

## MUNICIPAL PUBLIC INFORMATION THROUGH SOCIAL NETWORKS



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### ABSTRACT

Social networks have evolved and become the largest search engine for information today. The present study starts from the question: How is the involvement of citizens in the use of social networks to obtain municipal public information? With the general objective of examining the citizen's perception of the use of social networks, at the municipal level, to disseminate information. And, specifically, to analyze how a municipal body uses the social media platform *Instagram* to promote openness about its activities. As a methodology, a quantitative research was carried out, through a questionnaire applied through the *Google Forms* platform, based on the Guide of Good Practices for the performance of social networks, to be answered using a 5-point Likert measurement scale, evaluating levels of frequency and satisfaction. Results were obtained that highlight the limitations of the municipalities evaluated in relation to the use of *Instagram*. As a suggestion, it is considered important to monitor the government-citizen relationship through the networks in the cities evaluated, seeking a functioning that promotes a positive evaluation of the population.

**Keywords:** Social Networks. Instagram. Information.

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## INTRODUCTION

The technological advancement that has marked the last few years has contributed to modifying and dynamizing the relationship between society and its public agents (Ferreira; De Souza, 2023), in this way, governments around the world increasingly depend on social networks to expand civic engagement (Feeney; Porumbescu, 2021).

Frequent relationships through social networks have become common, growing not only as a communication tool, but as an important means of manifestation of expressions and socialization. It is undeniable that the adoption of social networks is modifying and innovating the relationship between society and its administrative agents (Ferreira; De Souza, 2023), since the versatility of the current communication channels and the massive adherence of the population have created a familiar environment for the practice of disseminating information (Ferreira; De Souza, 2023).

Therefore, in view of the assertions presented, the question arises: How is the involvement of citizens in the use of social networks to obtain municipal public information? The decision to research society's perception of the public-municipal positioning in these networks arises from the fundamental role they play in the exchange of information between government and citizen. In this context, Jiang (2023) states that social media platforms provide government agencies with a channel to immediately reach citizens.

The general objective of this work will be to examine the citizen's perception of the use of social networks, at the municipal level, to disseminate information. And, specifically, to analyze how a municipal body uses the social media platform *Instagram* to promote openness about its activities. As a methodology, a quantitative research was carried out, through a questionnaire applied through the free online platform *Google Forms*, with closed questions, based on the Guide of Good Practices for the performance of social networks, to be answered using a 5-point Likert measurement scale.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### SOCIAL NETWORKS, INSTAGRAM AND THE POPULARIZATION OF INFORMATION

Access to information is a right of every citizen, which is related to the right to freedom of expression and autonomy (Pinto Filho; Santa Rita; Pinto, 2020) in this way, the broad appreciation given to information and knowledge emerged, especially in response to the need to reconcile social anxieties (Ferreira; De Souza, 2023).

In democratic societies, access to information is essential for the advancement of citizens' sociability, thus, social media expand the opportunities for communication and interaction of institutions through highly accessible communication tools and platforms (Tutar; Parlak, 2023).

In a survey conducted by Forbes Brasil (2023), the country is the third largest consumer of social networks worldwide, being the first in Latin America in access to platforms. They have had their emergence since the mid-90s, what used to be just an exchange of messages, today has become the largest search engine for information today, in this context, *Instagram* is a social network, initially, for sharing photos and, later, also videos, which was launched in 2010, by the American Kevin Systrom and the Brazilian Mike Krieger (Oliveira, 2022).

Over time, the application has drawn attention for its practicality and quality, there are numerous accounts created on *Instagram*, intended for sharing diverse content (Oliveira, 2022), it offers interactive features, such as comments, direct messages, and the ability to tag and mention other users (Sjöberg; Cassinger; Rampazzo Gambarato, 2023), in this way, the social network has become responsible for most of the information exchanged by society.

