

A Model for Public Service Delivery in the Context of Social Media (E-Government 2.0)

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aimed to present a model for public services in the context of social media (e-government 2.0) in Iran.

Method: This paper used a grounded theory (GT) centered on semi-structured interviews with 23 experts in the Iranian e-government and social media development effort. The data were analyzed using MAXQDA software.

Findings: This study showed that some factors, such as goal and plan attainment, electronic readiness, and environmental changes, prepared the ground for e-government 2.0 and were affected by macro-environmental trends, including environmental crises and risks, thereby advancing progress and development. Meanwhile, it is necessary to pay attention to various implementation, cultural, and infrastructure considerations and to provide for the infrastructural, social, organizational, legal, and security requirements, which result in the development of management, knowledge, awareness, communications, and service.

Conclusion: The present study showed that achieving goals, e-readiness, and environmental changes are the basis for e-government 2.0. Crises and developments influence these factors. Also, the success of e-government 2.0

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requires attention to implementation, cultural, and infrastructure requirements that lead to improved management, awareness, and service quality. Given the country's local and cultural conditions, this model can serve as a practical framework for designing and implementing e-government services in Iran.

Keywords: E-Government 2.0, Social Media, Public Service, Developing Country, Iran

Introduction

Social media is one of the digital channels progressing rapidly, and this technology is steadily increasing (Carpentier et al., 2019; Mansoor, 2021). About 45% of the world's population uses social media (Kavota et al., 2020). Also, statistics show that the number of social media users in the world in 2017 was about 2.86 billion people, and in 2021, it reached 3.78 billion people; by 2025, this number will reach 4.41 billion people (Tankovska, 2021). Social media refers to online tools that facilitate social interaction and allow users to create and share content. (Bertot et al., 2012). Social media includes various types, and social networks have attracted much attention (Kapoor et al., 2018). Social networks are collections of socially relevant data that arise from many connections (Marin & Wellman, 2011).

Social media has become a central communication tool for governments, organizations, and universities to disseminate vital information to the public (Tsao et al., 2021). Also, the advent of social media has changed how organizations operate (Olanrewaju et al., 2020). Hence, regarding the importance of social media as a novel technology, the capabilities of this technology can be utilized to provide public services, and to witness extensive changes in the field of services (Criado et al., 2017; Graham et al., 2015; Liu & Bakici, 2019; Zhao & Fan, 2018). Accordingly, when social media is used to provide public services, a new concept, e-government 2.0, emerges, referring to the use of technologies and social media tools to manage government processes. (Chun et al., 2010; Mergel, 2012). E-government 2.0 opportunities for governments, such as better e-services, improved communication with citizens, democracy, citizen participation in government activities, collection of ideas and solutions, knowledge sharing, service innovation, increased reputation for government agencies, better control of upcoming events and crises, and improved government decision-making and policy-making (Chen et al., 2024; Dong & Lian, 2022; Górska et al., 2022; Luna & Pennock, 2018; Miao et al., 2022; Moss et al., 2015; Rathore et al., 2021).

The use of social media is also increasing in developing countries. For example, as a developing country, Iran had about 48 million active social media users at the beginning of 2024, equivalent to 53.6% of the country's total population (DataReportal, 2024). Among them, the use of social networks has accounted for the largest share of statistics. According to a report by IDEA Agency published in August 2023, the

number of Instagram users in Iran reached 41 million in 1401 (IDEA Agency, 2023). Also, in developing countries, where complex and expensive technological infrastructure is typically unavailable, social media can provide a viable means to overcome these challenges. In other words, social media is a powerful tool that helps developing countries overcome various challenges by improving access to healthcare, education, economic opportunities, political engagement, and disaster management (Chen et al., 2024; Mekonen et al., 2024; Nisar & Shafiq, 2019; Yogapriya & Nimesh, 2022). However, despite the importance of social media in developing countries, the government's use of social media has remained only in the information stage, providing one-way information (Al-Aufi et al., 2017). This issue also exists in Iran, which is a developing country. Studies show that the maturity of e-government 2.0 in Iran is in its early stages (Taghavifard & Hejazinia, 2021). This could be due to a lack of research that identifies all dimensions of delivering e-Government 2.0 services in developing countries. On the other hand, despite the importance of e-government 2.0, Most studies conducted have focused on limited aspects of e-government 2.0 in developing countries, such as factors influencing adoption and assessing the current status, and they have been done by relying on quantitative research methods (Abdelsalam et al., 2013; Khan et al., 2021; Thi Uyen Nguyen et al., 2024). Also, no research has been conducted on the provision of e-government services in Iran. The variations in social, cultural, political, economic, and e-government readiness among countries make it challenging to apply a "one size fits all" approach (Thi Uyen Nguyen et al., 2024). Consequently, it is necessary to introduce a model to support the implementation of e-government 2.0 in Iran. Additionally, employing the Grounded Theory approach rather than relying on existing theories can yield a deeper, more realistic understanding of the situation in Iran. Accordingly, the present study aimed to design a model for e-government 2.0 in Iran, seeking to answer the question: "How is the model for providing public services in the context of social media for Iran?"

