Social Media Use in Justice Administration: Disintermediation, Conversation and Collaboration

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Abstract

This article examines how social media are used in the administration of Justice and if they improve service quality. Based on three principles of open government-transparency, participation and collaboration—an analytical model is proposed applicable to interactive communication in the judicial branch, and the performance of the official profiles is recorded for the Facebook, Twitter and YouTube accounts of five State Judicial Systems in the U.S. Although the courts adopt social media strategies with less hesitation, more attention is paid to the risks, and the digital relationship with citizens is mainly top-down for delivery information. This approach leads to a reflection about the extent to which online judiciary collaboration with citizens is possible, considering that its main purpose is to solve disputes. At the same time, it discusses if an integrated user-centric content policy might be appropriate for strengthening its service.

Keywords: Judicial branch; Court communication; Citizen engagement; Social media; Democratic innovations; User-centric

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Introduction

Designing new ways of communicating with citizens is one of the main challenges for public administrations in the context of social media's omnipresence. The current tendencies of media consumption and the growth of mobile connections have forced governments to incorporate innovative tools as interactive platforms to improve service delivery to the public.

The relationship between social media and the public sphere is mostly approached by scholars as they are used in the executive branch, in political campaigns and in the emergence of social movements. To date, except for reports and brief opinion articles published by stakeholders directly related to judicial procedures, communication in the judiciary has not been a relevant issue in academic research.

In particular, the literature on how social platforms transform public services can be divided into two types. The first one emphasizes the opportunities and benefits for governments when adopting new media and creating content-flow models that allow innovative design for institutional communication management [1-4]. The second type describes how social media are currently used in different government agencies and cities globally. The most shared empirical finding is that public administrations

underuse these technologies. Notwithstanding the possibilities to interact, governments still communicate one-way or top-down through social media [5-11].

The basic framework for incorporating social media into the executive branch was provided in the Memorandum on Transparency and Open Government [12]. In it, the Obama administration defined three principles of the open government policy:

• Transparency,

• Participation and

• Collaboration.

Transparency promotes accountability and provides information about what the government is doing. Participation allows citizen engagement and improves the quality of government's decisions. Collaboration implies the active engagement of nonprofit organizations, businesses and individuals with the government's work. For the judiciary, the framework is the principle of open justice, which states that justice should be done and also be seen to be done [13]. The assumption is that openness and transparency

increase public confidence and legitimate the judicial service [14,15]. The principle implies that the courts should guarantee access to information through open data about rulings, statistics, budgetary and administrative issues [16,17].

Whereas the executive is demonstrating progress in that direction, the judiciary incorporates social media and open government actions more prudently [18,19], due to its role within public administration and hierarchical institutional culture. In fact, the judicial branch has the power to control constitutionality, is independent and must be impartial. It needs time to make decisions to offer guarantees for a fair trial and should avoid pressures from public opinion, media and other stakeholders. Judges cannot comment about pending matters or personal preferences, and they have to be discreet with information for not hindering ongoing investigations. What the courts say through rulings is a precedent for future cases, and they must ensure a correct application of the law. This tradition creates a tension within the culture of sharing and collaboration, the networks' social structures, hypertextuality and user demand for a horizontal conversation on the Web [20-22]. New media are decentralized and multidirectional, while the courts are institutional and unidirectional; new media are personal and intimate, while courts are separate, even cloistered; and new media are multimedia, while courts are highly textual [23].

The current management of social platforms in the judicial branch is still cautious. However, good examples of new attempts to improve the quality of the service to the public through communication can be noted. Due to institutional and cultural conditionings, the courts tend to deliver information in one direction, and it seems inevitable that they mainly offer disinter mediated relationships to citizens, while conversation and collaboration are less frequent and exceptional. Nevertheless, a one-way communication strategy on interactive platforms does not confine the courts to an institution-centric model. Different jurisdictions show similarities in the type of service added through communication but divergences in who benefits from it. Some courts are strongly user-oriented, whereas others emphasize the institution. By specifically prioritizing user assistance, the courts strengthen their public condition as a branch of a democratic government. They make it more comprehensible and they also offer more services than only solving disputes, as open information, access to Justice promotion and public sphere facilitation.