In previous investigations, Oliveira (2022) locates research that seeks to investigate *Instagram* and its functionalities, in the areas of Marketing, Media, and Communication. The author also conducts a study in order to find out how the carousel posts of content creator accounts on Instagram are textually organized, concluding that the main purposes achieved are to gain more followers, increase engagement and consequently generate more revenue for content creators.

In April 2022, *Instagram* ranked 4th as the most active social media in the world (Nawir; Herman; Bo'do, 2024), known for its visually appealing content, is an ideal space for brands that rely heavily on images to communicate their message (Pitafi; Mumtaz, 2024), in this way, various information is made available to society and easily accessed.

In addition, *Instagram* is a useful social media platform for municipalities in terms of better tracking their target audiences (Tutar; Parlak, 2023), it is common to find profiles of public agencies active on social networks, aiming to reach the population and presenting the activities carried out by the management.

Currently, in the virtual world, all publications and actions are strictly observed by the public, mistakes and successes are noticed at all times (Da Silva; Silva; Oliveira, 2021), the

interaction that social networks promote ranges from the personal to the professional, people spend much of their time on them (Da Silva; Silva; Oliveira, 2021), thus social media has had a significant impact on how humans communicate and continue their daily routines over the past twenty-five years (Svirak, N., Kwarteng, M., and Pilík M, 2023).

## PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND TRANSPARENCY

The transparency of acts within the public administration, nowadays, refers to the process of formulating laws and allocating budgets, so that the citizen is informed about government decisions. The concept of transparency is linked to the information economy, in which the citizen is seen as an investor and as a consumer of public goods (Leite; De Lira, 2023).

Transparency encompasses more than the principle of publicity, provided for in the Federal Constitution of 1988, as it brings the possibility of citizen participation in public management, allowing him to know and intervene in public projects, plans and actions (Visentini; Santos, 2019), in this way, more and more developed or developing countries recognize that free access to information is fundamental for democracy, as the current economic, social and financial context in which governments are inserted forces them to be as transparent as possible, creating greater citizen involvement in political matters (Leite; De Lira, 2023).

From 2009 onwards, however, legal and regulatory measures sought to institutionalize public transparency, in order to provide society with instruments that ensure it the necessary information to improve its evaluation (Marco; Terzi, 2022), thus clarifying to the community the government's actions and their results. In compliance with current legislation, the public entity is obliged to disclose its acts, based on the principles that govern public management (Visentini; Santos, 2019).

Transparency can also be seen as a mechanism to reduce the degree of corruption (Leite; De Lira, 2023; Elberry; Goeminne, 2020) or for the advancement of the economic performance of national governments (Leite; De Lira, 2023). As well as expressed in article 5, item XXXIII, of the CRFB/88, which establishes the right to receive from public bodies information of their private interest, or of collective or general interest, which will be provided within the term of the law. It is also important to mention the legal protections that support this understanding, such as Law No. 12,527/2011, or the Access to Information Law (LAI), which regulates the access to information provided for in the aforementioned

article, and provides the necessary support for the transparency practiced by public agents (Ferreira; De Souza, 2023).

It is important to emphasize that transparency is an essential requirement for the exercise of popular participation, for social control and for *accountability* (Pinto Filho; Santa Rita; Pinto, 2020), to achieve this objective, the public administration must promote wide dissemination, in electronic media or public hearings (Visentini; Santos, 2019).

## USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS BY PUBLIC AGENCIES

Social networks have reduced the asymmetry of power between the government and citizens (Jiang; Tang, 2023), considering that access to the data posted by these organizations increases accountability and allows citizens to know what they do and what they use public money for. Rapid *feedback* from government social networks, in turn, provides citizens with a sense of participation (Jiang; Tang, 2023; Pitafi; Mumtaz, 2024), thus increasing society's power of criticality.

Thus, the main innovation in the dissemination of the acts and results of the public administration was made possible mainly through the use of digital platforms (Marco; Terci, 2022). Thanks to the tools of social networks, in contrast to unidirectionality, bidirectionality and instant communication can be provided between institutions and the target audience (Tutar; Parlak, 2023), thus the digital transformation practices normally used in business contexts have now been adopted in public service processes (Suaedi; Zulfikar, 2023).

