform that are automatically generated by Facebook. The data

in these reports were analyzed, and tables and charts were produced to show the data, along with a narrative to describe the results.

Finally, after the analyses of the documents were completed, interviews were conducted with the necessary town government employees or officials to expand upon and gain a deeper understanding of the Facebook use by the towns that goes beyond the document data analysis for RQ1 and RQ2. The interviews were the chief method used to answer RQ3 (*What are the factors that influence the three small-town governments to use Facebook to serve residents?*). Tables are presented to display the data, and relevant quotes were pulled from these interviews and presented.

Results

Research Question 1

RQ1: *How are three small-town governments using Facebook to serve residents?*

Overall, the three towns are making posts on Facebook for use cases that largely correspond with getting information out to residents (one-way information sharing) as opposed to using Facebook to request information or assistance from citizens. The chief posting use case was *marketing events in the municipality,* which highlights events and happenings, both public and privately sponsored, taking place in the town. All three towns handle the process for determining what type of content to post to Facebook on an informal basis, with discretion delegated to the Facebook page administrator. As it relates to the possibility of using Facebook or its features in additional ways to serve residents, interview respondents were almost equally split between being unsure or open to the idea and having plans to do so. As a result of the interviews, it was also evident the town Facebook page administrators followed by most of the town managers had the greatest degree of knowledge regarding how their town uses Facebook.

To answer RQ1, public posts on each town's main Facebook page were analyzed for the study period January 1, 2022 through December 31, 2022. Each post was categorized into specific use cases. Some posts, based upon their content and message, were assigned to two use case categories. In total, this analysis yielded a total of 1,495 unique posts from all three towns and generated 1,934 coded posts for use cases across the three towns.

By town, Abingdon made 538 individual posts over the study period, which were coded to 803 specific use cases. Lebanon made 262 individual posts over the study period, which were coded to 311 specific use cases. Marion made 695 individual posts over the study period, which were coded to 820 specific use cases. These raw numbers for the specific use cases coding were normalized as percentages for presentation.

Posts by Use Cases

Figure 5 shows the collective total posts for the towns of Abingdon, Lebanon, and Marion grouped by the most widely used use cases.

Figure 5

All Towns – Most Widely Used Posts by Use Cases
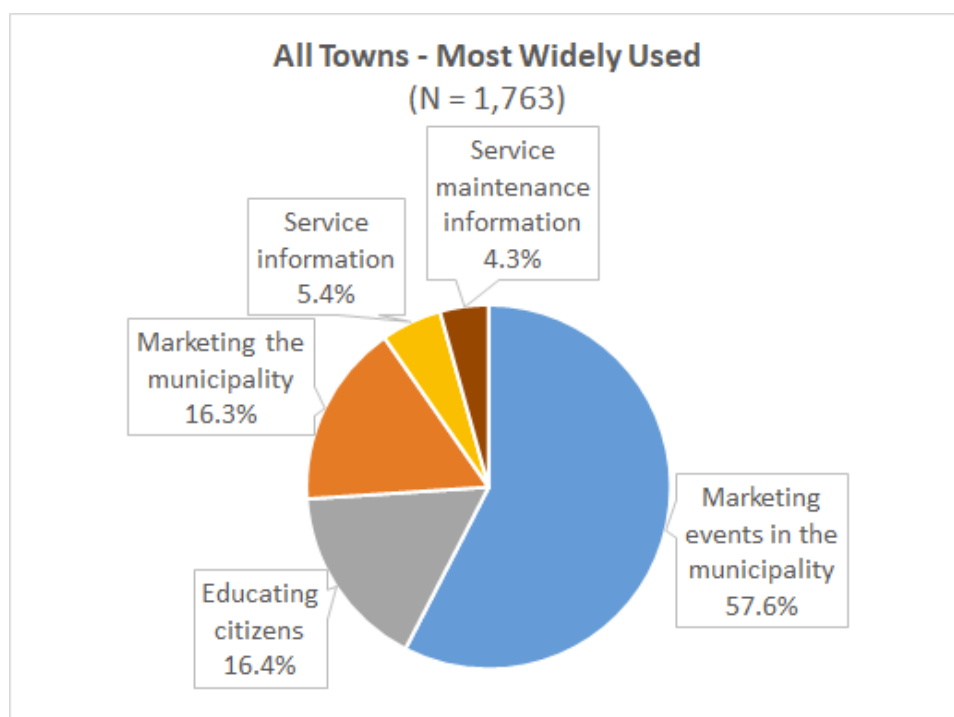
The total number of specific use cases coded for all towns in the most widely used use cases categories was 1,763. As for primary use cases, the *marketing events in the municipality* category had the highest frequency with 57.6 percent of coded posts. Collectively, the three towns are using Facebook for *marketing events in the municipality, educating citizens,* and *marketing the municipality* as their top three use cases. The remaining categories are used infrequently and are limited in use.

Figure 6 shows the most widely used use cases coded by categories for each individual town. See Appendix A for larger versions of the pie charts presented in Figure 6.

Figure 6

Most Widely Used Use Cases by Town
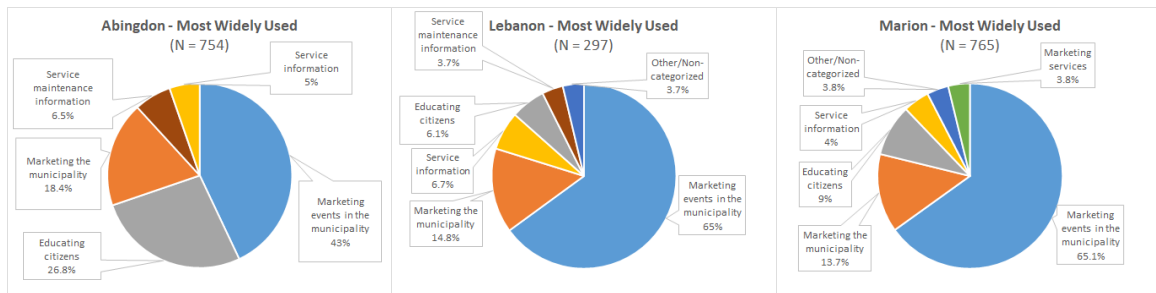
By a wide margin, the *marketing events in the municipality* category is also the most frequent use case for each town as was found as the most widely used use case for all towns. For the primary use cases, the same categories appeared consistently among the three towns in the most widely used use cases except for the *marketing services, other/non-categorized,* and *service maintenance information* categories. Other than for these exceptions, this suggests the towns are predominantly using Facebook for these primary use cases to serve residents.

From the interviews, most town interviewees expressed use cases or uses for Facebook that mirrored the most widely used categories for all towns as depicted in Table 2. These uses of Facebook include promotion of events in the town, public hearing notices, utility outages, town news, general announcements, road closures, safety issues, and emergencies.

Table 2

Mentions of Reasons for Facebook Use Relating to Most Widely Used Use Cases for All Towns

Participant	Marketing events in the municipality	Educating citizens	Marketing the municipality	Service information	Service maintenance information
Abingdon Facebook Administrator	X	X	X	X	X
Abingdon Town Manager	XX	X	X	X	X
Abingdon Mayor	X	X	X		
Lebanon Facebook Administrator	XX	X	X	X	X
Lebanon Town Manager	XX	X	X	X	X
Lebanon Mayor	X	X		X	
Marion Facebook Administrator	XX	X	X	X	XX
Marion Town Manager		X			
Marion Mayor	X	X		X	

Note. X-mentioned during the interview, XX-mentioned and emphasized during the interview.

During the interviews, all but one of the participants mentioned words or phrases indicating that Facebook is used for *marketing events in the municipality* use case. The Abingdon town manager, Lebanon Facebook administrator, Lebanon town manager, and Marion Facebook administrator emphasized this particular use case. In the case of Marion, the Facebook administrator emphasized that Facebook is used for the *service maintenance information* use

case. Interestingly, the Marion Facebook administrator mentioned that many town residents had become accustomed to consulting the town's Facebook page when their water service was out, and if a notice isn't posted quickly, the residents will begin to inquire why there was no noticed posted on Facebook.

In sum, it is evident from both the qualitative and quantitative data that in all three towns the *marketing events in the municipality* is the chief use case.

Figure 7 shows the collective total posts for the towns of Abingdon, Lebanon, and Marion grouped by the least widely used use cases.

Figure 7

All Towns – Least Widely Used Posts by Use Cases
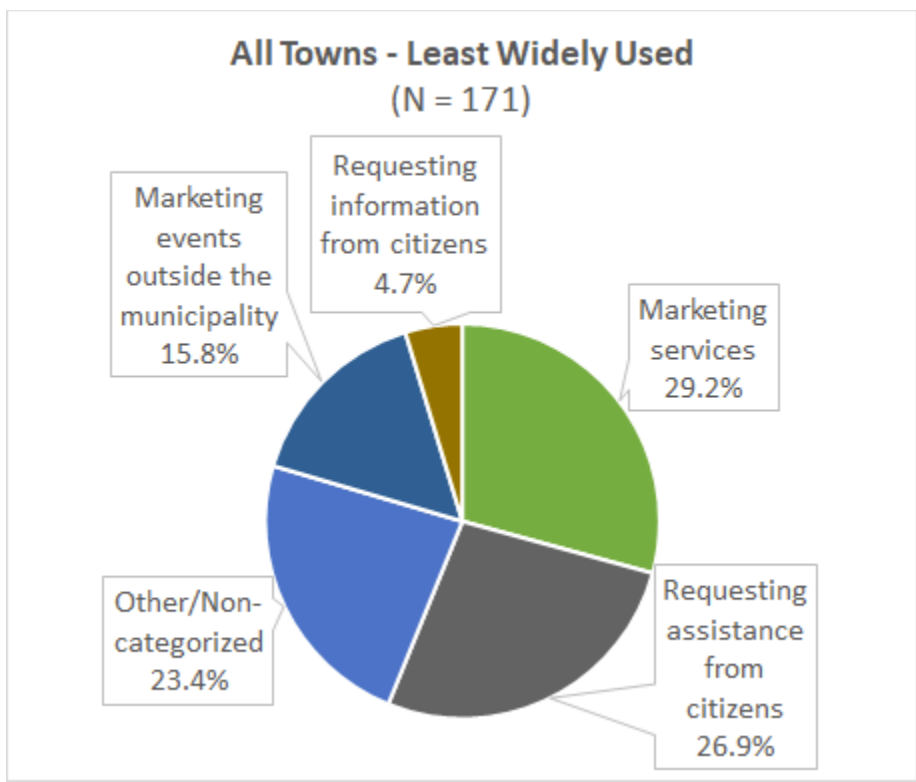
The total number of specific use cases coded for all towns in the most widely used use cases categories was 171. As it relates to overall limited use cases, the top categories include

marketing services, requesting assistance from citizens, and O*ther/Non-categorized.* The

remaining categories are utilized to a lesser extent.

Figure 8 shows the least widely used use cases coded by categories for each individual
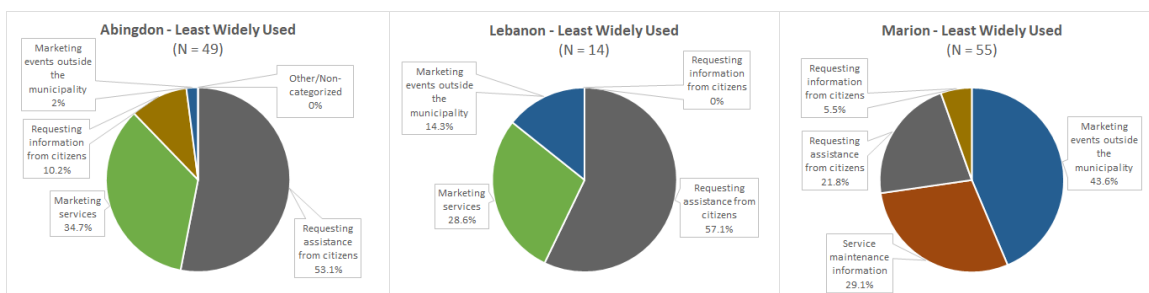
town. See Appendix B for larger versions of the pie charts presented in Figure 8.