The specific purpose of this research is to understand which kinds of relationship the courts propose to citizens through publishing content on social media. Particularly, if citizens are considered as mere recipients of information or if they are also involved as active partners. For this objective, it is necessary to observe what the courts post and to define a typology of current ways in which they are using those platforms. In the research, the performance and content policy of the official accounts of five State Judicial Systems, District of Columbia, New York, Florida, Michigan and North Carolina, are considered. From the data, a few concrete experiences can be identified of co-creation and collaboration [24-26], which introduces the third principle of open government. The final analysis outlines the ratio of the user-centric model [27,28] in each jurisdiction and discusses what citizens may claim from the judiciary as a public institution.

Citizens and Governments on Social Media

Interactive platform incorporation in government

The research about innovations in public service delivery through interactive platforms is wide and shows some common evidences. It can be divided into two groups. From a certain inciting perspective, the first group of studies focuses on the opportunities for the public sector to join social media. Interactive platforms allow the transition from e-government, where citizens are mostly customers, to we-government, where citizens are considered partners [1]. Collaboration is the last step in a progressive path from a one-way push communication tactic to a two-way pull and networking tactic for co-designing public services [3]. This concept of social government reveals an environment in which the public sector becomes a partner rather than a director for solution delivery [4]. The purpose of such collaboration is to identify, design, execute and monitor public services and to share ideas regarding society's relevant challenges. It is carried out by harnessing collective intelligence through conversations opened to bottom-up initiatives [29]. The challenge is to offer easy access to official data and its integration with social data added by users [2].

In fact, social media are technologies that facilitate social interaction and enable deliberation across stakeholders [30]. Different approaches to incorporating digital social tools mark the benefits in terms of transparency and innovation in government and democracy [31-34]. The frequent use of social media has also the potential to strength citizens' trust in their authorities [35,36].

Social innovation in a context of new media's omnipresence requires networking and community building and that user-generated content be shared with other users [37]. For this aim was conceived the third principle of the open government initiative, which goes beyond information, open data and mere interaction with citizens to improve public services through instances of co-creation. In essence, co-creation or co-production is about involving citizens as initiators, co-designers or co-implementers of public services [26]. In this process, the public sector opens its value chain to the stakeholders it serves, expecting additional value from them [38]. Collaboration with citizens is based on crowdsourcing of public knowledge and talent to develop innovative solutions to large-scale societal challenges.

From a more descriptive perspective, the second group of studies attempts to appreciate how social media are currently used in the public sector. Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook are the social media services most used by governments [39]. Studies carried out in different countries show that the exploitation of the possibilities of collaboration is still delayed due to the employment of social media mostly according to a one-way tactic [40-42].

In fact, even when it is desirable for democratic governments to have social media policies, very few government agencies

are actually affected by citizen feedback [43]. Citizens' potential to create democratic innovations is rarely exploited [44]. Governments are reluctant to engage new voices in their social media accounts and to retweet external content, except from well-known and prestigious nonprofit organizations [45]. Similarly, Facebook messages are employed mainly for disseminating news updates. Instead of setting strategies to engage citizens, governments tend to monitor social media and discipline employees even if there are no guiding policies in place. At least three reasons might be considered contributions to such underuse:

• A lack of understanding of the open government-related social media potential and service offerings;

• A missing conceptual framework to anticipate the impact of different social media on open government;

• A social media adoption following a trial-and-error principle since little strategically scientific implementation advice is available.

Social media use in the judicial branch

Over the last few years, the courts began to create profiles on social platforms [46] as an attempt to strengthen connections with citizens. According to a report of the Conference of Court Public Information Officers, 41% of American courts said that they do not use social media. That number is down from 2013, when more than 48% responded that their courts did not use social media. Nevertheless, the report reveals that 26% of court officials see social media as not necessary and that approximately one-third of them are neutral on the issue.

Professional culture and the role of the judicial branch in the government may explain such a cautious approach to open, multidirectional and immediate communication. By nature, the courts are conservative institutions. They have tended to be tentative about social media due to a focus on "information-out" communication, with an emphasis on access and accuracy, limited resourcing, legal limitations and sociocultural restrictions including language [47]. In the same way, judicial culture operates unidirectionally. Judges speak through their rulings, and their mission is to resolve controversies. Whereas courts expedite orders, parties comply, in a one-way communication process.