In Brazil, about 44% of internet users have access to *fake news* daily (2022), so the digital presence of government public agencies is necessary because when there is an overload of information online, government publications on social networks can promote the openness and transparency of information, thus increasing citizens' trust (Jiang; Tang, 2023).

In previous studies, Kniess (2021) investigates how the Office of the Comptroller General of the Union (CGU) approaches the idea of transparency in its social media profiles, questioning how the topic is mobilized by the CGU, and which communication strategies are privileged in each network evaluated, thus, the content analysis of 4,212 publications on *Facebook* and *Twitter* In 2015 and 2016 he revealed that the institution privileges two themes: transparency and corruption. In addition, in more than half of the posts, the institution encourages citizens to engage in political participation activities (Kniess; Marques, 2021).

Effective communication strategies on social networks are crucial to connect with the public (Pitafi; Mumtaz, 2024), in some cases, the government feels greatly helped by the diversity of comments, criticisms, and suggestions that are both positive and negative, because all of this is input and evaluation material for the government, so that later in the elaboration of a policy it is able to overcome a problem (Nawir; Herman; Bo'do, 2024).

The success of digital transformation in public services is achieved when the data created through technology can be used effectively by public institutions (Suaedi; Zulfikar, 2023), technological developments have become an opportunity for government public relations to optimally perform its functions, both in internal and external public relations activities (Agustini et al., 2024).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The general objective of this work will be to examine the citizen's perception of the use of social networks, at the municipal level, to disseminate information.

A quantitative and descriptive research was carried out, thus, as the main strategy was the case study, carried out through an applied questionnaire. The idea of the study is to examine how specific variables can affect people's perceptions and attitudes towards the use of the social network to access information related to municipal management.

Thus, seeking to assess the users' perception of the quality of the social network evaluated, an online questionnaire was carried out, through the free online platform *Google Forms*, with closed questions that will help in the data collection process. Questions were prepared to be answered using a 5-point Likert measurement scale. The questions built from the *Likert* scale offer a scale of points as an answer option and thus allow different levels of intensity of opinion about a topic to be discovered.

In addition, the questionnaire is guided based on the Guide of Good Practices for the performance of social networks, prepared by the Social Communication Secretariat of the Federal Government, launched in September 2023, which aims to guide the performance of the digital teams of the direct and indirect administration with information and recommendations for the construction of a structured digital presence, within the current legislation, in addition to providing guidance on how to interact with the population on different platforms and digital channels (BRASIL, 2023).



The questionnaire investigated the perception of taxpayers on subjects such as: 1) digital presence, 2) analysis of content production, 3) ability to understand the information transmitted, 4) interaction with followers.

Table 1 - Questionnaire applied

	Questions
P1	What is your age group?
P2	What city do you live in?
P3	What is your level of education?
P4	How often do you have access to the social networks you have?
P5	How often do you go to your city's social media channels for municipal information?
P6	How often do you trust the content shared on the city's institutional social networks?
P7	How do you evaluate the availability of information on the internet about municipal management?
P8	How do you evaluate the importance of the municipal presence on social networks?
P9	How do you evaluate the content shared on the municipal social networks you know?
P10	How do you evaluate the communication of your municipality's social networks? If they are clear, cohesive and easy to understand.
P11	What is your level of satisfaction with the interaction on municipal social networks with your followers?

Source: Prepared by the author (2024).

Being the measurement scale, the answers will be focused on the degrees of: 1) frequency, with measurement levels ranging from "very frequent" to "never", 2) evaluation, with measurement levels between "excellent" to "poor". The parameters were defined in order to evaluate how the municipal government acts in the government-citizen relationship with the provision of information about its management.