Figure 8

Least Widely Used Use Cases by Town

The overall least widely used use case categories for the three towns were very

consistent, with a few exceptions. For example, the *marketing services* category appears for

Abingdon and Lebanon, but not Marion. The *service maintenance information* category appears

for Marion only and the *Other/Non-categorized* category appears for Abingdon only.

Interestingly, both the *requesting assistance from citizens* and *requesting information

from citizens* categories fell into the least widely used use cases for all three towns. This result

would seem to suggest the towns are not using their public posts on the town Facebook page as a

primary means to request information or assistance from citizens. It is possible that this

information and assistance is garnered through Facebook private messaging or other electronic or

non-electronic traditional means. For example, the Marion Facebook page administrator

mentioned responding to inquiries on posts and Facebook messages received during the

interview as a matter of routine.

For more insight into how each town ranked by use case, Table 3 shows the rank of the most frequent category by town from the most frequent (1) to the least frequent (10) by percentage.

Table 3

Rank of Use Cases by Town by Percentage

Rank	Abingdon (N = 803)	Lebanon (N = 311)	Marion (N = 820)
1	Marketing events in the municipality (40.4%)	Marketing events in the municipality (62.1%)	Marketing events in the municipality (60.7%)
2	Educating citizens (25.2%)	Marketing the municipality (14.2%)	Marketing the municipality (12.8%)
3	Marketing the municipality (17.3%)	Service information (6.4%)	Educating citizens (8.4%)
4	Service maintenance information (6.1%)	Educating citizens (5.8%)	Service information (4.3%)
5	Service information (5%)	Service maintenance information (3.5%)	Other/Non-categorized (3.5%)
6	Requesting assistance from citizens (3.2%)	Other/Non-categorized (3.5%)	Marketing services (3.5%)
7	Marketing services (2.1%)	Requesting assistance from citizens (2.6%)	Marketing events outside the municipality (2.9%)
8	Requesting information from citizens (0.6%)	Marketing services (1.3%)	Service maintenance information (2%)
9	Marketing events outside the municipality (0.1%)	Marketing events outside the municipality (0.6%)	Requesting assistance from citizens (1.5%)
10	Other/Non-categorized (0%)	Requesting information from citizens (0%)	Requesting information from citizens (0.4%)

Plans to Increase the Presence or Usage of Facebook or Its Features

Interview participants were also asked about any possible plans to increase the presence or usage of Facebook or its features to serve residents. Table 4 shows the results of this question.

Table 4

Plans to Increase Presence or Usage of Facebook or Facebook Features

Participant	Yes	No	Unsure/Open
Abingdon Facebook Administrator		X	
Abingdon Town Manager	X		
Abingdon Mayor	X		
Lebanon Facebook Administrator	X		
Lebanon Town Manager	X		
Lebanon Mayor			X
Marion Facebook Administrator			X
Marion Town Manager			X
Marion Mayor			X

Interview participants were split regarding any possible plans to increase the presence or usage of Facebook or its features to serve residents. Both the Lebanon Facebook page administrator (personal communication, March 15, 2023) and town manager (personal communication, March 15, 2023) mentioned the possibility of using Facebook features, such as Facebook Live, to promote town sponsored events while they are taking place. Both the Abingdon Mayor (personal communication, March 20, 2023) and town manager (personal communication, March 20, 2023) mentioned recently a new "Mondays with the Mayor" video series had been started and is shared to Facebook. This was an example of a recent development

on how Abingdon had increased the usage of Facebook features instead of a planned use for the future.

Oversight of Facebook Page

All three towns rely heavily upon the Facebook page administrator for overseeing the town's Facebook page and the posting and sharing of content. When asked, each of the town interviewees (personal communication, March 15, 20-21, 2023) related that there is not a formal process for deciding what types of posts or content gets shared by the town onto the town Facebook page. The posting process is handled informally and left to the discretion of the Facebook page administrator. Interestingly, in all three towns, managing Facebook and other social media platforms is just one part of the Facebook page administrators job duties performed for the town. None of the towns has a position solely dedicated to social media maintenance.

Summary

As noted, the three towns are making posts on Facebook for use cases that largely correspond with getting information out to residents (one-way information sharing) as opposed to using Facebook to request information or assistance from citizens. Collectively, the towns are doing a good job providing information for the categories making up the most widely used use cases. The towns should consider a strategy to use Facebook in a comprehensive manner to not only inform residents but also to engage them. This would also fit with the T3 Framework for Innovation theoretical framework in two-way (T2: Transformational) communication and multi-directional (T3: Transcendent) communication via Facebook posts. A strategy may also include expanding the way Facebook is used to serve residents with a focus on seeking information and assistance from residents, or using Facebook as part of a comprehensive and holistic social

media or e-government strategy that may also include other social media platforms and technological tools.

Research Question 2

RQ2: *What results are experienced by the three small-town governments and residents in the town's use of Facebook to serve residents?*

Marion had the greatest number of Facebook posts per 1,000 population. In follower count, Marion also had the greatest number per 1,000 population. For page reach, page visits, and new "likes" Lebanon had the greatest number per 1,000 population in each of the three categories. All three towns posted increases in the number of reach and visits per 1,000 population in 2022 compared to 2021. This result indicates that these key metrics of Facebook use measurement are trending upward for each of the towns.

For demographics, women are the largest following gender demographic per town. Age range wise, the 35-54 age range is the largest following demographic per town. Men and those in the age ranges of 18-34 and 55+ were least observed as following each of the town Facebook pages. Each town interviewee expressed satisfaction with their Facebook results and did not articulate any plans to pursue other demographics to follow their Facebook page. The town interviewees were mostly unsure or open to the idea of increasing marketing to raise awareness of the town Facebook page to get more views, followers, or engagement, including demographics. The Abingdon mayor and town manager both articulated a need to consider other social media platforms to reach more residents.

To answer RQ2, the Facebook Insights Reports for each town were requested and analyzed for the study period January 1, 2022 through December 31, 2022. The Facebook Insights Reports contained important metrics related to the page and its performance. Examples

of these important metrics include number of followers, demographics (gender and age ranges), page reach, page visits, the number of new "likes," and trends for each town. This section details the results for RQ2 using the Insights Reports data for each town along with a cross-town analysis. Additionally, the number of total posts made by the towns on their respective Facebook page during the study period was noted and compared to the other towns to determine the posting frequency for each town.

Table 5 presents key information regarding each town's Facebook page that is relevant to the study. This includes the page web address, the date the page was established, the total number of followers/likes, and total posts made during the study period January 1, 2022 through December 31, 2022.

Table 5

Key Town Facebook Page Facts

Town	Page Address	Date Page Established	Total Followers/ Likes	Total Posts
Abingdon	https://www.facebook.com/townofabingdonva	03/30/2016	9,942	538
Lebanon	https://www.facebook.com/TownofLebanonVA	11/07/2018	5,980	262
Marion	https://www.facebook.com/MarionVirginia24354	02/17/2011	11,982	695

Note. Total followers/likes and total posts are as of the end of the study period, 12/31/2022.

The Town of Marion page had the most followers at 11,982. The least number of followers is found with the Town of Lebanon page with 5,980. Similarly, the page with the greatest number of posts is Marion with 695 with Lebanon having the least at 262 posts.
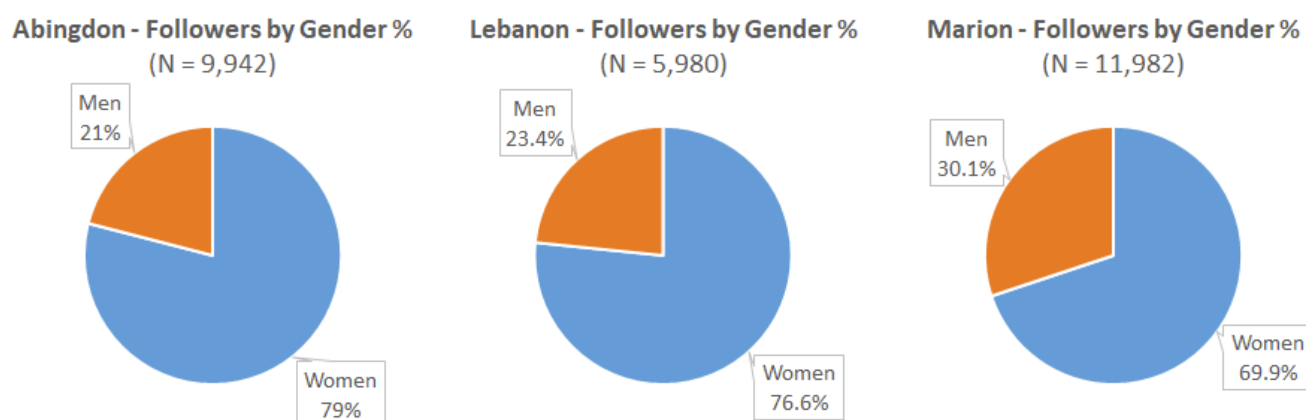
Interestingly, the Marion page is the oldest of the three town pages, followed by Abingdon, and then Lebanon.

Demographics by Gender

The Facebook Insights Reports presents demographic information (gender and age ranges) regarding the Facebook users following a page. Facebook refers to the followers of a page as the page's audience. Figure 9 shows this demographic gender data of followers for the Facebook pages for each of the towns of Abingdon, Lebanon, and Marion.

Figure 9

All Towns – Gender of Page Followers

Abingdon - Followers by Gender %
(N = 9,942)

Men 21%
Women 79%

Lebanon - Followers by Gender %
(N = 5,980)

Men 23.4%
Women 76.6%

Marion - Followers by Gender %
(N = 11,982)

Men 30.1%
Women 69.9%

As shown in Figure 9, women make up vast amount of the Facebook page followers for each of the towns. The largest percent number of men followers is with Marion where men make up 30.1 percent of the page followers, which is slightly more than Abingdon or Lebanon.

It is most interesting that women are the largest followers of the town Facebook pages. Without additional study or inquiry, it would be difficult to determine why this is the case. The reasons for this would be interesting to explore. None of the town interviewees had any substantial comments to make about this finding.

Demographics by Age Ranges

Figure 10 shows this demographic age ranges data of followers for the Facebook pages for each of the towns of Abingdon, Lebanon, and Marion.