The courts employ social media in multiple ways. According to the CCPIO report, Facebook is used to post jobs and calendar matters of interest. Courts also use Facebook to provide public recognition to staff who achieved a professional accomplishment or who retired. More than 60% of courts use Twitter to release decisions and for emergency management, and more than 50% use it to gather and monitor news. Indeed, announcements of upcoming issues about high-profile trials with media interest and information about functional routines, such as when a court will open after a weather delay, are published. Videos on YouTube usually have a more educational purpose. They are directed at self-represented litigants and include "how-to" content, and they are also available in Spanish.

The Supreme Court of Michigan [48] established detailed guidelines for the permitted uses of official social media accounts throughout the State. Almost all of these uses are focused primarily on direct communication and the facilitation of access to Justice, with a few exceptional references to input from stakeholders. Social platforms can be used to make information available about the court; for community outreach, education, and interaction, including improving access to court's services, soliciting input on surveys, and publicizing special events and volunteer opportunities; to issue press releases; to direct inquiries for more extensive information; to notify jurors or stakeholders during emergency situations that cause the court to be unable to operate; and to train staff and users of court services. Florida's judicial branch [49] launched a four-year communication plan that contains social media goals. The document appreciates interactive platforms as tools that provide opportunities to promote openness and accountability. The branch also encourages conversation between courts and journalists and offers opportunities to listen to public concerns. Finally, social media can be used to educate citizens and instill public confidence in Florida's judicial branch.

In short, the judiciary is already using social media for several purpose categories: internal communication within the courts; recruitment of employees; training for judges, employees and self-litigants; the publishing of public information, such as locations, hours, parking, media releases, etc.; and community outreach and interaction for access to services, solicitation of input, opportunities to volunteer, etc. [50].

In spite of this progress in defining policies for social media management, the tension between two perspectives, one that considers that facilitate access to Justice [51] and another that believes that the courts must avoid the omnipresence of social platforms to maintain its integrity [52-54], is widely conserved and does not seem to achieve a healthy balance. To date, courts of different States and professional associations have been more concerned about avoiding the growth of pressures on the administration of Justice. Thereby, they develop ethical guidelines that are more concentrated on restrictions on social media use than on promoting improvements in the service of Justice [55-62]. The main worry is that actors who take part in trials-attorneys, witnesses, the public, jurors, judicial employees and judges-might affect the independence, impartiality, integrity and procedural guarantees during the case [63]. For example, the prescriptions in those documents stress that attorneys should not pressure judges or jurors through social media, judicial employees must avoid negative commentary regarding the court or demonstrating special favoritism, judges should avoid friendship on social media with attorneys or commenting on pending matters, etc.

Analytical Proposal for Research

To address the way in which the judiciary may employ social media, a new and more specific analytical model is necessary. The policies that guide the ethical behavior of actors involved in the administration of Justice is timely but insufficient because they do not focus on the potential of interactive platforms to improve the services that the judiciary offers, but on how to shield its traditional functional values: integrity, impartiality and independence. On that basis, collaborative instances in which value can be added seem to be not possible.

The proposed analytical model reformulates the principles of open government: transparency, participation and collaboration. Specifically, the model defines the relationship type built between the courts and its citizens and shows the services associated with the communicative activity on its official profiles. In addition, the model distinguishes between institution-centric and user-centric publications, which goes beyond the simplistic identification of one-way, push or G2C (Government to Citizen) strategies, with unilateral practices that treat citizens as consumers. In fact, the model exposes which service type is added to the essential service of resolving disputes and criticizes which practices empower citizens and engage them as partners.

Three types of potential relationships between the courts and judicial actors emerge from social networking:

• Disintermediated information: generated from a top-down or unidirectional flow. The judiciary communicates to different stakeholders directly, without the need for other mediators such as journalists. Social media are used as amplifiers of the institution's communicative capacity. The action of telling prevails, while citizens participate passively and are supposed to listen to the messages. The informative service can be centered either on the interests of the institution, through the distribution of press information, e.g., release decisions, publicizing events, or highlighting activities of individual judges, or on the interests of the user, by providing open data, spreading their rights, explaining how the judicial system works or what the scope of a particular law is.

• Conversational interaction: implies a two-way flow (G2C and C2G) or a concrete call for citizens to get involved. The users have here a more active participation. It is expected they behave in response to posts and give feedback to the courts' profiles. The conversation occurs through the interactive possibilities of platforms in terms of likes, comments and shares. With citizens' digital engagement, the courts seek to promote access to Justice and other related services. This additional service responds to institutional interests when the purpose is to gain society's trust and increase the institution's reputation. In contrast, it focuses on the user when the posts provide orientation or give more information about how to act in a trial and how to access to other services linked to the service of Justice.