In this way, it also sought to collect information from population profiles, such as age group and education, being applied exclusively to *Instagram users*, and who live in the cities of Timon-MA and Teresina-PI, due to the proximity between the municipalities, and frequent sharing of routines among their inhabitants. The questionnaire was sent to the target audience virtually, starting on 06/08/2024, through a form via *WhatsApp*, and even through shares on the social network *Instagram*, being completed on 08/16/2024, reaching the number of 153 responses.

## RESULTS DISCUSSION

### AUDIENCE AND SAMPLE

To meet the proposed objectives, the target audience was made up of people who have access to the *Internet* and are users of the social network *Instagram*, with routine access to the application. Participation was voluntary and confidential.

As previously detailed, the structure of the questionnaire begins with 3 questions about the profile of each taxpayer. Of the total of 153 participants, 121 (79.1%) were between 18 and 29 years old; 30 (19.6%) were between 30 and 49 years old; 1 (0.7%) was under 18 years of age; 1 (0.7%) aged 50 years or older. Regarding the location of the participants' homes (P2), 100 (65.4%) of the total live in the city of Timon-MA, and 53 (34.6%) live in the city of Teresina-PI. Regarding the level of education (P3), 85 (55.6%) reported having incomplete or ongoing higher education; 29 (19%) have completed higher education; 20 (13.1%) only had high school education; 19 (12.4%) had a postgraduate degree (specialization, master's or doctorate). The characteristics of the sample collected are presented below (Chart 2).

Table 2 – Descriptive Statistics of the Sample

<b>Age Group (P1)</b>	<b>Percentage of respondents (r)</b>
Under 18 years old	0.7% (r = 1)
18 – 29 years old	79.1% (r = 121)
30 – 49 years old	19.6% (r = 30)
50 years or older	0.7% (r = 1)
<b>House (P2)</b>	
Timon – MA	65.4% (r = 100)
Teresina – PI	34.6% (r = 53)
<b>Education (P3)</b>	
Complete high school	13.1% (r = 20)
Incomplete or ongoing higher education	55.6% (r = 85)
Higher education	19% (r = 29)
Postgraduate studies	12.4% (r = 29)

Source: Authorship.

## ANALYSIS OF FREQUENCY LEVELS

The frequency level on the *Likert scale* carried out in this research used 5 points of distance to measure the regularity of habits of the audience reached. Among the options, it was possible to choose between the levels: 1) very frequent or 2) frequent, which demonstrate levels of actions practiced on a daily basis; 3) occasionally; which deals with actions carried out on an occasional basis; 4) rarely, an action performed with large intervals of time; 5) never, action not performed by the respondent. The characteristics of the sample collected are presented below (Chart 3).

Table 3 - Characteristics of frequency levels with descriptive statistics

<b>Access to personal social networks (P4)</b>	<b>Percentage of respondents (r)</b>
Very common	74.5% (r = 114)
Frequent	17.6% (r = 27)
Occasionally	6.5% (r = 10)
Rarely	1.3% (r = 2)



Never	0% (r = 0)
<b>Access to the municipality's Instagram (P5)</b>	
Very common	11.8% (r = 18)
Frequent	21.6% (r = 33)
Occasionally	41.2% (r = 63)
Rarely	22.9% (r = 35)
Never	2.6% (r = 4)
<b>Trust in shared content (P6)</b>	
Very common	3.9% (r = 3)
Frequent	27.5% (r = 42)
Occasionally	43.8% (r = 47)
Rarely	22.2% (r = 34)
Never	2.6% (r = 4)

Source: Survey result.

Of the total of 153 participants, 114 (74.5%) access their social networks (P4) very frequently, with little or no time interval; 27 (17.6%) access it frequently, with considerable time intervals; 10 (6.5%) access it occasionally, that is, occasionally; 2 (1.3%) browse rarely, with long intervals of time. In reference to P5, 18 (11.8%) respondents very often access their municipality's Instagram; 33 (21.6%) access it frequently, with some time intervals; 63 (41.2%) access it occasionally or sporadically; 35 (22.9%) access rarely; Only 4 (2.6%) never access the municipality's focused social network. Regarding the trust obtained in the information transmitted through the social network (P6), only 3 (3.9%) respondents trust very frequently; 42 (27.5%) trust frequently, 47 (43.8%) trust occasionally, that is, occasionally; 34 (22.2%) trust rarely; 4 (2.6%) respondents do not trust the content shared.