This study contributes to expanding the academic literature in several ways. First, it extends the body of knowledge on local governments' use of social media by focusing on Iran as a developing country. Second, it contributes to theoretical development in e-government 2.0. Third, this model was designed to suit Iran's specific

conditions and can serve as a model for other countries in the region. So, it helps policymakers and e-government practitioners in developing countries extend social media-based services.

The rest of the study is structured as follows: In the related work section, we categorize related research by focus area. The methodology section introduces the research method. Then, the findings section presents the study's findings and the e-government 2.0 model for Iran. In the discussion section, we compare the results with relevant literature. Finally, the conclusion section presents the conclusion and recommendations for future studies.

Literature Review

As shown in Table 1, many studies have been conducted on e-government 2.0 and providing public services in the context of social media, each focusing on a particular social media aspect in the public sector. Nevertheless, most of them have addressed, conceptually, descriptions, concepts, challenges, requirements, and the extent of e-government 2.0 use (Bertot et al., 2010; Chun et al., 2010; Criado et al., 2017; Luna & Pennock, 2018). Regarding the overview descriptions of e-government 2.0 (Khan, 2015; Mergel & Bretschneider, 2013; Sun et al., 2015), these scholars were among the first to introduce a model for e-government 2.0. From another perspective, most studies in developing countries have focused on limited aspects of e-government 2.0, such as factors influencing adoption and assessing the current status (Abdelsalam et al., 2013; Khan, 2015). In addition, some studies investigated the impact of variables such as users' satisfaction, compliance, trust, and characteristics related to the use of government services on social media platforms (Al-Omoush et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2024; Khan et al., 2021; Raimo et al., 2024). Also, no research has been conducted on the provision of e-government services in Iran.

Table 1. The dimensions considered in the literature review

Dimension	References
descriptions, concepts, challenges, requirements, and the amount of use of e-government 2.0	(Bertot et al., 2010; Chun et al., 2010; Criado et al., 2017; Luna & Pennock, 2018)
Types of Users and Relationships in E-Government 2.0	(Hong, Nadler, 2012; Porwol, Ojo, Breslin, 2016; Flores, Rezende, 2018)
Governance Models for E-Government	(Mergel, 2012; Khan, 2013; Mergel & Bretschneider, 2013)
The impact of variables such as users' satisfaction, compliance, trust, and characteristics	(Al-Omoush et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2024; Khan et al., 2021; Raimo et al., 2024)
Overview descriptions of e-government 2.0	(Khan, 2015; Mergel & Bretschneider, 2013; Sun et al., 2015)
Assessing the current status and Maturity of e-government 2.0	(Abdelsalam et al., 2013; Khan, 2015; Taghavifard & Hejazinia, 2021)

Except for the studies mentioned, no study presents a conceptual model of electronic government 2 for Iran and considers it a multifaceted phenomenon. As recommended by the applied methodology, it is advisable to conduct a preliminary literature review before initiating the study (Glaser & Holton, 2004). After analyzing the study's findings, A comprehensive discussion will be provided based on an extensive literature review. Therefore, this section offers only initial insights for potential readers. In summary, a review of previous studies has identified various research objectives in the e-government 2.0 development literature. These focus on the results, requirements, acceptance models, and use rate. In developed countries, no e-government 2.0 model has been presented for developing countries. To address this research gap, the present study was conducted qualitatively using a Grounded Theory (GT) approach to propose a conceptual framework for the development of e-government 2.0 in Iran.

The present study aimed to design a model for e-government 2.0 in Iran, a developing country, with a focus on social networks.