Figure 10

All Towns – Age Ranges of Page Followers
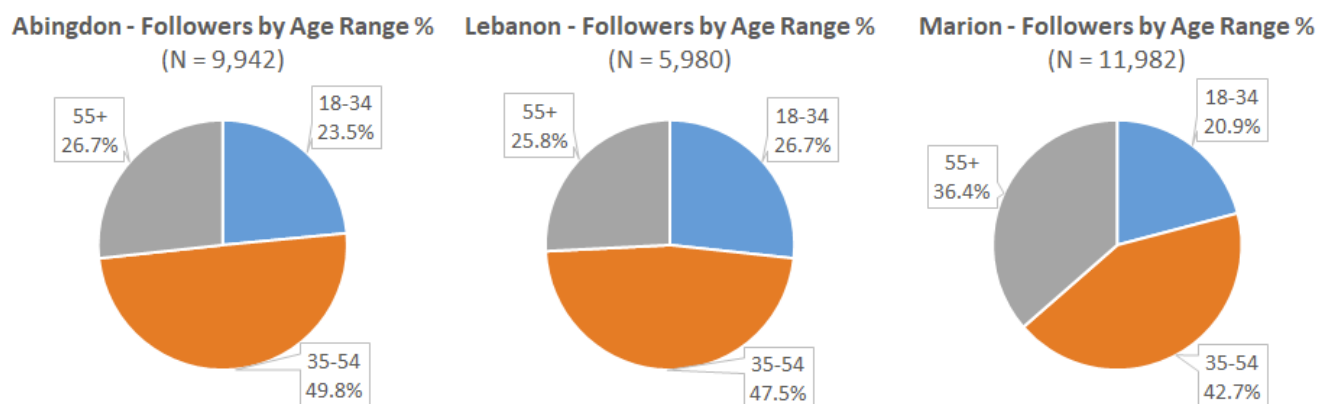
As shown in Figure 10, the largest age range following each respective town's Facebook page is the 35-54 age range. For Abingdon and Marion, the age range least following the respective town's Facebook page is the 18-34 age range. In Lebanon, the least following age range is the 55+ group. Notably, Marion has a nearly ten percentage points higher amount of 55+ age range followers than Abingdon and Lebanon.

Table 6 shows the feedback received from interviewees regarding the age ranges using Facebook or following the town pages.

Table 6

Facebook Usage Demographics Considerations

Participant	Facebook reaches a wide audience	Facebook reaches a smaller audience	Younger people are using Facebook	Younger people are not using Facebook	Younger people are primarily using other social media platforms	No Feedback
Abingdon Facebook Administrator				X		
Abingdon Town Manager		X		XX		
Abingdon Mayor	XX				X	
Lebanon Facebook Administrator	X		X			
Lebanon Town Manager			X			
Lebanon Mayor						X
Marion Facebook Administrator			X			
Marion Town Manager						X
Marion Mayor						X

Note. X-mentioned during the interview, XX-mentioned and emphasized during the interview.

The Abingdon town manager (personal communication, March 20, 2023) indicated he believed that Facebook may have reached its pinnacle of popularity since demographics are shifting and younger people (presumably ages 18-34) are not using the platform as much as in the past. Regarding Facebook, the town manager stated "I think they're on the decline. And so,

we don't want to put all our eggs in that one basket" (personal communication, March 20, 2023). The Abingdon mayor (personal communication, March 20, 2023) mentioned and emphasized that Facebook reaches a wide audience; however, younger people are often now using Instagram or TikTok and that perhaps all town social media platforms should point to each other or be linked together. The Abingdon Facebook page administrator (personal communication, March 20, 2023) also mentioned the town was looking into services to send its posts to multiple social media platforms at once. The Marion Facebook page administrator (personal communication, March 21, 2023) mentioned that younger people using Facebook, and not reaching them via traditional media, was a reason for using Facebook.

Overall, the town interviewees (personal communication, March 15, 20-21, 2023) related no plans to target different demographics in order to encourage them to start following their Facebook pages. One important consideration to remember is that those who don't specifically follow a Facebook page may be seeing its content shared by other users or pages. Thus, the pages may be reaching a wider demographic than can be seen in the data from those users who have expressly followed the page.

Town Metrics Comparison

A comparison was made comparing the results of the three towns for RQ2 for several key metrics. This comparison included the number of page posts by town, the total number of page followers by town, the page reach by town, the total number of page visits by town, the total number of new "likes" by town, and finally Facebook trends for each town.

Total Page Posts by Town

For total Facebook page posts, the Marion page had 695 posts, the Abingdon page had 538 posts, and the Lebanon page had 262 posts. Collectively, all three towns made 1,495 posts.

Figure 11 shows the total number of posts made by each town during the study period (January 1, 2022 through December 31, 2022) normalized per 1,000 population.

Figure 11

Total Facebook Page Posts Made by Towns
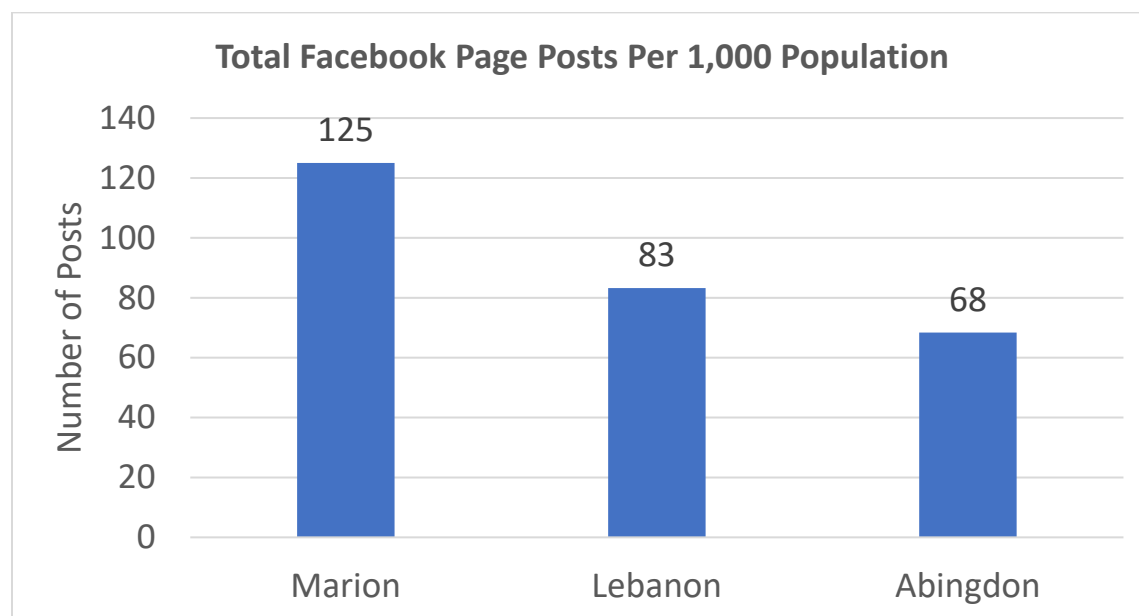
Note. The population of Marion is 5,559, Lebanon is 3,147, and Abingdon is 7,867 as of July 1, 2019 (United States Census Bureau, 2020).

With population normalized, the Town of Marion made 125 Facebook page posts per 1,000 population. This was a somewhat larger number of posts per 1,000 population than Lebanon and Abingdon.

Total Followers by Town

For page followers, the Marion page had 11,982, the Abingdon page had 9,942, and the Lebanon page had 5,980 followers. Figure 12 shows the total number of followers for each town's Facebook page at the end of the study period normalized per 1,000 population.

Figure 12

Total Facebook Page Followers by Town
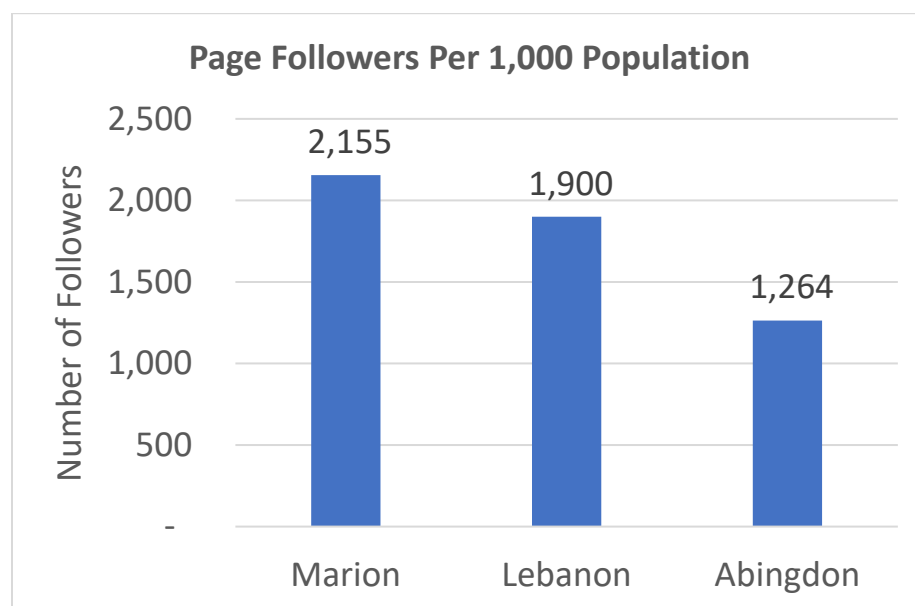

Page Followers Per 1,000 Population

Note. The population of Marion is 5,559, Lebanon is 3,147, and Abingdon is 7,867 as of July 1, 2019 (United States Census Bureau, 2020).

The Town of Marion page had the largest number of followers at 2,155 per 1,000 population. The reason for the differing follower numbers may be related to the page's founding date. As previously noted, Marion started its page on February 17, 2011. Abingdon started on March 30, 2016, and Lebanon started on November 7, 2018. The fact that the Marion Facebook page has more followers might be because it has been around longer. Similarly, the fact that Abingdon has less followers per 1,000 population may be because it is the most populous among the three towns.

Page Reach by Town

According to Facebook (n.d. -b), page reach is the "number of people who saw any content from your Page or about your Page, including posts, stories, ads, social information from people who interact with your Page and more" (para. 1).

For page reach, the Abingdon page had 302,853, the Marion page had 211,042, and Lebanon page had 141,399. Figure 13 shows the page reach numbers for each town normalized per 1,000 population.

Figure 13

Page Reach by Town
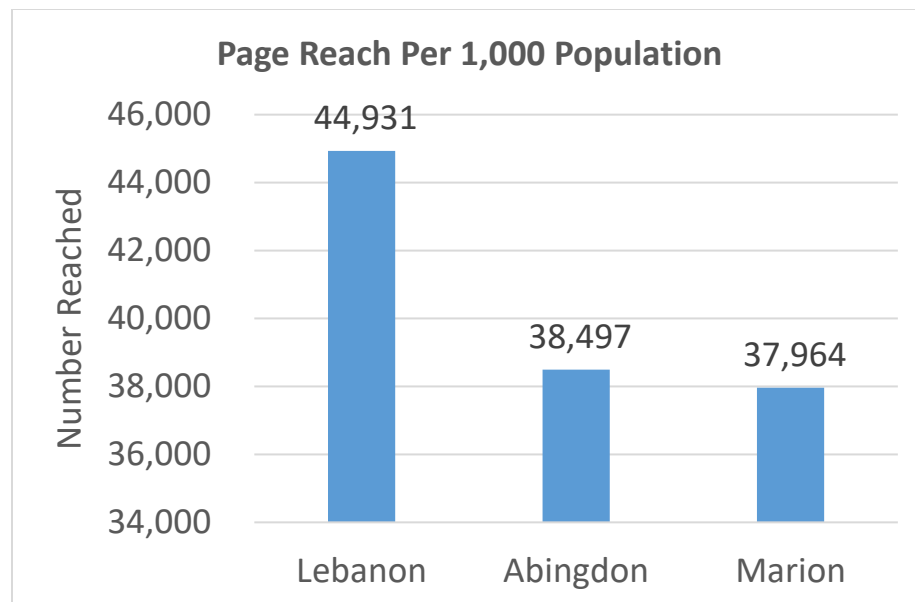
Note. The population of Lebanon is 3,147, Abingdon is 7,867, and Marion is 5,559 as of July 1, 2019 (United States Census Bureau, 2020).

Posts and content from the Lebanon town page reach more viewers during the study period per 1,000 population at 44,931. Abingdon and Marion were slightly less in page reach number and had similar reach.