• Deliberative collaboration: user-centric only. It is supported by a two-way exchange that aims at identifying, designing, implementing and monitoring services and policies. This engagement goes beyond a mere digital interaction. Through such facilitation of deliberation, the institution allows citizens to speak, and it listens, acknowledging in them the capacity to add value with their ideas, experiences and knowledge. Thereby, the judiciary and its citizens are partners in the processes of co-creating services, rules or procedures. Even though the authorities are those finally making the decisions on institutional policies, they are directly helped by citizen contributions from the bottom. For certain issues, citizens might have a finer sensibility about the challenges for Justice **(Table 1).**

The model conceives of the three relationships as simultaneous and relevant. The challenge is not only to build the first two and not to be locked to their institutional interests but also to generate instances for deliberative collaboration. In fact, it is not a linear step model. In contrast, relationships intersect and combine with each other, and some communications serve their purpose in only one of the relationships. This implies that it does not seem reasonable to require a two-way flow of communication for every post or that every issue communicated should be exposed to a public deliberation on its legitimacy and effectiveness but that the strategy of use of social media can integrate all relationships with the greatest possible balance. However, in this model, one-way actions can also be considered as value aggregators and can strengthen the quality of the judiciary's service, especially when these are user-centric.

Data and Methods

Research on social media has different possible methodological approaches. This research is mixed with an exploratory sequential model, which consists of employing qualitative data followed by quantitative data to test or generalize findings [64]. The exploratory approach is adequate because the courts still seem to be experimenting to determine how best to implement a social media policy in accordance with their institutional culture and needs [65]. Specifically, based on the proposed theoretical model, the selected courts' profile activity is observed to determine relevant uses. This observation considers the background of the CCPIO report, the Supreme Court of Michigan policy and the judicial branch of Florida communication plan about most frequent social media uses. Once the trends of content management are identified, the posts are recorded and classified by uses in a given period.

The study's first qualitative step aims at revealing specific uses of courts' social media profiles on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube,

Table 1 Court-Citizen relationship model, as it emerged from official profiles posts.

Court-Citizen Relationship	Flow	Communication actions	Associated service
Disintermediated information	One-way G2C	a) Institution-centric: delivery of information. b) User-centric: explanation of citizens' rights, laws, the judiciary; open data; and useful announcements.	Informative
Conversational interaction	Two-way communication G2C and C2G	a) Institution-centric: trust in the judiciary through responses, greetings and acknowledgements. b) User-centric: orientation for procedures and access to services or programs as well as training.	Access to Justice and related services
Deliberative collaboration	Two-way government G2C and C2G	a) User-centric: enquiry to citizens; use of their knowledge and experiences; and User-Generated Content (UGC).	Public sphere facilitation and co-creation

according to the proposed model with the three relationship types. This is done by observing the published post. The observation is useful for establishing an exhaustive list of "communication actions" executed on these social media profiles.

The second step consists of quantitative data collection from selected profiles' performances, according to use classifications. The period of posts recorded is as follows:

• Three months for Facebook: July, August and September 2017,

• Two months for Twitter: August and September 2017, and

• One year for YouTube: from October 2016 to September 2017.

Due to the level of activity on each platform is different, three different periods are considered to ensure that a satisfactory number of posts is obtained for the analysis. A total of 2,687 post was recorded. The number of videos posted on YouTube was quite low, so it was appropriate to extend the analysis period to have more videos to classify and to obtain results more representative of this platform's use.

The criteria of courts selection included the following:

a) State judicial branches with significantly developed social media and official profiles on the three platforms [66];

b) States where judges are not elected-the District of Columbia, New York and Florida; and

c) States in which judges are elected-Michigan and North Carolina.

The comparison between the first two types of jurisdictions is relevant to examine if the communication is more user-centric where judges are elected. Finally, the sample of the study is made up of the following jurisdictions: **(Table 2)**

Autonomous textual pieces are considered units to record, but reviewing the links that the posts might contain in case it is necessary to understand their contents. The units are those accessible for any courts' profiles follower:

• Tweets, RTs and replies;

• Posts on Facebook and responses to user comments; and

• New videos published on YouTube.