Method

The present research methodology is qualitative. Based on this, researchers employed the systematic grounded theory approach introduced by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Grounded theory is well-suited to qualitative researchers seeking to answer questions such as "What is happening in an area?" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). For various reasons, Grounded Theory was used in the present research. Firstly, Grounded Theory is a valuable method for a wide range of topics in information technology and new multifaceted phenomena (Wiesche et al., 2017). Secondly, it is appropriate that researchers do not have a hypothesis at the beginning and seek (Glaser & Holton, 2004). Finally, Grounded Theory is suitable when no comprehensive and coherent theory exists in one field (Goulding, 2002). Given the lack of a cohesive theory of e-government 2.0 in Iran as a developing country, the multifaceted nature of e-government 2.0, and the lack of a hypothesis at the beginning of the research, foundational data theory was considered the most appropriate option for the current study.

Data collection and participants

The research's statistical population, which included specialists and academic and organizational experts in information technology, especially electronic government, in Iran, a developing country, was of paramount importance. Their expertise was crucial for the comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of e-government 2.0 and the necessity of data triangulation in qualitative research (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The operational definition of the statistical population of experts in this field is all people who have at least two of the following three criteria:

- Among managers working in government organizations and academic experts
- At least five years of work experience in the field of electronic government and information technology
- Bachelor's degree or higher in Industrial Engineering, Information Technology, and Management fields

This study used the theoretical sampling method and theoretical saturation criterion. First, interviews were conducted with some experts in the field of research. Then, to identify qualified participants, snowball sampling was used, a sampling expansion method that involves asking an informant or participant to recommend others

(Morse, 1994). Researchers used Semi-structured interviews to collect data, and the main questions raised in the interviews were:

- What factors cause the development of electronic government 2.0 in Iran as a developing country?
- Which environmental factors affect the development of electronic government 2.0 in Iran as a developing country
- What considerations should be considered when selecting electronic government development mechanisms 2.0 in Iran as a developing country?
- What strategies and measures should be taken to develop electronic government 2.0 in Iran as a developing country?
- What consequences and results does the development of electronic government 2.0 have in Iran as a developing country?

The interviews continued to achieve theoretical saturation. Due to theoretical saturation in the 21st interview, two more interviews were conducted, resulting in a final sample size of 23.

Data Analysis

The study employed Strauss and Corbin's Grounded Theory methodology, facilitated by MAXQDA 10, and followed three steps: open, axial, and selective coding.

- Open Coding: Data was broken down, examined, compared, conceptualized, and categorized to form initial categories. This involved continuous adaptation and labeling.
- Axial Coding: Categories were organized around a central category based on causal, intervening, contextual, and consequential conditions, focusing on the central phenomenon, which in this study was the Development of E-Government 2.
- Selective Coding: Researchers connected core categories to write a theory, creating a comprehensive, story-like picture of the problem.

Finally, we used the qualitative research validation criteria introduced by Lincoln and Guba (1985). These criteria include credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Table 2, the validity of the qualitative method was confirmed using the criteria introduced.

Table 2. Validation of the qualitative method

Criterion	Activities
Credibility	Dedicating enough time to view and understand the data. Using the peer review method, the researcher is accompanied in the field of information technology management
Dependability	The study had two groups of researchers. The first researcher performed the coding once, and the second supervised the research implementation and its results.
Transferability	Other developing countries can use the obtained research results
Confirmability	Non-interference of the researcher's personal opinions and reviewing the results at the end of the research by a researcher outside the research team

Findings

This study has extracted 155 concepts, 53 sub-categories, and 20 main categories for the e-government 2.0 model. Therefore, the dimensions of the e-government 2.0 development model are shown in Figure 1 and Table 3.