Page Visits by Town

According to Facebook (n.d. -c), page visits is the "number of times your Facebook Page was visited" (para. 1).

For page visits, the Abingdon page had 49,940, the Marion page had 45,824, and the Lebanon page had 34,691. Figure 14 shows the page visits numbers for each town normalized per 1,000 population.

Figure 14

Page Visits by Town
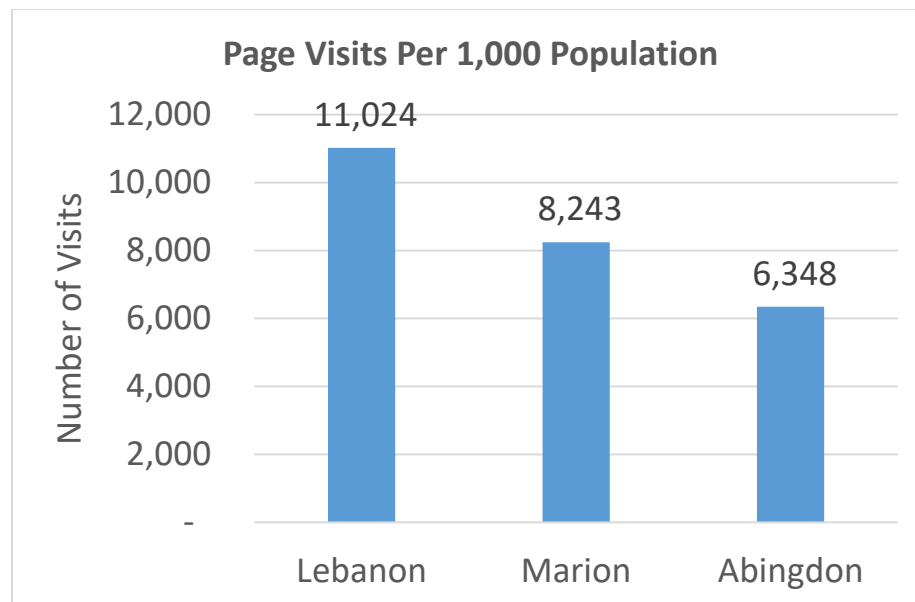
Note. The population of Lebanon is 3,147, Marion is 5,559, and Abingdon is 7,867 as of July 1, 2019 (United States Census Bureau, 2020).

Page visits to the Lebanon page was the largest among the three towns at 11,024 per 1,000 population. Abingdon and Marion were slightly less in page reach number and had similar reach.

New "Likes" by Town

According to Facebook (n.d. -a), when someone "likes" a page they are showing support for the page and want to see content from it. New "likes" are simply the number of new "likes," or increase, the page has received over a given period of time.

For new "likes," the Abingdon page had 1,737, the Lebanon page had 1,079, and the Marion page had 1,051. Figure 15 shows the new "likes" numbers for each town normalized per 1,000 population.

Figure 15

New Page Likes by Town
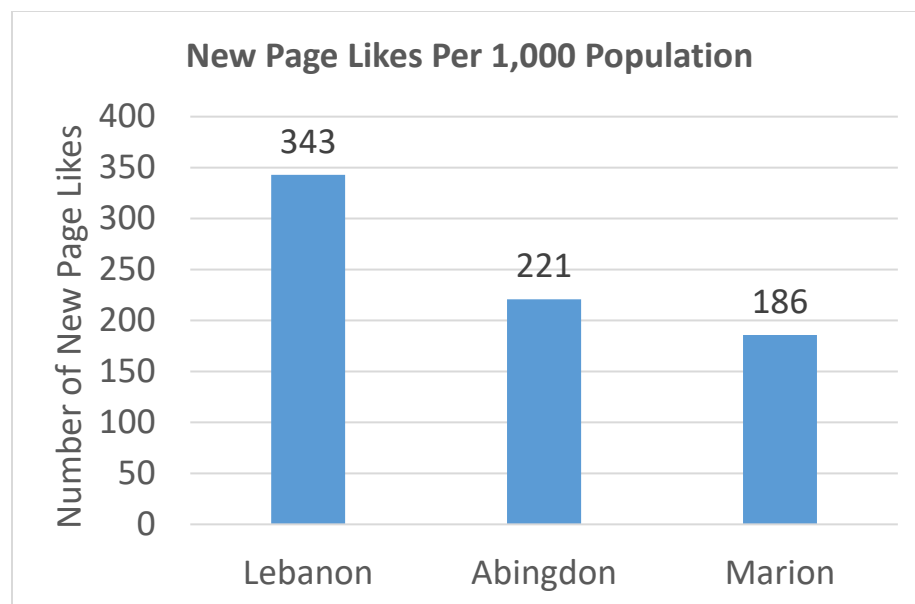
Note. The population of Lebanon is 3,147, Abingdon is 7,867, and Marion is 5,559 as of July 1, 2019 (United States Census Bureau, 2020).

Lebanon had the greatest number of new "likes" per 1,000 population at 343. Abingdon and Marion had slightly less and a similar number of new "likes." The number of new "likes" may also be driven by those Facebook users seeing the content from the town's page being shared by other users and deciding to "like" the page so that they may see future posts or information of interest.

Facebook Trends by Town

The trends for page reach and visits for the town Facebook pages were compared for the years 2021 and 2022. Figure 16 shows the trends for page reach and visits for the Town of Abingdon normalized per 1,000 population.

Figure 16

Facebook Trends for Town of Abingdon
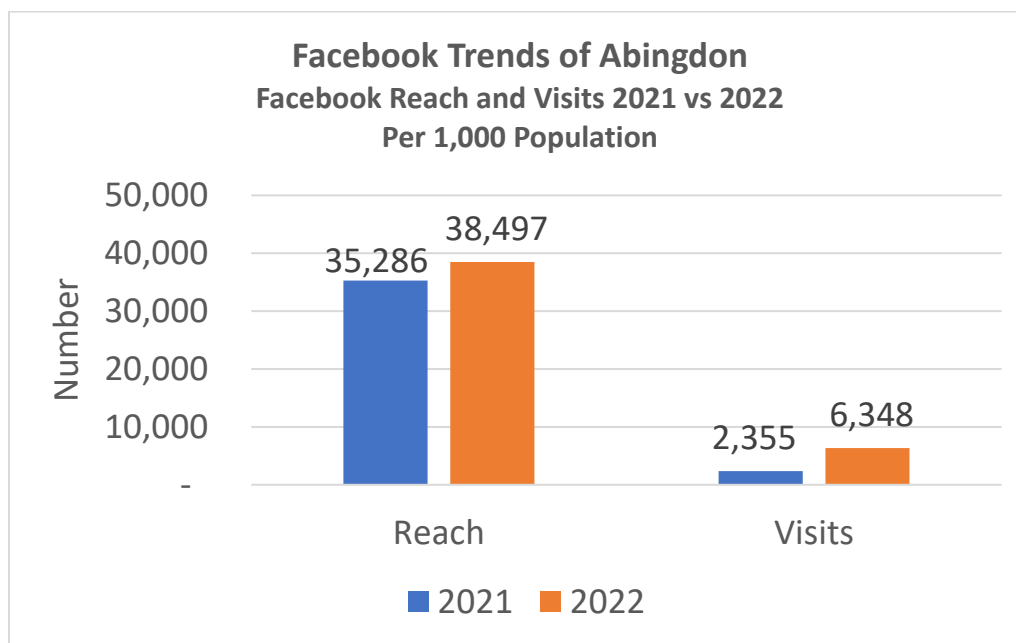
Note. The population of Abingdon is 7,867 as of July 1, 2019 (United States Census Bureau, 2020).

The page reach for Abingdon increased slightly in 2022 from 2021. Page visits increased nearly tripled in total in 2022 from 2021.

Figure 17 shows the trends for page reach and visits for the Town of Lebanon normalized per 1,000 population.

Figure 17

Facebook Trends for Town of Lebanon

Facebook Trends of Lebanon
Facebook Reach and Visits 2021 vs 2022
Per 1,000 Population
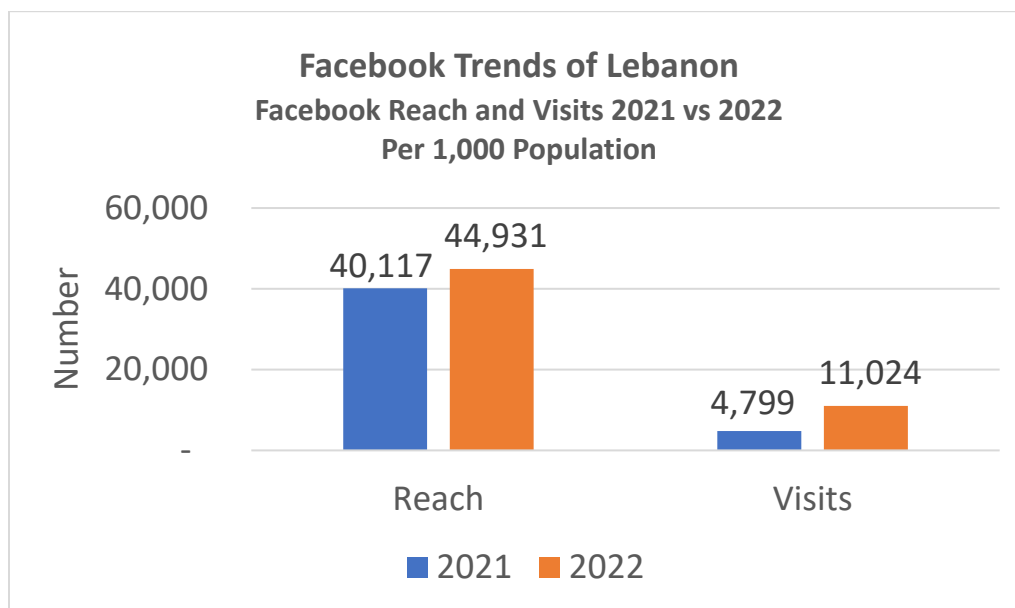
Note. The population of Lebanon is 3,147 as of July 1, 2019 (United States Census Bureau, 2020).

The page reach for Lebanon was up slightly in 2022 from 2021. Page visits were more than double in 2022 from 2021.

Figure 18 shows the trends for page reach and visits for the Town of Marion normalized per 1,000 population.

Figure 18

Facebook Trends for Town of Marion
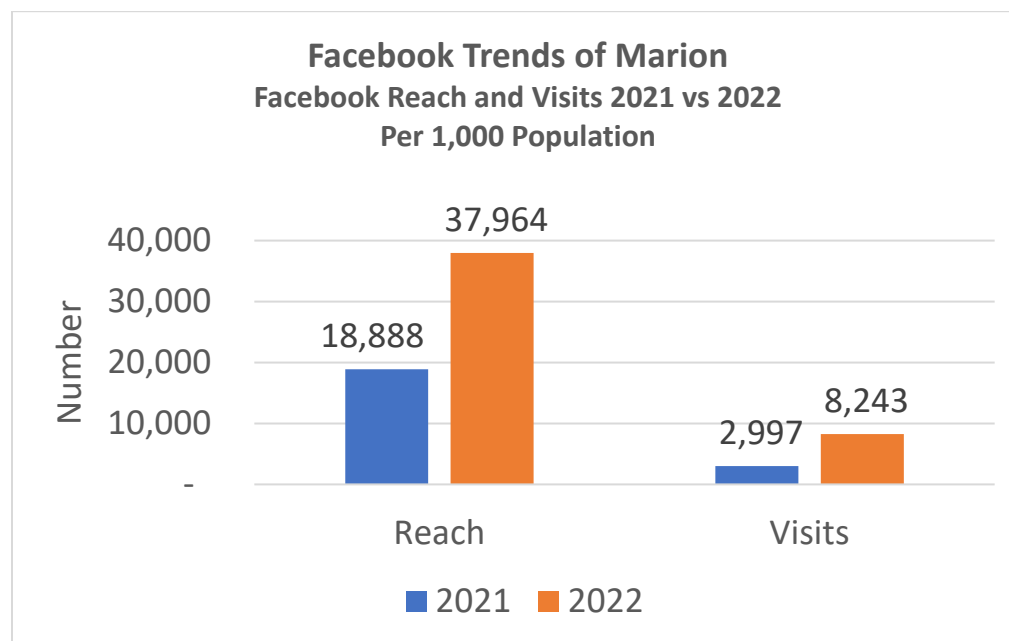
Note. The population of Marion is 5,559 as of July 1, 2019 (United States Census Bureau, 2020).