## ANALYSIS OF EVALUATION LEVELS

The characteristics of the sample collected in this section are presented below (Chart 4).

Table 4 - Characteristics of assessment levels with descriptive statistics

<b>Provision of information (P7)</b>	<b>Percentage of respondents (r)</b>
Excellent	5.2% (r = 8)
Very good	5.2% (r = 8)
Good	24.8% (r = 38)
Reasonable	47.1% (r = 72)
Bad	17.6% (r = 27)
<b>Digital presence (P8)</b>	
Very important	58.2% (r = 89)
Important	25.5% (r = 39)
Moderate	11.1% (r = 17)
Sometimes important	4.6% (r = 7)
Not important	0.7% (r = 1)

<b>Shared content (P9)</b>	
Excellent	4.6% (r = 7)
Very good	9.2% (r = 14)
Good	35.9% (r = 55)
Reasonable	40.5% (r = 62)
Bad	9.8% (r = 15)
<b>Communication (P10)</b>	
Excellent	4.6% (r = 7)
Very good	12.4% (r = 19)
Good	37.3% (r = 57)
Reasonable	35.3% (r = 54)
Bad	10.5% (r = 16)
<b>Level of satisfaction about the interaction (P11)</b>	
Excellent	3.9% (r = 6)
Very good	5.9% (r = 9)
Good	22.9% (r = 35)
Reasonable	47.1% (r = 72)
Bad	20.3% (r = 31)

Source: Survey result.

Analyzing the availability of information passed on in the evaluated Instagrams (P7), only 8 (5.2%) participants evaluate the transfer as excellent, with 72 (47.1%) responses evaluating it as a reasonable level. 27 (17.6%) evaluate it as bad. Regarding the importance of municipalities being present in the digital environment (P8), 89 (58.2) consider it very important, 17 (11.1%) consider this importance moderate, and only 1 (0.7%) respondent evaluates it as not important. Analyzing the content shared on the social network (P9), only 7 (4.6%) analyze the quality as excellent, 55 (35.9%) evaluate the content as good, at an average level, 62 (40.5%) consider it reasonable, and 15 (9.8%) respondents evaluate it as poor. Regarding the quality of communication between the municipality and the citizen through the social network, only 7 (4.6%) evaluate it as excellent; 57 (37.3%) classified it as good, 54 (35.3%) classified it as reasonable, and 16 (10.5%) respondents considered the communication bad. Regarding the level of satisfaction with interaction with followers (P11), only 6 (3.9%) classified it as excellent; 35 (22.9%) evaluate it as good; 72 (47.1%) respondents evaluate it as reasonable; 31 (20.3%) participants evaluated this interaction as bad.

## CONCLUSION

The present work sought to examine the citizen's perception of the use of social networks, at the municipal level, to disseminate information, specifically the social network *Instagram*. The survey was restricted to the population of the cities of Timon-MA and Teresina-PI, and a questionnaire was carried out on a *Likert scale* to assess levels of

attendance and satisfaction. Although both municipalities remain active on the evaluated social network, there are still limitations and failures.

In the evaluation of the interviewees, most consider the institutional presence on the social network to be very important, despite the negative evaluation regarding the quality of the information provided and also the failure in communication between the municipality and its followers on Instagram. The survey also showed the low level of satisfaction of respondents about interaction in digital media.

This study also contributed to highlight the carelessness of managers in relation to the feedback passed on to the population through the social network, thus generating the low trust of the participants in the shared content, which indicates the need for evaluation and correction regarding the functioning of the institutional network.

Social networks serve as the largest search engine for information today, in this sense, it is essential to monitor the government-citizen relationship through the networks in the cities evaluated, seeking a functioning that promotes a positive evaluation of the population.

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