The New York judicial branch has a complex system of Twitter accounts, which are used for different purposes. To achieve comparable results across jurisdictions, four profiles are considered together, on which are published news, reports, information for access to Justice and open job positions. In the same way, the DC Courts' Twitter profile for posting career opportunities is considered as well. Data reliability is calculated using Cohen's kappa [67].

Findings

Based on the background about social media uses, posts from the five sample jurisdictions were observed in depth to draft our own listing of uses.

On the one hand, the courts publish institutional information, in which they explain their history, integration and change of authorities. They also deliver press releases or newsletters, in which they provide general information on trial progress, judicial trends or institutional news, such as the nomination of new judges, and share media news to their followers. Another frequent specific use is to show judges' points of view, through interviews-either produced by the court's communications office or by journalists on news media—and through the transcription of fragments of public speeches they give. Indeed, uses include the publication of judges' profiles with their professional background or paying respect to a public officer who has retired or recently died. In this way, the accounts recognize judges or public officers who have received honors or awards for their outstanding performance. Moreover, it is common to publicize events, meetings or ceremonies in which one or more judges participate, and they are occasionally explicitly thanked for their involvement. All these types of use respond to the institution's interest of keeping citizens informed about its own activity.

On the other hand, other uses are characterized by the delivery of direct information, but they point to user empowerment. For example, these consist of explanations of how the judicial system works. This includes explaining a typical trial process or providing a judicial glossary for a better understanding of the system and an easier access to Justice. Law or procedural reforms and new standards manuals for different cases are also published to keep stakeholders updated. Another use oriented to the citizen is messages with information about the launch of services or programs. It is also common to observe posts with useful information, such as when the courts are open, where they are located, and when a hearing is held. In fact, social media are

Table 2 Official social media profiles considered by jurisdiction.

Jurisdiction	Facebook	Twitter	YouTube
District of Columbia	www.facebook.com/ TheDCCourts	@DC_Courts @DCCourtsJobs	www.youtube.com/channel/ UC8T2CIV5UkqgYbzJaxUYMRA
New York	www.facebook.com/ NewYorkCourts	@NYSCourtsNews @NYOfficialRpts @NYCourtsA2J @NYCourtsCareers	www.youtube.com/channel/UCW_ ws2fU5vIOBAwRlzv5yFw
Florida	www.facebook.com/ FloridaCourts/	@Florida_Courts	www.youtube.com/channel/UCd2y6bJjeSKcwlS30- pRR9w
Michigan	www.facebook.com/ misupremecourt/	@MISupremeCourt	www.youtube.com/user/MichiganCourts
North Carolina	www.facebook.com/NCcourts/	@NCCourts	www.youtube.com/user/NorthCarolinaCourts

Source: Author.

often used to warn about closures for non-labor days or weather inconveniences. Indeed, the courts show administrative open data, stats or survey results about their performance, which can be considered for accountability. In this way, they also offer open access to full-text rulings and to public hearings of relevant cases. In addition, they use social media accounts for specific training needs of judges or personnel about judicial issues.

In a more inciting way, expecting to engage users, the courts tend to post stakeholder acknowledgments for stakeholders such as jurors, or congratulations to volunteers or people participating in meetings, and for giving general courtesy greetings. They also publish content that promotes public-good campaigns that are driven either by the judicial branch or by external organizations. Another typical use is the adhesion to national dates or celebrations, for example Constitution Day. In addition, they disseminate participant experiences in judicial programs, where they give direct testimony with their own voice.

Instead, as a concrete call to users to get involved and to facilitate access to judicial services and programs, the courts publish information about events before they occur, with an explicit invitation to citizens to participate. Moreover, crime prevention and rights dissemination is another common type of content. Courts also use social media accounts when new positions are open, encouraging stakeholders to apply for the position, and to disseminate volunteer opportunities. At the same time, they often offer practical explanations for access to services, with how-to content. In this way, posts also give orientation in direct response to users' request for more information or for how to benefit from various judicial programs.

The last specific social media use that can be observed is only user-centric. It aims at a co-production process, in which users are intensely invited to share their views on a certain public issue. This invitation to collaborate ranges from an open request for comments about proceedings overhauls or rule amendments to an amicus curiae call. Sometimes User-Generated Content (UGC) is also published as a way of amplifying citizens' voices. This use means that the courts share posts published by a citizen with their followers, for example, a picture or an opinion on a blog.