Notably for Marion, page reach was up from 2021 to 2022, nearly doubling. Page visits also were up more than double from 2021.

All three towns posted increases in the number of reach and visits in 2022 compared to 2021. This result indicates that these key metrics of Facebook use measurement are trending upward for each of the towns.

Satisfaction with Results

All town interviewees (personal communication, March 15, 20-21, 2023) expressed general satisfaction with the results of using Facebook. Table 7 shows the results of this question from the interviews.

Table 7

Levels of Satisfaction with Facebook Results

Participant	Satisfied	Not Satisfied
Abingdon Facebook Administrator	X	
Abingdon Town Manager	X	
Abingdon Mayor	X	
Lebanon Facebook Administrator	X	
Lebanon Town Manager	X	
Lebanon Mayor	X	
Marion Facebook Administrator	XX	
Marion Town Manager	X	
Marion Mayor	X	

Note. X-mentioned during the interview, XX-mentioned and emphasized during the interview.

No interviewees from any of the towns expressed any dissatisfaction or major points of concern about the level of satisfaction. Marion's Facebook page administrator expressed a higher level of satisfaction and stated, "But as far as us being satisfied, very satisfied. We get a lot of good comments" (personal communication, March 21, 2023). The Lebanon town manager (personal communication, March 15, 2023) mentioned that Facebook is an instant line of communication to the public, which helps more than traditional media, such as newspapers, in time-sensitive situations such as when boil water notices must be issued. The Lebanon town manager (personal communication, March 15, 2023) also mentioned that one of the advantages of Facebook over the newspaper is that people can comment, and the town can get instant feedback.

Plans for Additional Views, Follows, and Engagements

As it relates to getting more views, followers, or engagements in general or from certain

demographics, only one of the towns had any immediate plans to do so with the town's main

Facebook page. Table 8 shows the results of this question from the interviews.

Table 8

Plans to Increase Marketing or Public Awareness

Participant	Yes	No	Unsure/Open
Abingdon Facebook Administrator		X	
Abingdon Town Manager			X
Abingdon Mayor	X		
Lebanon Facebook Administrator	X		
Lebanon Town Manager			X
Lebanon Mayor			X
Marion Facebook Administrator			X
Marion Town Manager			X
Marion Mayor			X

The Lebanon town manager (personal communication, March 15, 2023) indicated that

the town's Facebook page grows decently on its own. The Lebanon Facebook page

administrator (personal communication, March 15, 2023) mentioned that she plans to work on

this in the upcoming summer months during the town's event season. Marion's Facebook page

administrator (personal communication, March 21, 2023) indicated that this is probably

something that should be looked to in the future, and the interview had caused him to reflect on

future possibilities. Abingdon's mayor (personal communication, March 20, 2023) indicated that

a new Facebook video series entitled "Mondays with the Mayor" was recently started to try and show followers what is taking place around town with general happenings and businesses. Abingdon's Facebook administrator (personal communication, March 20, 2023) mentioned that there were no plans for the town's main page, but the town has a separate tourism and marketing Facebook page in which more efforts are made to attract more followers, such as by spending money on post boosting to increase the reach of certain Facebook posts.

Summary

The key Facebook metrics of number of reach and visits are trending upward for each of the towns. For demographics, women are the largest following gender demographic per town. Age range wise, the 35-54 age range is the largest following demographic per town. Men and those in the age ranges of 18-34 and 55+ were least observed as following each the town Facebook pages. Of course, it must be noted that the reach of Facebook may mean that many individuals who are not following the town pages are seeing page posts, so the actual demographic numbers may be higher or different. However, the towns should consider strategies to increase their followers to increase the number of men and younger and older age ranges. This may include a marketing campaign or other innovative ways to build follower numbers (such as outreach events).

As noted in the interviews, some of the town personnel are aware that Facebook is not reaching younger or older individuals. Like a potential solution to RQ1, using Facebook as part of a comprehensive and holistic social media or e-government strategy, which may also include other social media platforms and technological tools, may increase the number of individuals reached across all demographics.

Research Question 3

RQ3: *What are the factors that influence the three small-town governments to use*

Facebook to serve residents?

To answer this research question, semi-structured interviews were done with employees

or officials of each of the three towns. The specific interviewees included the primary town

Facebook page administrator, the town manager, and the mayor.

Overall Factors

Based on the interviews, the overarching theme heard from the town interview

participants from all the towns was that the primary reason for using Facebook was to get

information out and to inform the residents and public of various issues, events, and happenings

in their respective town. This finding reflects the data analysis results for RQ1 (*How are three*

small-town governments using Facebook to serve residents?) with the most widely used use

cases. The Lebanon town manager, Marion Facebook page administrator, and Marion mayor

mentioned the decline of traditional media (such as newspapers, television, and radio) reach and

shifting age demographics who do not follow traditional media as the driving force for using

Facebook to serve residents. In sum, the major factor is that Facebook is another tool that can be

used to get information out and to potentially reach those who do not engage with traditional

media sources.

Abingdon

The town's current Facebook page was established before the current Facebook page

administrator, town manager, and mayor began their service. The Facebook page administrator

stated, "It is more for getting notifications out to the public, whether it be council, commissions,

committees, vacancies" (personal communication, March 20, 2023). The page administrator

(personal communication, March 20, 2023) also related that Facebook is used to communicate information such as road closures. The page administrator concluded that Facebook is used "mostly just to notify the community of what's going on" (personal communication, March 20, 2023). The town's manager stated, "We use it for is to push information out, whether it's a community event or a parade, or some sort of public event. The whole objective is to get information to the community" (personal communication, March 20, 2023). The mayor stated as a factor that "I feel like Facebook reaches a pretty wide audience; we're able to get information out to people" (personal communication, March 20, 2023).

Lebanon

The town's current Facebook page was established before the current Facebook page administrator and town manager began their service. The Facebook page administrator (personal communication, March 15, 2023) related that the page was started because a former town council member, who was also a teacher, realized the importance of social media and how it appealed to younger people. The town's Facebook page administrator went on to say "we can reach such a wide audience with it" regarding Facebook usage (personal communication, March 15, 2023). The town's manager indicated that "the ease of reaching citizens was probably the biggest thing" for using Facebook (personal communication, March 15, 2023). The town manager also mentioned transparency for citizens as a factor and called Facebook an "instant line of communication" (personal communication, March 15, 2023). The town manager (personal communication, March 15, 2023) also mentioned the ability to get immediate comments back (unlike with newspapers) as a key benefit of Facebook. The town's mayor indicated that Facebook is used "to get information out to our citizens regarding all operations of the town" (personal communication, March 15, 2023).

Marion

The town's current Facebook page was established by the current Facebook page administrator in 2011. The town's current mayor was also serving when Facebook was started to be used; however, the town manager started working for the town approximately two years after the town began using Facebook. The Facebook page administrator related, "We saw that there was an opportunity to reach a different audience than we could reach with traditional media" as a factor for establishing a Facebook presence for the town (personal communication, March 21, 2023). This shift was the major reason the town began using social media, such as Facebook, to reach more people who might not be viewing or being reached by traditional media sources. The page administrator (personal communication, March 21, 2023) also mentioned the town tends to be progressive. The town manager mentioned that Facebook "is a useful tool for us" (personal communication, March 21, 2023). The mayor mentioned that Facebook is a "way of communicating with our citizens" and Facebook is a "means of communicating with a lot of different people" (personal communication, March 21, 2023).

Core or Supplemental Government Service Offering

When each interviewee was asked if maintaining a Facebook page was a core government service offering or a supplemental offering to complement core government service offerings, almost all respondents indicated it was supplemental. The key difference was that two of the interviewees (from Abingdon and Marion) indicated that they viewed their town's use of Facebook as part of a core service offering at present.

The Abingdon page administrator related, "I would have to say that I think that it's more of the main tool. I don't see anybody coming up to the third floor to look at our meeting notices. People want the information immediately at their fingertips, so I would say it was more the

primary source now" (personal communication, March 20, 2023). The Marion page administrator related, "From this department, from my standpoint, it's a core service for us" (personal communication, March 21, 2023). The Marion page administrator also stated regarding inquiries received via Facebook, "Unless it happens between 11:30 at night and eight o'clock in the morning, I'm monitoring the Facebook page, and we always make it a point to respond back certainly within 24 hours" (personal communication, March 21, 2023).

Two of the Lebanon interviewees (the Facebook page administrator and town manager) viewed Facebook as currently supplemental but recognized that it's becoming more of core service from their perspective. The page administrator stated, "I think at this time, it's still supplemental, but I do feel that it's becoming more of a core" (personal communication, March 15, 2023). The town manager (personal communication, March 15, 2023) mentioned that at this time it is still supplemental since the law requires certain public notices be advertised in newspapers, but probably one day it would be more of a core offering as traditional media like newspapers decline.

Summary

Each of the towns are predominantly using Facebook to get information out to residents in a one-directional manner, and this finding also shows in the factors for influencing the three towns to use Facebook. Like the RQ1 recommendations, the towns should consider not only getting information out to residents via their posts but also engaging residents in two-way and multi-directional conversations. Facebook, along with other social media platforms, should be used to listen and engage residents to get the full benefit of social media's purpose.

Connection to T3 Framework for Innovation

The theoretical framework guiding the study is the T3 Framework for Innovation by Dr. Sonny Magana. As part of the results, each town's use of Facebook was categorized to one of the levels of the framework. The results of this categorization follow in Table 9.

Table 9

T3 Framework for Innovation Rating by Town

Town	Rating Level
Abingdon	T1: Translational Technology Use
Lebanon	T1: Translational Technology Use
Marion	T1: Translational Technology Use

Each of the towns are rated at the T1: Translational Technology Use level regarding their use of Facebook to serve residents. This rating leaves opportunity for improvement to get to the optimal level of the model, which is T3: Transformational Technology Use. Magana (2017) defines translational technology use as:

Translational uses of technology simply enable tasks that can be done in an analog or nondigital way to be done digitally. This is rather analogous to the task of translating from one language to another—say English to Spanish. (p. 20)

This level of the T3 Framework for Innovation is the most basic in that it can be viewed as one-directional information sharing, which is static (non-interactive) in nature. An example is when a town posts a notice of a council meeting on Facebook, whereas historically these have been published in newspapers or paper notices placed upon bulletin boards. The town in such case has taken the paper notice (analog or non-digital) and converted it to digital and shared the information via Facebook. Another example might be a calendar of events item for a community that may have been historically placed only in a local newspaper. These event notices can be put

on Facebook to accomplish the analog to digital conversion. In this study, the towns were observed to largely be posting information through their public Facebook posts that met the definition presented by Magana for the T1 level.