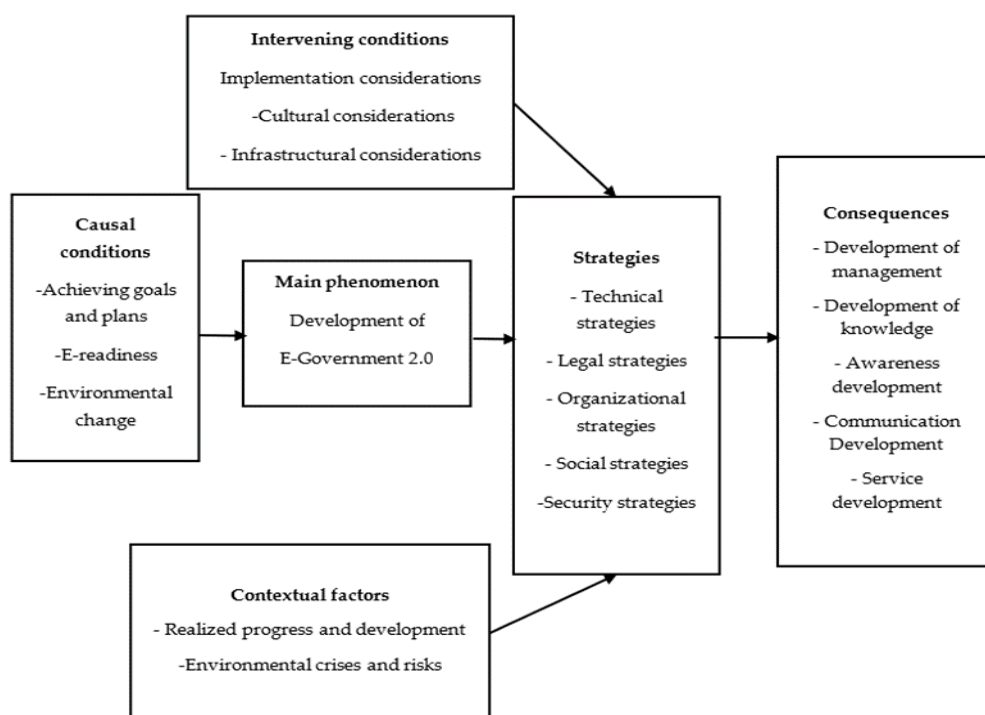


Figure 1. E-government2.0 model

Table 3. Categories and sub-categories of providing public services in the context of social media

Dimensions	Category	Sub-Category
Causal Conditions	Goal And Plan Attainment	The Country's Development Policies
		The Importance of Developing and Improving Services
		Goal Failure
	E-Readiness	Technical Capacities
		Social Network Capabilities
	Environmental Changes	Attitude Change
		The Importance of Developing Communications
		Increased Volume of Data and Information

Contextual Conditions	Environmental Crises and Risks	Environmental Complexity
		Economic Issues
		Political Pressures
	Accomplished Progress and Development	Environmental Readiness
		Scientific Development
		Information Technology Development
Intervening Conditions	Implementation Considerations	Legal factors
		Security factors
		Managerial factors
	Cultural Considerations	Ethical factors
		Human factors
	Infrastructure Considerations	Informational factors
		Technical factors
Strategies	Technical Strategies	Hardware requirements
		software requirements
		Data requirements
	Organizational Strategies	Structural requirements
		Management requirements
		Operational requirements
	Social Strategies	Human requirements
		Cultural requirements
	Legal Strategies	Knowledge requirements
		Change of Rules
Consequences	Management Development	Dissemination of Rules
		Hard Security requirements
	Knowledge Development	Soft Security requirements
		Improved Service Operations
	Awareness Development	Crisis Management
		Knowledge Management
	Communication Development	Innovation
		Transparency
	Service Development	Openness
		Participation
	Service Development	Interaction
		Cooperation
		Saving
		Accessibility
		Accountability
		Improved Service

As indicated in Table 3 and Figure 1, the main phenomenon of this research is e-government 2.0, defined as the provision of government services through social media to improve government interactions with

citizens, especially in developing countries such as Iran. This phenomenon aims to increase transparency, public participation, and efficiency in providing government services by leveraging social media features, such as broad reach, high speed, and two-way communication. E-government 2.0 is considered more than a technical tool; it is a transformation in the relationship between government and society that can strengthen public trust and improve service quality. By leveraging new technological capabilities, this model responds to society's growing needs for better, more transparent services and represents a paradigm shift in public management.

Causal conditions are the factors that underlie the emergence and development of e-government 2.0, including Goal and Plan Attainment, Environmental Changes, and Electronic Readiness. The country's policies provide a platform for this transformation by encouraging the adoption of new technologies. At the same time, the failure of traditional methods to meet public needs has created an incentive to move towards this model. E-readiness also facilitates the implementation of this phenomenon by relying on technical infrastructure and social media capabilities. These conditions show that e-government 2.0 results from the interaction between social needs and technological advances and is proposed as a solution to the challenges in the public sector.

Contextual conditions refer to the environment in which e-government 2.0 takes shape and is influenced by advances in science and information technology that provide the necessary infrastructure. However, this phenomenon faces challenges, including economic and political crises, such as sanctions and international pressures, that can affect its development. These conditions present a combination of opportunities and obstacles, making the development of this model a complex process. Therefore, the success of e-Government 2.0 depends on flexibility and careful planning to capitalize on opportunities and navigate obstacles.