From this initial observation, a complete list of specific uses of interactive platforms can be developed and associated with the proposed analytical model **(Table 3)**.

On the basis of these use categories, the selected courts' profile activities were recorded. This quantitative research step allows a further comparison between the relative importances of different uses within the integral strategy of each State's judicial system **(Table 4)**.

Twitter is the platform most used by the courts, followed by Facebook and YouTube. DC Courts show the lowest level of activity. However, DC stands out as the jurisdiction that provides the most direct answers to users, especially on Twitter. After this use are relevant press information delivery and the publicizing of events. Courts in New York State are positioned at the fourth place in terms of activity level. In particular, their posts offer full-text access to rulings. This use is followed by the publication of employment and volunteer opportunities. The North Carolina jurisdiction ranks third in terms of post numbers. Their social media profiles show a relative balance between several uses: the main

Table 3 Specific uses of social media according to the type of court-citizen relationship.

Court-Citizen Relationship	Categories of specific uses
Disintermediated information	a) Institution-centric — Information about the court as an institution — Press release, newsletter delivery — Judge's perspective, interview, public speech — Judge's profile, officer's memory — Honor and award achieved by judge or officer — Publicized event, meeting or ceremony b) User-centric — Explanation of judicial system functioning — Law or procedural reform update, standards guide — Service or program launch announcement — Court schedule and useful information — Administrative open data, stats, survey results — Full-text ruling, filing, public hearing content — Specific training in judicial issues
Conversational interaction	a) User-centric — Inviting users to participate in event — Crime prevention, rights dissemination — New open position, volunteer opportunity — Explanation for service or program access, practical education — Orientation to service in response to users' requests
Deliberative collaboration	b) User-centric — Request for public comment on a special issue — User-Generated Content (UGC)

Source: Author.

Table 4 Quantity of social media posts according to categories of specific uses by State Court, during the period considered.

Categories of specific uses	DC			NY			FL			MI			NC		
	FB	Tw	YT	FB	Tw	YT	FB	Tw	YT	FB	Tw	YT	FB	Tw	YT
Information about the court as an institution	-	-	-	-	-	1	16	8	2	3	12	-	7	14	5
Press release, newsletter delivery	-	12	2	2	11	-	35	70	-	75	553	-	21	29	-
Judge's perspective, interview, public speech	-	2	3	2	2	3	7	8	-	36	59	13	3	1	7
Judge's profile, officer's memory	1	-	-	3	6	-	5	4	-	4	21	1	7	2	1
Honor and award achieved by judge or officer	1	2	-	1	-	-	24	5	-	3	19	1	7	6	-
Publicizing event, meeting or ceremony	10	4	2	4	7	2	35	7	-	37	79	1	21	22	10
Explanation of judicial system functioning	-	-	-	-	1	-	40	36	4	13	34	-	3	-	-
Law or procedural reform update, standards guide	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	2	-	3	22	-	-	-	-
Service or program launch announcement	2	8	-	1	1	-	2	8	-	10	29	-	13	10	1
Court schedule and useful information	1	-	-	-	3	-	86	175	1	21	39	-	16	5	-
Administrative open data, stats, survey results	-	-	-	-	-	-	7	6	-	4	5	1	-	-	-
Full-text ruling, filing, public hearing content	-	-	6	-	55	-	-	46	-	2	7	57	-	1	-
Specific training in judicial issues	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	3	18	23	-	2	-	-
Acknowledgements to stakeholders, courtesy greetings	1	7	-	-	5	-	6	4	1	5	24	1	24	5	3
Promoting public-good campaign	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	8	-	1	1	1
Adhesion to national date or celebration	1	-	1	1	-	-	4	1	-	2	15	-	17	10	1
People participating in judicial program showcase	-	-	2	-	-	-	1	-	-	3	6	17	2	-	-
Inviting users to participate in event	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	2	-	2	8	-	5	3	1
Crime prevention, rights dissemination	1	-	-	-	1	-	1	3	-	5	2	-	6	2	1
New open position, volunteer opportunity	-	1	-	-	18	-	8	20	-	12	17	-	2	-	10
Explanation for service or program access, practical education	1	1	1	1	10	-	7	6	2	10	28	-	-	-	-
Orientation to service in response to users' requests	-	19	-	-	-	-	1	2	-	5	1	-	-	1	-
User-Generated Content (UGC)	-	2	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	1	11	-	1	1	-
Request for public comment on special issue	-	2	-	-	-	-	12	6	-	5	4	-	-	-	-
Total	19	60	17	15	122	6	305	420	13	280	1,026	92	158	113	41