It's important to reinforce for the T3 Framework rating that this study only considered each town's main Facebook page presence, not any other Facebook pages established for departments or other town entities. This study also focused upon the public posts made by the town and Insights Reports data that provided key performance metrics and the demographics (age and gender) of followers. The study did not analyze any private messages sent and received between the town and residents or any publicly posted comments exchanged between the town and residents. Therefore, in the totality of circumstances, a town may be operating at a higher T3 Framework rating level when all these factors are considered together across the town's entire social media footprint.

Research Question Responses

The following are the responses to the three research questions that guided this study.

Research Question 1

How are three small-town governments using Facebook to serve residents?

The overarching reason that towns are using Facebook to serve residents is to get information out to residents and page followers. Specifically, the chief use case is for the marketing of events and happenings within the town. These events include both town-sponsored and non-sponsored events. When it comes to the most widely used use cases for all three towns, the *marketing events in the municipality* category is the clear primary use case coming in at 57.6 percent out of 1,763 posts analyzed for the study period. The towns were less likely to be using Facebook to request information or assistance from citizens via their Facebook posts.

Research Question 2

> *What results are experienced by the three small-town governments and residents in the town's use of Facebook to serve residents?*

All three towns posted increases in the number of reach and visits per 1,000 population in 2022 compared to 2021. This finding indicates that these key metrics of Facebook use measurement are trending upward for each of the towns. Marion had the greatest number of Facebook posts per 1,000 population. In follower count, Marion also had the greatest number per 1,000 population. For page reach, page visits, and new "likes," Lebanon had the greatest number per 1,000 population in each of the three categories.

In all three towns, women are the primary followers of the town's Facebook page, and the age range of 35-54 is the most represented. Men and those in the age ranges 18-34 and 55+ make up a smaller portion of the followers. Overall, town interviewees expressed general satisfaction with the results of using Facebook in serving residents. Most town interviewees also indicated that there are not any specific plans to increase the usage of Facebook features or to deliberately seek out new demographics to follow the page.

Research Question 3

> *What are the factors that influence the three small-town governments to use Facebook to serve residents?*

All three towns expressed a desire for getting information out or communicating with residents and page followers as the chief factors that influence the town to use Facebook to serve residents. Factors mentioned by interviewees include marketing events, reaching citizens easily, achieving transparency, pushing out information, communicating with citizens, and reaching those who may be missed by traditional media sources (newspapers, television, and radio).

For the most part, the towns use Facebook as a supplement to traditional core services, although two of the towns had Facebook page administrators (Abingdon and Marion) rate it as a core service.

Summary

The purpose of this mixed methods multi-case study is to analyze (1) how three small-town governments are using Facebook to serve residents; (2) the results that are experienced by the three small-town governments and residents in the town's use of Facebook; and (3) the factors that influence the three small-town governments to use Facebook to serve residents. The study highlights the similarities and differences among three town governments (Abingdon, Lebanon, and Marion) located in Southwestern Virginia in their approach and the experiences in the use of the social media platform Facebook.

Overall, the towns are using Facebook in a manner to get information out to residents. Getting information out to residents was the overall factor for why the towns use Facebook. The chief use case, by far in each town and overall, is to get information out to the community about events and happenings within the towns (*marketing events in the municipality* use case). These may be town sponsored or privately sponsored events. The towns are also generally experiencing growing numbers of followers, page reach, and new page "likes" when 2021 was compared to 2022 Facebook Insights Reports data. The town Facebook pages are followed most widely by women (by a 70 to 80 percent margin in each town). Age wise, the followers for the town Facebook pages are also in the 35-54 age range (by a 40 to 50 percent margin in each town), which is a middle age demographic when compared to the 18-34 and 55+ age groups.

This chapter included a description of the setting and participants, a general overview of the findings, the data analysis process details, the results of the data analysis presented in tables

and charts along with a descriptive narrative, the research question responses, and a summary of the chapter.

Chapter 5 presents the conclusion to the study.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this mixed methods multi-case study is to analyze (1) how three small-town governments are using Facebook to serve residents; (2) the results that are experienced by the three small-town governments and residents in the town's use of Facebook; and (3) the factors that influence the three small-town governments to use Facebook to serve residents. The study highlights the similarities and differences among three town governments (Abingdon, Lebanon, and Marion) located in Southwestern Virginia in their approach and the experiences in the use of the social media platform Facebook.

The study was conducted as a multi-case study and used document analysis and interviews as data collection methods, which were appropriate methods for a case study. The following research questions guided the study, which resulted in themes being identified.

RQ1: *How are three small-town governments using Facebook to serve residents?*

RQ2: *What results are experienced by the three small-town governments and residents in the town's use of Facebook to serve residents?*

RQ3: *What are the factors that influence the three small-town governments to use Facebook to serve residents?*

This chapter includes a summary of the study findings, the themes identified, recommendations to the towns to expand their use of Facebook, recommendations for future research, and a summary of the chapter.

Summary of Findings

The study found that the three towns are extensively using Facebook in primarily a one-directional manner. Specifically, each town is predominantly using posts on Facebook to

highlight events and happenings taking place in the town. These events may include both publicly and privately sponsored events. The towns are generally not using Facebook to request information or assistance from residents through their public Facebook posts. It was determined that most of the town participants view the use of Facebook as a supplementary tool to complement core government service offerings.

Demographically, the study found that women (70-80 percent) are following each of the town Facebook pages more than men (20-30 percent). Specifically, the age range of 35-54 was the largest age range following each of the town Facebook pages. Younger (ages 18-34) and older (age 55+) residents are not using the town Facebook pages as much. It is possible that younger residents may be using other social media platforms and older residents may be following traditional media sources (newspaper, television, and radio) as their information sources.

Relating to factors influencing usage, the primary theme that evolved in the document analysis data and heard from the town interview participants from all the towns was that the leading reason for using Facebook is to get information out and to inform the residents and public of various issues, events, and happenings in their respective town. Another commonality present that was heard in multiple interviews was the decline of traditional media (such as newspapers, television, and radio) reach and shifting age demographics who do not follow traditional media as driving force for using Facebook to serve residents. Overall, the major factor is that Facebook is another tool that can be used to get information out to residents. It has the potential to reach those who do not engage with traditional media sources.

A total of three themes were identified as follows:

- Facebook is primarily used by towns to inform and market events

- Most followers are female and in the 35-54 age range

- Towns are satisfied with current Facebook usage and processes

As evidenced in the results in Chapter Four, the towns are also generally experiencing growing numbers of visitors and page reach on their main town Facebook page. It was apparent that each town is satisfied overall with the results of their town's Facebook page usage. Further insight from the interviews revealed that there are no current plans to make any major changes to the way Facebook is used to serve residents in the near future.

Recommendations

It is commendable that each of the three towns are using the Facebook social media platform to serve its residents. The fact that each town has a Facebook page shows that the towns view Facebook as a worthwhile tool, and they should be applauded for this effort that advances the use of technology in public administration. The three towns are using Facebook in the manner that best suits their situations and priorities.

Part of the reasons for this study was to provide recommendations for the towns to use to improve and expand their use of Facebook. This desire is especially true since this study is based upon a case study foundation. The following details the specific recommendations to the town employees and officials of the three towns in the study. Implementing these recommendations will strengthen each town's use of the Facebook social media platform to serve residents. The town employees and officials responsible for Facebook maintenance can consider and evaluate these recommendations as possible ways to increase the usage of Facebook in their service to residents and take Facebook use to a higher level.

1. Use Facebook posts to request information and assistance from residents.

2. Use more features of Facebook, such as Facebook Live, videos, and polls to engage residents.

3. Use Facebook tools and features to market to target demographic groups that are present on Facebook but are not using or engaging with the town's Facebook page.

The first recommendation is that the towns should consider using their public posts on Facebook to achieve more engagement, namely requesting information and assistance from residents. Use cases reflecting these outcomes in this study were found in a lower number. Thus, the towns may be able to boost engagement by using Facebook to solicit ideas and feedback from residents and stakeholders on decisions facing the local government. For example, a simple demonstration of this idea might be to ask residents to provide feedback on town services (such as parks, roads, etc.) and ideas for improvements. An approach like this engages residents and makes the interaction collaborative. A major point for using social media is for users to be engaged and interactive with each other.

The second recommendation is that the towns should consider increasing the use of certain features of Facebook, such as Facebook Live and videos. During the study period, few posts were observed that used Facebook Live, videos, or advanced Facebook features. Mostly, it was found that posts were either text, graphics, or re-shares of contents from other Facebook pages. Using advanced features such as Live or videos may allow for greater engagement and understanding of topics. For example, Facebook Live allows users to provide real-time comments to the video content. As an example, Facebook Live could be used to broadcast town-sponsored events, and the town government can receive instant feedback during those broadcasts. Using these interactive and advanced features of Facebook allows for more dynamic and attractive content than simply static text, graphics, or links. This recommendation also

increases engagement and the usefulness of Facebook to serve residents. Interviewees from each of the towns were open to expand the use of Facebook Live or video content.

The third recommendation is that the towns should consider using the tools available within Facebook to boost content and page visibility to the desired demographic groups that are present on Facebook but are not engaging with or using the town's page. The towns would benefit from the use of these tools to gain a more demographically diverse audience on their Facebook pages. Granted, there are fees charged by Facebook for this service, and this fee would have to be considered for budgeting purposes. However, the fees are not significant enough to be cost prohibitive. Obtaining additional followers for the Facebook page also allows the towns to reach a broader audience and helps with getting essential information out to residents and other interested parties.

Recommendations for Future Research

The first recommendation for future research would be to carry out a Facebook study with a larger number of units of local government in a certain geographic area. This recommendation would likely yield more insight into the trends, similarities, and differences among the units of local government. A second recommendation for future research would be for a study to dive deeper into the demographics (age and gender) of governmental Facebook followers. As evidenced in this study, women and those in the 35-54 age range were the predominant followers in each town.

The final recommendation would be to perform a study that includes all the Facebook pages (as opposed to just the main page) across the various departments and offices of the respective units of government. This study would lead to a more holistic picture of how a town is using Facebook to serve residents across its enterprise. In the case of the three towns involved

in this study, in addition to the main Facebook page for each town, other departments were also using Facebook pages.

Summary

This study shows how three small-town governments located in Southwestern Virginia use the Facebook social media platform to serve residents. This study shows that social media, particularly Facebook, can be an instrumental tool for governmental organizations. Facebook allows for multi-directional communication with constituent groups such as town residents. In each of the three towns included in this study, the employees and officials interviewed indicated positive experiences in using Facebook to serve residents. The three towns should be commended for their use of Facebook to serve residents, as this is an innovation in public administration. This study also shows that there is room for improving the usage of Facebook and social media and provides specific recommendations so that residents and constituents are served at higher levels of service and achieve multi-directional communication. These improvements would allow the towns to achieve a higher-level rating on the T3 Framework for Innovation model and be at a higher functioning level in the Open Government Initiative principles and Mergel's Framework

By following these recommendations, residents and the town governments alike will be served at an advanced level. As technology changes and new innovations arise, it is important for government organizations and public administrators at all levels to keep abreast of changing trends and to implement solutions that will serve their constituents well. Citizens also expect that governmental organizations will provide cutting edge services like the experiences they may receive from private organizations.

This study has added to the literature on smaller units of government that are using Facebook. This chapter included a summary of the study findings, the themes identified, recommendations to the towns to strengthen their use of Facebook, recommendations for future research, and a summary of the chapter.