Intervening conditions are legal, cultural, and infrastructural factors that shape the strategies and outcomes of e-Government 2.0. The need for new laws to regulate activities on social media, the lack of IT literacy among the population, and infrastructural constraints, such as inadequate Internet access, are among the obstacles to implementing this model. These conditions underscore the importance of attending to legal, cultural, and technical aspects in the development process and emphasize that without addressing these obstacles, achieving the goals of e-Government 2.0 will

be challenging. Consequently, managing these factors is essential for the success of this phenomenon.

Strategies in this study refer to comprehensive, multidimensional measures designed to address the e-government 2.0 phenomenon and manage diverse conditions. These strategies include technical measures such as providing hardware and software; legal measures such as drafting new laws; organizational measures such as training employees and changing structures; social measures such as building culture and increasing public awareness; and security measures such as data protection and privacy. This multifaceted approach shows that successful implementation of this model requires coordination across dimensions and that the desired results cannot be achieved by focusing on a single aspect. These strategies provide a platform for realizing the goals of e-government 2.0.

As a result, the realization of e-government 2.0 in Iran, as a developing country, involves a multidimensional path that begins with causal conditions: the country's development policies and the need to improve government services provide the initial motivation for delivering services through social media. This motivation is strengthened by contextual conditions such as advances in information technology and communication infrastructure, even as economic and political crises persist. Intervening conditions, such as legal and cultural considerations, affect the implementation process and require special attention. Strategies such as technical measures, drafting new laws, effective organization, social culture building, and strengthening cybersecurity are designed and implemented to manage these conditions. If successful, these strategies lead to positive outcomes, including improved service quality, time and cost savings, increased transparency, and strengthened citizen participation. Careful coordination between these factors is the key to successfully realizing e-government 2.0.

Conclusion

The e-government 2.0 model can facilitate planning and practical use of social media technology in the public sector, especially in Iran. Therefore, this study presented the e-government 2.0 model for Iran. The study examined most aspects of introducing new technology in the public sector. Hence, given the lack of a comprehensive model for e-government 2.0 in Iran, this study used the systematic grounded theory approach by Strauss and Corbin (1990), comprising three sections:

open, axial, and selective coding. First, the current study considered the concepts, definitions, and importance of e-government 2.0 and social media technology. Then, by reviewing the literature, the study highlighted the importance and necessity of paying attention to the present research. Eventually, researchers extracted 155 initial codes, 53 sub-categories, and 20 categories using three-stage grounded theory coding. The results of the present study showed that factors such as achieving goals, community e-readiness, and environmental changes are causal conditions for the realization of e-government 2.0.

The contextual factors affecting the provision of government services in the context of social media include two general categories: Accomplished progress and Development, and environmental crises and risks. In development and progress, scientific and technological progress is recognized as a foundation for promoting e-government, consistent with previous studies (Zhao & Fan, 2018; Sun et al., 2015). Economic and political challenges (such as sanctions and political pressures) are essential in environmental crises and risks. The current study, focusing on the local conditions of Iran, has paid more attention to the executive, economic, and political requirements that have been less investigated in some previous studies.

The results of the present study showed that the interfering conditions in the provision of government services in the context of social media fall into three categories: executive considerations (legal, managerial, and security), cultural considerations (human and ethical), and infrastructural considerations (informational and technical). Legal factors refer to the lack of appropriate laws and the need for guiding principles, which were also emphasized in previous studies (Yi et al., 2013). Management factors include resistance to change among managers and employees, which has been identified in research (Zhang, 2013) as an obstacle to development and is consistent with the results of this study. Security factors are also related to privacy violations and cyberattacks, as emphasized in previous studies (Bertot et al., 2010). In the cultural domain, the current research, focusing on Iran's local conditions, has placed greater emphasis on cultural and ethical aspects. Finally, infrastructural factors such as poor internet access and information standards have also been identified as key challenges in previous studies, consistent with this study's findings (Sivarajah et al., 2015).