Source: Author.

one is press information delivery; followed by publicizing official events; courtesy greetings, as for jurors during their appreciation month; adhesion to national celebrations, such as Constitution Day; institutional information about the court, court's schedule and services or programs announcements. Florida State Courts are the second. They stand out for publishing useful content for stakeholders and information regarding closures. This strong emphasis may be explained, in part, by Hurricane Irma, which made landfall in Florida in September 10th 2017. After this, they publish press information, an explanation of the operation of the judicial system, and full-text decision access on Twitter. The most active profiles are those of Michigan's judicial branch. Their main use corresponds to the publication of press information, through which they disseminate general information and share media news. After this usage, they post judges' perspectives on interviews or public speeches and publicize official events.

All of the sample courts show a common pattern regarding the type of relationship they propose to citizens. All of them manage social media mainly to communicate with users directly. Then, they use social media for conversational interaction, in which courts seek citizens to become involved with them and to behave in response to their call. Collaboration is instead rather exceptional. This scale of priorities has no correlation with links in posts. Although the greater number of links in the posts refers to

the judicial branch's Web site or other official account, they are indifferently included in the different uses **(Table 5)**.

The few cases of collaborative social media use recorded show some nuances. Citizen contributions are requested on the one hand for the amendment of rules and proceedings and on the other hand for collaborating with other institutions. For example, the judicial branch of Florida openly invites citizens to "let your thoughts be heard" for amendments to the Florida Rule for Certified and Court-Appointed Mediator, specifying the deadline for sending comments. On several occasions, it also invites users to comment on the Constitution of the State reform, amplifying the post regarding the Constitution Revision Commission. The District of Columbia asks for constructive feedback and gives a special e-mail address to send it to. Moreover, it publishes the proposal for comments for the admission rule to the DC Bar Association. In Michigan, the courts open a period of deliberation for internal reforms, such as the Child Protective Proceedings or the Estates and Protected Individuals Proceedings. At the same time, it amplifies invitations for citizen collaboration from well-known nonprofit organizations, such as the National Center for State Courts. In addition, it encourages users to "share your story!" of drug recovery, launched by the National Association of Drug Professionals during national recovery month.

Table 5 Quantity of posts on the three social platforms considered according to the Court-Citizen Relationship by State Court.

Court-Citizen Relationship	DC	NY	FL	MI	NC
Disintermediated information	56	106	644	1,205	214
Conversational interaction	36	36	75	172	96
Deliberative collaboration	4	1	19	21	2
Total	96	143	738	1,398	312
Kappa	0.795	0.861	0.865	1.000	0.847

Source: Author.

Table 6 Percentage of posts on the three social platforms considered according to institution-centric and user-centric use by State Court.

Management Model	DC	NY	FL	MI	NC
Institution-centric	53.1	35	33.1	71.5	73.1
User-centric	46.9	65	66.9	28.5	26.9
Total	100	100	100	100	100
Kappa	0.933	0.868	0.901	0.886	0.938

Source: Author.

The courts also facilitate the public sphere to citizens when they publish UGC in their own profiles. That is, they assume the content as an input, which introduces a new topic that was initially outside the communicative agenda of the courts-especially if a user's post did not mention the court's profile. In this sense, the UGC is not a plain RT or share from another account, but generally a comment is added. This reaction implies a certain endorsement of the content, which is amplified by spreading it among the official profiles' followers. The most frequent examples are observed in the publication of pictures and personal points of views **(Table 6)**.

In contrast, no common pattern is found when analyzing the management model of social media communication. Whereas DC Courts show a certain balance between an institution-centric and a user-centric model, New York and Florida are strongly user oriented, and Michigan and North Carolina are mainly institutionally oriented. These differences seem to indicate that the management model responds to a strategic communication choice, related to certain institutional objectives, regardless of the relationship type that the courts propose to citizens. In addition, the emphasis on the institution or on the user has no correlation with the use of images in posts. In all sample jurisdictions, the vast majority of pictures published show a judge, a court room, a judicial building or other institutional symbols.