REFERENCES

Aboulhosn, S. (2019). *Social media marketing tips for every platform*. Sprout Social.

    https://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-tips/

Andrews, M. (2022). *Social media customer service 101: The beginner's guide*. Hootsuite.

    https://blog.hubspot.com/service/social-media-customer-service

Baker, K. (2023). *The 15 best social media analytics tools for marketers in 2023*. HubSpot.

    https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/social-media-analytics-tools

Barnhart, B. (2022). *Social media and government: How to keep citizens engaged*. Sprout Social.

    https://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-and-government/

Barton, R. (n.d.). *Leveraging social media in local government*. New Hampshire Municipal

    Association. https://www.nhmunicipal.org/town-city-article/leveraging-social-media-
    local-government

Bellström, P., Magnusson, M., Pettersson, J. S., & Thorén, C. (2016). Facebook usage in a local

    government: A content analysis of page owner posts and user posts. *Transforming*

    Government, 10(4), 548-567. https://doi.org/10.1108/TG-12-2015-0061

Beveridge, C., & Tran, T. (2022). *Social media in government: Benefits, challenges, and how it's*

    used. Hootsuite. https://blog.hootsuite.com/social-media-government/

Boateng, F. D., & Chenane, J. (2020). Policing and social media: A mixed-method investigation

    of social media use by a small-town police department. *International Journal of Police*

    Science & Management, 22(3), 263-273. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461355720927429

Bonsón, E., Royo, S., & Ratkai, M. (2017). Facebook practices in western European

    municipalities: An empirical analysis of activity and citizens' engagement.

    Administration & Society, 49(3), 320-347. https://doi.org/10.1177/0095399714544945

Bonsón, E., Torres, L., Royo, S., & Flores, F. (2012). Local e-government 2.0: Social media and corporate transparency in municipalities. *Government Information Quarterly, 29*(2), 123-132. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2011.10.001

Boyd, D. M., & Ellison, N. B. (2007). Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 13*(1), 210-230. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00393.x

Brynielsson, J., Granåsen, M., Lindquist, S., Narganes Quijano, M., Nilsson, S., & Trnka, J. (2018). Informing crisis alerts using social media: Best practices and proof of concept. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management, 26*(1), 28-40. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5973.12195

Cassell, M. K., & Mullaly, S. (2012). When smaller governments open the window: A study of web site creation, adoption, and presence among smaller local governments in northeast Ohio. *State & Local Government Review, 44*(2), 91-100. https://doi.org/10.1177/0160323X12441602

Chapman, S. J. (2017). What's in a website? E-government scores and municipal characteristics. *Public Administration Quarterly*, *41*(2), 360-385.

Cinus, R. (2018). *How government agencies can leverage the power of social media – 7 best practices (with examples)*. Roberta Cinus. https://www.robertacinus.it/en/blog/e-gov-en/government-agencies-social-media-best-practices-examples/

CivicPlus. (2016). *7 ways local government can use social media*. https://www.civicplus.com/blog/ce/seven-ways-local-government-can-use-social-media

Clarke, T. (2019). *14 social media best practices you should follow in 2020*. Hootsuite. https://blog.hootsuite.com/social-media-best-practices/

Cover, L. (2020). *Bring it in: How to build an all-star social media team*. Sprout Social.

    https://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-team/

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among*

    five approaches (4th ed.). Sage Publications. [Kindle version].

Criado, J. I., Sandoval-Almazan, R., & Gil-Garcia, J. R. (2013). Government innovation through

    social media. *Government Information Quarterly, 30*(4), 319-326.

    https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2013.10.003

Devgan, S. (2022). *Social media for government: A complete guide*. Statusbrew Insights.

    https://statusbrew.com/insights/social-media-for-government/

Doernberg, S. N., & Wendler, D. (2016). Ensuring respect for human research participants:

    Institutional review boards and sharing results from research. *JAMA: The Journal of the*

    American Medical Association, 316(11), 1149-1150.

    https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2016.7970

Facebook. (n.d. -a). *What does it mean when someone likes or follows a page?* Retrieved August

    8, 2021, from https://www.facebook.com/help/171378103323792/

Facebook. (n.d. -b). *Facebook page reach.* Retrieved March 9, 2023, from

    https://www.facebook.com/business/help/844160039406775

Facebook. (n.d. -c). *Facebook page visits.* Retrieved March 9, 2023, from

    https://www.facebook.com/business/help/276102860429282

Feeney, M. K., & Welch, E. W. (2016). Technology–task coupling: Exploring social media use

    and managerial perceptions of e-government. *American Review of Public Administration,*

    46(2), 162-179. https://doi.org/10.1177/0275074014547413

Fusi, F., & Feeney, M. K. (2018). Social media in the workplace: Information exchange, productivity, or waste? *American Review of Public Administration, 48*(5), 395-412. https://doi.org/10.1177/0275074016675722

Gao, X., & Lee, J. (2017). E-government services and social media adoption: Experience of small local governments in Nebraska state. *Government Information Quarterly, 34*(4), 627-634. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2017.09.005

Gichoya, D. (2005). Factors affecting the successful implementation of ICT projects in government" *The Electronic Journal of e-Government, 3*(4), 175-184. https://academic-publishing.org/index.php/ejeg/article/view/440/403

Gintova, M. (2019). Understanding government social media users: An analysis of interactions on immigration, refugees and citizenship Canada Twitter and Facebook. *Government Information Quarterly, 36*(4), 1-10. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2019.06.005

Gogolan, D. (2020). *Data proven social media trends and best practices for 2021*. Socialinsider. https://www.socialinsider.io/blog/social-media-best-practices/

GovLoop. (n.d.). *The government's guide to using Facebook*. https://www.govloop.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/The-Governments-Guide-to-Using-Facebook.pdf

Grady, C. (2015). Institutional review boards: Purpose and challenges. *Chest, 148*(5), 1148-1155. https://doi.org/10.1378/chest.15-0706

Guillamón, M., Ríos, A., Gesuele, B., & Metallo, C. (2016). Factors influencing social media use in local governments: The case of Italy and Spain. *Government Information Quarterly, 33*(3), 460-471. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2016.06.005

Hao, X., Zheng, D., Zeng, Q., & Fan, W. (2016). How to strengthen the social media

   interactivity of e-government. *Online Information Review, 40*(1), 79-96.

   https://doi.org/10.1108/OIR-03-2015-0084

Hatcher, W., & Gallardo, R. (2014). *Social media and community development: Usage and best*

   practices. PA TIMES Online. https://patimes.org/social-media-community-development-

   usage-practices/

Hood, M. (2019). *How to use social media for effective citizen engagement*. Forum One.

   https://www.forumone.com/insights/blog/how-use-social-media-effective-citizen-

   engagement/

Hu, G. (2009). The widely shared definition of e-government: An exploratory study. *Electronic*

   Library, 27(6), 968-985. https://doi.org/10.1108/02640470911004066

IBM. (n.d.). *What is social media analytics?* https://www.ibm.com/topics/social-media-analytics

International City/County Management Association. (2017). *Government technology solutions*

   survey.

   https://icma.org/sites/default/files/2017%20Government%20Technology%20Solutions%

   20Survey.pdf

Kavanaugh, A. L., Fox, E. A., Sheetz, S. D., Yang, S., Li, L. T., Shoemaker, D. J., Natsev, A., &

   Xie, L. (2012). Social media use by government: From the routine to the critical.

   Government Information Quarterly, 29(4), 480-491.

   https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2012.06.002

Korstjens, I., & Moser, A. (2018). Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research. Part 4:

   Trustworthiness and publishing. *The European Journal of General Practice, 24*(1), 120-

   124. https://doi.org/10.1080/13814788.2017.1375092

Lappas, G., Triantafillidou, A., Deligiaouri, A., & Kleftodimos, A. (2018). Facebook content

    strategies and citizens' online engagement: The case of Greek local governments. *The*

    Review of Socionetwork Strategies, 12(1), 1-20. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12626-018-

    0017-6

League of Oregon Cities. (2015). Social media and municipal law: Friends and forums, tweets

    and traps. *Local Focus*, 29-30.

    https://www.orcities.org/application/files/9215/7437/8381/SocialMediaAndYourCity-

    Nov2015LF.pdf

Leavy, P. (2017). *Research design: Quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, arts-based, and*

    community-based participatory research approaches. Guilford Publications.

Lewis, J., McMahon, J., & Latner, M. (2016). *A small city's path to getting the most from social*

    media. Governing. https://www.governing.com/gov-institute/voices/col-pismo-beach-

    small-city-path-social-media.html

Lin, X., Spence, P. R., Sellnow, T. L., & Lachlan, K. A. (2016). Crisis communication, learning

    and responding: Best practices in social media. *Computers in Human Behavior, 65*, 601-

    605. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.05.080

Magana, S. (2017). *Disruptive classroom technologies - a framework for innovation in*

    education. Sage Publications.

Magana Education. (n.d.). Disruptive classroom technologies. Retrieved from

    https://maganaeducation.com/disruptive-classroom-technologies/

Mahajan-Cusack, L. (2016). *The impact of social media on local government transparency and*

    citizen engagement [Doctoral dissertation, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey].

RUcore: Rutgers University Community Repository.

https://rucore.libraries.rutgers.edu/rutgers-lib/50539/

Marabella, J. (2018). *7 ways to use social media with your municipal website in 2019*. CivicPlus.

https://www.civicplus.com/blog/ce/using-social-media-with-municipal-website

Marshall, C. J. (2018). *Social media communication by Michigan county and city government*

(Publication No. 586) [Senior honors thesis, Eastern Michigan University]. Digital

Commons @ EMU. https://commons.emich.edu/honors/586/

Matthews, K. (2015). Using social media effectively. *Local Focus*, 23-25.

https://www.orcities.org/application/files/9215/7437/8381/SocialMediaAndYourCity-

Nov2015LF.pdf

McLachlan, S. (2022). *Social media for crisis communications and emergency management*.

Hootsuite. https://blog.hootsuite.com/social-media-crisis-communication/

McLachlan, S., & Newberry, C. (2021). *22 benefits of social media for business*. Hootsuite.

https://blog.hootsuite.com/social-media-for-business/

McNeal, R., Hale, K., & Dotterweich, L. (2008). Citizen-government interaction and the

internet: Expectations and accomplishments in contact, quality, and trust. *Journal of

Information Technology & Politics, 5*(2), 213-229.

https://doi.org/10.1080/19331680802298298

Mergel, I. (2012). The social media innovation challenge in the public sector. *Information Polity,

17*(3,4), 281-292. https://doi.org/10.3233/IP-2012-000281

Mergel, I. (2013a). A framework for interpreting social media interactions in the public sector.

Government Information Quarterly, 30(4), 327-334.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2013.05.015

Mergel, I. (2013b). Social media adoption and resulting tactics in the U.S. federal government. *Government Information Quarterly, 30*(2), 123-130. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2012.12.004

Mergel, I. (2016). Social media institutionalization in the U.S. federal government. *Government Information Quarterly, 33*(1), 142-148. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2015.09.002

Mergel, I., & Bretschneider, S. I. (2013). A three-stage adoption process for social media use in government. *Public Administration Review, 73*(3), 390-400. https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12021

Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. John Wiley & Sons. [Kindle version].

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). John Wiley & Sons.

Mickoleit, A. (2014). *Social media use by governments.* Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/social-media-use-by-governments_5jxrcmghmk0s-en

Milcetich, J. (2017). How to use social media to deliver excellent customer service. *Journal of Digital & Social Media Marketing, 5*(2), 139-145.