Strategies for providing government services on social media fall into five general categories: technical, legal, organizational, social, and security. In the area of technical strategy, the present study highlights the importance of hardware, software, and data management equipment, consistent with previous studies (Sivarajah et al., 2015; Meijer & Thaens, 2013), which have also emphasized the need for technical equipment and data management. In legal strategies, changing laws and their dissemination by the public sector are proposed, which is consistent with studies (Bertot et al., 2010; Picazo-Vela et al., 2012), as these studies have also pointed to the role of laws in facilitating the use of social media. Organizational strategies encompass operational, human, managerial, and structural requirements that emphasize staff training, the design of flexible structures, and the management of resistance to change; however, this aspect has received less attention in previous research. In social strategies, current research promotes e-literacy and reduces social resistance to technology, consistent with studies (Sun et al., 2015; Criado et al., 2017). Finally, security strategies include hardware and software measures to prevent cyberattacks and privacy violations, consistent with previous research (Zhao & Fan, 2018) that emphasizes the importance of cybersecurity.

The results of the present study revealed that the consequences of e-government 2.0 development fall into six categories: management development, knowledge development, awareness development, communication development, service development, and savings. Management crises and service operations improvement are discussed in management development, consistent with previous studies (such as Zheng, 2013; Graham et al., 2015; Luna & Pennock, 2018). These studies have also highlighted the importance of decision-making speed and coordination between departments. Knowledge management and innovation through social networks have been examined in knowledge development, consistent with Zhao & Fan (2018), who also emphasize access to knowledge and innovation in e-government. In awareness development, increasing transparency and openness of information are discussed, consistent with studies (such as Sivarajah et al., 2015). Interaction, cooperation, and citizen participation in decision-making have been emphasized in communication development, consistent with research (such as Meijer & Thaens, 2013). In service development, improving the quality, accessibility, and responsiveness of services is considered, consistent with studies (Graham et al., 2015). Finally,

saving time, costs, and energy has been identified as one of the most important outcomes and is also mentioned as a main advantage of e-government in previous studies (Khan, 2015).

Therefore, most studies have concentrated on the benefits, challenges, and requirements of e-government 2.0. In other words, little research has examined the key drivers of e-government 2.0, especially in developing countries. Previous research has yet to investigate the issue of causal conditions and the possibility of momentary changes and environmental crises as an ecological trend. In other words, developing countries face different considerations and environmental trends than developed countries. For instance, discussing political and regional pressures and the issue of various economic and political sanctions in developing countries can be effective in e-government 2.0. Also, previous studies have yet to investigate other factors, such as cultural considerations and the impact of society's social norms in the growth of e-government 2.0, because of the specific social and cultural needs of developing countries. Unlike previous studies, the current research has examined the details of providing government services on social media platforms. Also, the current research has presented a wide range of strategies, including intervening, causal, contextual, and consequence conditions for developing electronic government services 2.0 in developing countries. In addition, unlike previous research, the current study focused on developing countries. As previously discussed, some new concepts, such as cultural considerations, the impact of societal norms, Environmental crises, and risks in e-government 2.0 development, distinguish this study from previous studies. In addition, the critical point is that in earlier research, legal issues and the need for standardization and providing guidelines have not been widely and systematically addressed. Generally, attention has been paid to security and privacy aspects.

In general, the innovation of the current research includes two items. The first uses the systematic approach of grounded theory to identify the different dimensions and areas of e-government development, and the second aims to discover the less-noticed aspects of e-government 2.0 in IRAN as a developing country.

Policymakers and planners in developing countries can take steps to advance e-government 2.0 by relying on the model developed in this study. They should consider influential environmental trends such as environmental crises. Also, they should seek help in developing an

expert and knowledgeable workforce. Finally, they should provide various legal, structural, social, security, and organizational requirements. In this regard, determining and publishing relevant laws and regulations can effectively provide a legal infrastructure, standards, and practice guidelines, draw on successful models from leading countries, and cooperate with the private sector. Furthermore, the operations group e-government2.0 should pay attention to various considerations such as cultural, infrastructural, and implementation factors. These considerations will lead to outcomes such as the development of knowledge, improvements in services, communication, and awareness. Government organizations will also move towards a new employee-centered and citizen-centered style. In addition to attracting the public sector's attention to social media technology to advance democracy, the main result of the current research enables an examination of the current situation to identify weaknesses and plan to remove existing obstacles. The proposed model encompasses various dimensions and can provide suitable indicators for assessing the gap relative to the desired position. Moreover, it is an opportunity to plan and create favorable conditions to leverage social media technology for high-level management in the public sector to advance democracy. With an overview of the current status of information technology and services in the public sector, we conclude that if governments aim to provide services more effectively through IT advances and faster access to required data and information, they should move toward e-government 2. For future research, it is suggested that this model be evaluated for the use of social media in public services in countries that have implemented this project, and that the model's strengths and weaknesses in these relationships be assessed.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST: The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this manuscript.

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