Discussion

According to the sample, the relationship proposed by the courts to citizens is essentially that of a direct connection without intermediaries. It confirms the evidence of a strong unidirectional usage of social media in the public sector. In this way, the judicial branch, which is traditionally hierarchical, stable and impartial, becomes a closer and more accessible institution. The efforts to add informational services to judicial services respond to the decision to make judicial work more transparent and understandable to the general public. This characteristic is observed in all the jurisdictions considered, without differences between those in which judges are electable and those in which they are not. The main distinction between both groups is that while in the first one the communication on social media

is strongly oriented to the institution, in the second one the model is user-centric. In fact, against the evidence of interactive platforms use in government for delivering information, one-way communication does not necessarily imply an institution-centric model, in which citizens are treated as customers instead of as partners. The spreading of one-way information can also promote citizen empowerment, by making available open data, full-text access to decisions or explaining how the judicial system works. Moreover, disinter mediated information can effectively be of interest to citizens, and they can take advantage of it. Sometimes this information is undoubtedly essential for stakeholders.

The service of information delivery is followed by a communication that promotes access to Justice and related services and programs. Through these actions, the judicial branch becomes an institution of government not only with a receptive attitude that is available to citizens who need to resolve conflicts but also develops initiatives so stakeholders can know their rights, defend themselves if they are not respected, and access the different program benefits offered.

Even though the collaborative relationship with citizens for co-creation is possible in Justice Administration, the courts still do not implement innovative communication in a meaningful way. They do it only exceptionally and in specific situations. In any case, this background is relevant at least to dare to think about the capability of the courts of innovating and deepening their democratic profile as public institutions.

Whether the judicial branch improves its service quality through interactive platform use depends on the management model. When digital communication on social media is user-centric, the essential function of the courts is reinforced. On this point, no common pattern can be determined among the jurisdictions in the sample. What citizens can expect from the performance of the judicial branch on social media is twofold. If the courts are considered an internal cultural framework, continuity can be expected in what the courts are doing in the digital territory, which is delivering institutional information involving judges and officers, providing open data and useful information for facilitating access to Justice, and acknowledging or offering courtesy greetings to stakeholders. In contrast, if the focus is on this institution's public condition in a democratic government, the courts may be required to communicate according to a model that is user- rather than institution-centric. This requirement would imply that their major efforts be concentrated on citizen empowerment, the promotion of access to Justice and the introduction of instances of co-production that involve citizens in government. In this sense, the fundamental question is if co-creation could be consolidated as an institutional procedure for a branch of the government whose function is to apply the law, instead of just being exceptions. So far, experience shows that citizens can collaborate at least in rules or procedural overhauls. These mechanisms democratize the judiciary, strengthen consensus on norms and incorporate collective knowledge.

Conclusions

Some jurisdictions in the U.S. are strongly active on interactive platforms and are exploring new ways for delivering their

essential services to the public. They show a large capacity of content production and have professional and well-trained teams for updating posts. Through those social tools, the courts add new services, from information to the promotion of access to Justice and public-sphere facilitation. Nevertheless, profile management is mainly one-way and is intended to build a more direct and closer relationship with users, while interaction and co-production are still occasional. However, even though the communicative actions in the judiciary seem to be consolidated into a unidirectional strategy according to its hierarchical tradition and role, it can be user oriented. This implies not only to strengthen transparency but also to empower citizens through access to Justice promotion and collaboration. Some courts are making significant progress in this direction, but others maintain the institution at the top of priorities in their posts, which allows a logical claim from citizens to be more included. In fact, a user focus reinforces the public character of the judicial branch and democratizes its functioning. Official guidelines for social media use would facilitate a productive integration with the court's general communications plan according to its institutional needs and goals.

The research has limitations. It is aimed at showing the kind of relationship the courts build with citizens on social media. This approach should not be considered as representative of the general communication policy at the courts. In fact, social media performance is not necessarily a mirror of the way the public sector engages the community and serves it. The institution-oriented communication model on interactive platforms we observed in some jurisdictions could live with a high-quality Justice service delivery that benefits the users.

Further research should focus on the details of how the few cases of collaboration between the courts and citizens operate, how they are designed and implemented, and which modifications these cases introduce into the daily administration of Justice. At the same time, it is important to wonder if these instances of collaboration engage effectively citizens or if they are only proposed by the institution.

Acknowledgements

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