Mossberger, K., Wu, Y., & Crawford, J. (2013). Connecting citizens and local governments? Social media and interactivity in major U.S. cities. *Government Information Quarterly, 30*(4), 351-358. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2013.05.016

National League of Cities. (n.d.). *Cities 101 — Forms of municipal government*. https://www.nlc.org/resource/forms-of-municipal-government/

Nations, D. (2020). *What is Facebook? Here's what you should know*. Lifewire.

    https://www.lifewire.com/what-is-facebook-3486391

Newberry, C. (2023). *Social media security tips and tools to mitigate risks*. Social Media

    Marketing & Management Dashboard. https://blog.hootsuite.com/social-media-security-

    for-business/

Newberry, C., & LePage, E. (2021). *How to create a social media strategy in 8 steps*. Hootsuite.

    https://blog.hootsuite.com/how-to-create-a-social-media-marketing-plan/

Noonan, A.M., Sunryd, B., Dugan, S., & Murphy-Rodrigues, M. (2023). *Best practices for using*

    social media in municipal government [PowerPoint slides]. Massachusetts Municipal

    Association. https://www.mma.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/MMA-webinar-

    BestPracticesforUsingSocialMediainMunicipalGovernment-3.7.23.pdf

North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources. (2010). *Best practices for local government*

    social media usage in North Carolina. https://archives.ncdcr.gov/media/23/open

Orszag, P. (2009). *Open government directive*. The White House.

    https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/open/documents/open-government-directive

Patten, M. L., & Newhart, M. (2018). *Understanding research methods: An overview of the*

    essentials (10th ed.). Routledge.

Pec, T. (2022). *Why businesses and brands need to be taking advantage of social media*. Forbes.

    https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2022/09/06/why-businesses-and-

    brands-need-to-be-taking-advantage-of-social-media/

Pew Research Center. (2021). *Demographics of social media users and adoption in the United*

    States. Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech.

https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/social-media/?menuItem=c14683cb-c4f4-41d0-a635-52c4eeae0245

Picazo-Vela, S., Gutiérrez-Martínez, I., & Luna-Reyes, L. F. (2012). Understanding risks, benefits, and strategic alternatives of social media applications in the public sector. *Government Information Quarterly, 29*(4), 504-511. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2012.07.002

Riserbato, R. (2020). *What a social media target audience is and how to find it*. HubSpot Blog. https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/social-media-target-audience

Rutledge, P. J. (1974). Federal-local relations and the mission of the city. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 416*(1), 77-90. https://doi.org/10.1177/000271627441600108

Shaw, A. (2018). *Three social media best practices for business development*. Forbes. https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescommunicationscouncil/2018/10/16/three-social-media-best-practices-for-business-development/

Skargren, F. (2020). What is the point of benchmarking e-government? An integrative and critical literature review on the phenomenon of benchmarking e-government. *Information Polity, 25*(1), 67-89. https://doi.org/10.3233/IP-190131

Smarsh. (n.d.). How public agencies can use social media to engage. Smarsh Blog. https://www.smarsh.com/blog/thought-leadership/how-government-agencies-can-engage-with-communities-on-social-media/

Snead, J. T. (2013). Social media use in the U.S. executive branch. *Government Information Quarterly, 30*(1), 56-63. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2012.09.001

Song, C., & Lee, J. (2015). Citizens' use of social media in government, perceived transparency, and trust in government. *Public Performance & Management Review, 39*(2), 430-453. https://doi.org/10.1080/15309576.2015.1108798

Straus, J. R., Glassman, M. E., Shogan, C. J., & Smelcer, S. N. (2013). Communicating in 140 characters or less: Congressional adoption of Twitter in the 111th Congress. *PS, Political Science & Politics, 46*(1), 60-66. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096512001242

Suciu, P. (2019, November 19). *Social media and local government*. Forbes. https://www.forbes.com/sites/petersuciu/2019/11/19/social-media-and-local-government/?sh=293e3c947aa6

Thomas, J. C., & Streib, G. (2003). The new face of government: Citizen-initiated contacts in the era of e-government. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, 13*(1), 83-101. https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mug010

Topkin, D. (2020). *7 brands with brilliant Facebook marketing strategies, and why they work*. HubSpot. https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/facebook-marketing-examples

Tran, T., & Bar-Tur, Y. (2020). *Social media in government: Benefits, challenges, and how it's used*. Hootsuite. https://blog.hootsuite.com/social-media-government/

Tufts University. (n.d.). *Social media best practices*. https://communications.tufts.edu/marketing-and-branding/social-media-overview/social-media-best-practices/

United States Census Bureau. (2020). *City and town population totals: 2010-2019*. https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/popest/2010s-total-cities-and-towns.html

United States General Accounting Office. (2002). *Electronic government: Selection and implementation of the Office of Management and Budget's 24 initiatives*. https://www.gao.gov/assets/240/236462.pdf

University of California, Santa Barbara. (n.d.). *Social media best practices*. https://brand.ucsb.edu/social-media/best-practices

Watson, R. (2015). Quantitative research. *Nursing Standard, 29*(31), 44-48. https://doi.org/10.7748/ns.29.31.44.e8681

We Are Social, DataReportal, & Hootsuite. (2021). Leading countries based on Facebook audience size as of July 2021 (in millions) [Graph]. In *Statista*. Retrieved August 15, 2021, from https://www-statista-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/statistics/268136/top-15-countries-based-on-number-of-facebook-users/

Wood, A. (2019). *The truth about local government and social media*. CivicPlus. https://www.civicplus.com/blog/ce/the-truth-about-local-government-and-social-media

Yazan, B. (2015). Three approaches to case study methods in education: Yin, Merriam, and Stake. *Qualitative Report, 20*(2), 134-152. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2015.2102

Yeomans, M. (2018). *A short history of social media*. (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351111638-2

Yin, R. K. (2016). *Qualitative research from start to finish* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.

Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). Sage Publications.

Zavattaro, S. M., & Sementelli, A. J. (2014). A critical examination of social media adoption in

government: Introducing omnipresence. *Government Information Quarterly, 31*(2), 257-

264. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2013.10.007

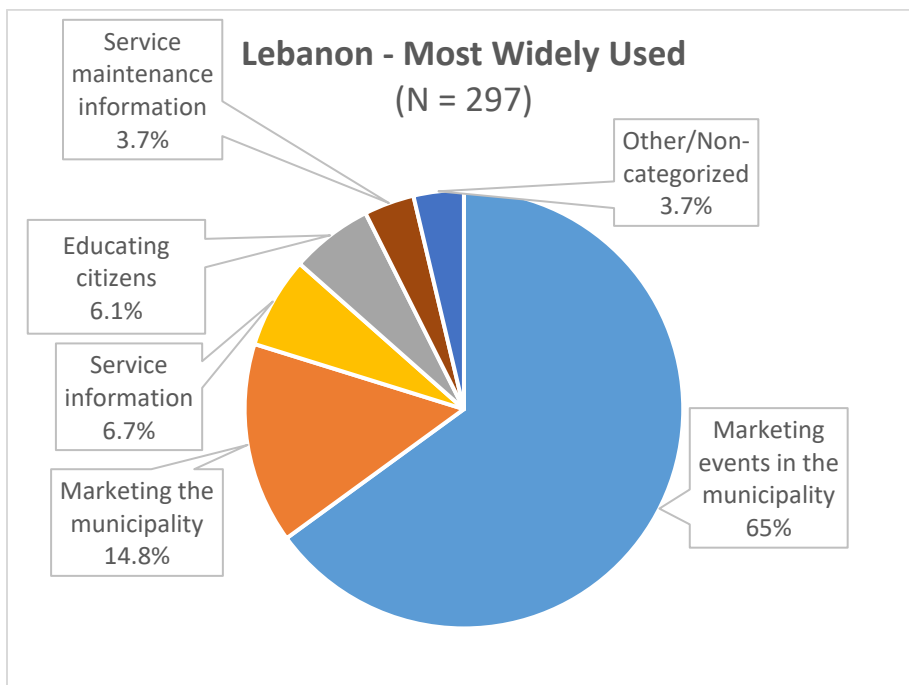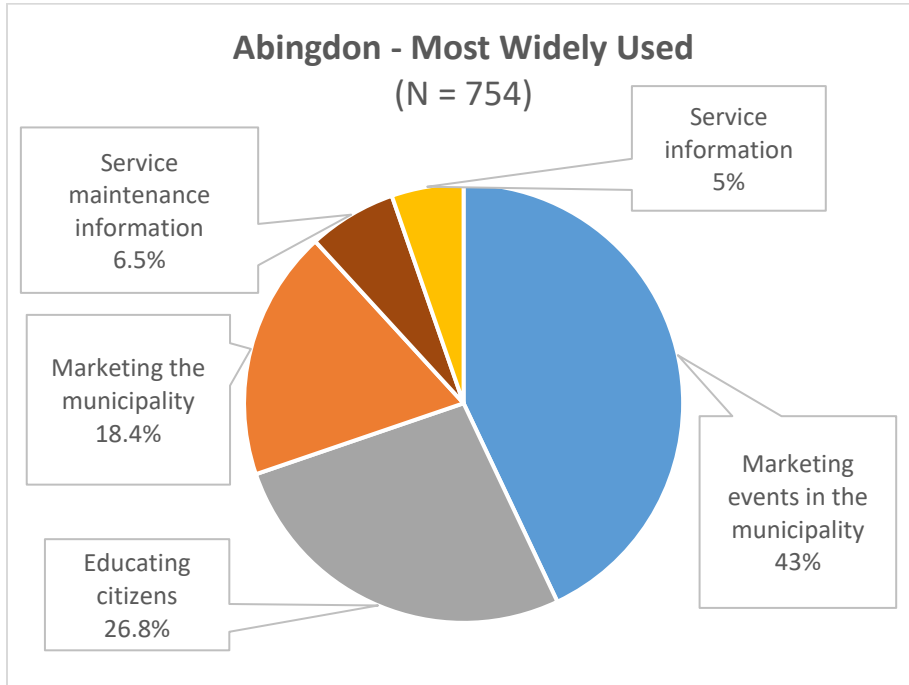Zimmermann P. & Finger M. (2005). "Information and communication technology (ICT) and

local power relationships: An impact assessment" *The Electronic Journal of e-*

Government, 3(4), 231-240. https://academic-

publishing.org/index.php/ejeg/article/view/446/409

Zote, J. (2021). *The most important social media trends to know for 2021*. Sprout Social.

https://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-trends/

APPENDIX A

Most Widely Used Use Cases by Town

Larger versions of the pie charts are presented here for each town in Figure 6 on page 91.

Abingdon - Most Widely Used
(N = 754)

- Service maintenance information 6.5%
- Service information 5%
- Marketing the municipality 18.4%
- Marketing events in the municipality 43%
- Educating citizens 26.8%

Lebanon - Most Widely Used
(N = 297)

- Service maintenance information 3.7%
- Other/Non-categorized 3.7%
- Educating citizens 6.1%
- Service information 6.7%
- Marketing the municipality 14.8%
- Marketing events in the municipality 65%

Marion - Most Widely Used
(N = 765)

Other/Non-categorized
3.8%

Marketing services
3.8%

Service information
4%

Educating citizens
9%

Marketing the municipality
13.7%

Marketing events in the municipality
65.1%

APPENDIX B

Least Widely Used Use Cases by Town

Larger versions of the pie charts are presented here for each town in Figure 8 on page 94.

Abingdon - Least Widely Used (N = 49)

- Marketing events outside the municipality 2%
- Other/Non-categorized 0%
- Requesting information from citizens 10.2%
- Marketing services 34.7%
- Requesting assistance from citizens 53.1%

Lebanon - Least Widely Used (N = 14)

- Marketing events outside the municipality 14.3%
- Requesting information from citizens 0%
- Marketing services 28.6%
- Requesting assistance from citizens 57.1%

Marion - Least Widely Used
(N = 55)

Requesting information from citizens
5.5%

Requesting assistance from citizens
21.8%

Marketing events outside the municipality
43.6%

Service maintenance information
29.1%