LOCAL GOVERNMENTS LEVERAGE SELFIE CULTURE WITH #CITYHALLSELFIE CAMPAIGN

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#CITYHALLSELFIE

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Local Governments Leverage Selfie Culture with #CityHallSelfie Campaign

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Article Information	Abstract
	The Engaging Local Government Leaders (ELGL) hashtag campaign #CityHallSelfie asks local government employees and residents to celebrate local government by snapping selfies in front of city hall. This study analyzes five years of the annual, ongoing campaign at the juncture of advocacy, member engagement, and marketing. Through the lens of framing and social presence theories, the study examines how X posts and selfies represent levels of resident-government relationships and short narratives of individuals, pairs, and groups. Findings reveal a nearly equal presentation of short narratives of groups and individuals, as well as a 98% function of simply sharing information, the lowest level of resident-government relationships. This campaign highlights how local governments can capitalize on hashtags and selfies to celebrate their efforts to govern their cities.

Introduction

E-government embraces using the web and social networking sites to provide city services and to encourage participation and two-way communication. As part of E-government, city governments now manage websites, social media platforms, and apps to better communicate with residents in a possible two-way conversation. Much of the official city communication is the responsibility of public information officers (Syed, 2023). They are challenged with balancing the need to inform stakeholders, listen to city and resident needs, as well as foster feedback and conversation on numerous inbound and outbound channels. This public

communication has the potential to bridge gaps between residents and their governments. The public information office generates much of a city's messaging, manages social media accounts, provides website content, and seeks feedback from residents through surveys and town halls. The public information officers are the liaisons between residents and governmental departments. However, governmental agencies and departments' messaging on websites and social media sites originates from a position of authority or power and is typically one-way, serious, and informative (Brainard & McNutt, 2010; Lambiase, 2018; Mergel, 2012). Since 2016, one annual, single-day social media campaign has aimed to connect residents with their local governments. Launched by Engaging Local Government Leaders (ELGL), the City Hall Selfie Day asked participants to celebrate local government by taking a selfie at their city hall buildings and posting them online with the hashtag #CityHallSelfie.

The campaign is annual and ongoing. The purpose of this study was to analyze how that hashtag campaign has functioned as public communication, how participants framed their messages, and what levels of resident-government relationships were displayed. The importance of such an investigation is to elucidate the successful features of public communication efforts so those leading local government communication can better engage with their residents in the governing process. Understanding the successful features of an ongoing and annual hashtag campaign provides benchmarks for other communicators to set realistic goals for connecting with residents. Public communicators will be able to devote their time and resources to campaigns that have a larger impact on the resident-government relationship.

Literature review

Local government and social media

Governmental entities benefit from the use of social media sites. Most cities and their departments maintain a presence on multiple social media sites. Even a decade ago, the International City/County Management Association found that, in 2014, 88% of local governments maintained a social media presence, with 80% on Facebook and 60% on X[1] (formerly Twitter) (ICMA, 2015). These sites allow for direct communication with residents, solicitations for feedback and participation, and opportunities for organizational listening. For instance, cities can post inclement weather and emergency messages for their residents from a mobile device in seconds (Quintana, 2019). Engagement efforts on social media can increase transparency and potentially improve the city's image (ICMA, 2012). Distributing information on social media can also influence public satisfaction and affect the public's intent to participate (Hariguna et al., 2019). However, public relations literature laments how organizations, including governments, have failed to take full advantage of the two-way potential of social

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[1] The years studied for the campaign pre-date Twitter's sale to Elon Musk and the transition to X.

media (Falco & Kleinhans, 2018; Linvill et al., 2012; Lovejoy et al., 2012; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010). Other shortcomings and disadvantages include adding yet another communication tool that must be handled, monitored, and archived by the public information office. Social media sites can also fuel rumors, misinformation, and discriminatory or hateful language, and the 24/7 nature of social media can make it a never-ending stream of messaging for public information officers to tackle.

Hashtag campaigns and activism

Corporations and nonprofits alike have capitalized on the ease with which they can now directly communicate with stakeholders and create digital campaigns. Through digital means like social media, organizations can engage in dialogue and empower their stakeholders to share, reply, forward, and expand upon a given message. The push toward digital communication involves the public sector and governmental entities at all levels. From the federal government to local parishes, an online campaign can bolster followers for such endeavors as upcoming events, conservation efforts, or bond elections. Cities have used hashtags, or keyword labels, to aggregate messages on social media and as calls to action and rally cries. Some hashtags have been born of city pride like #MyDallasIs (Maben et al., 2019) or out of a local tragedy like #VegasStrong (Barrie, 2019), #OneBoston, and #BostonStrong (Williams et al., 2017). These hashtags celebrate the resilience of entire cities.

Hashtags also serve as search terms to help users aggregate data and connect posts to other data streams. By adding # before a term, users contribute to a larger, searchable conversation. Conferences and membership events often provide a hashtag to connect participants in online spaces for networking purposes, or participants organically develop hashtags on their own (Ross et al., 2011). Hashtags have been used for activism and social causes; #BlackLivesMatter (Freelon et al., 2016), #ows from the Occupy Wall Street movement (Papacharissi, 2016), and #MeToo (Xiong, 2019) are some of the more well-known hashtags for online activism encouraging solidarity and social change.

Chon and Park (2020) asserted that people are more likely to participate in social media activism when they are motivated regarding the issue at hand; they also maintained that people's collective problem-solving in social media campaigns leads to collective action. Motivated people become activist publics, and online activism extends to the offline world (Bode et al., 2014; Chon & Park, 2020; Hyun & Kim, 2015). While past studies have focused on campaigns around contentious issues (e.g., gun ownership and immigration), the present study focused on less controversial topics. #CityHallSelfie champions the work of local government and its actors.

#CityHallSelfie does not easily fit into a hashtag typology. It is not a social justice activism or advocacy hashtag, nor does it align with the conference/membership participation tag. It is also recurring and more episodic than a full advertising/marketing campaign. A built-in community is using the tag, rather than consumers. A city's brand advocates are tagging to celebrate their city hall and local governments at large. Cities, like countries and regions, have

developed brands for the purposes of community building, tourism, and economic development (see Caldwell & Freire, 2004; Scholvin, 2023; Zavattaro, 2013). Hashtags offer a way to collate social media messages. Kim and Phua (2020) described how consumers "obtain valuable information about brands from campaign hashtags alone" (p. 10). Coupled with visuals from selfie culture, the #CityHallSelfie hashtag helped cities brand their local governments and highlight city employees.

Selfie culture

Selfies are spontaneous self-portraits taken on a mobile device's camera and posted on social media sites. Typically, selfies are close-up images shot by the actor at arm's length. Approximately 92 million selfies are taken every day, which account for four percent of all the photos taken daily (Broz, 2023). Selfie culture has been both vilified and celebrated. Negative views point to narcissism, abandonment of privacy, false sense of empowerment, and selfish exhibitions. On a more positive note, selfies offer self-presentation by groups that may not be reflected as often or as accurately in media outlets with traditional gatekeeping functions (Giroux, 2015; Maben, Benedict et al., 2019). Giroux (2015) asserts that selfie culture can be used to "rewrite the relationship between the personal and the political, and in doing so expand the vibrancy of public discourse and work to prevent the collapse of public life" (p. 164). Examples include #ILookLikeAnEngineer and #ILookLikeAProfessor selfie campaigns, where professionals in those industries posted selfies on social media to expand the catalog of online images to include more women and people of color (see Maben, Benedict et al., 2019). These grassroots campaigns created public discourse about how professions, and the diversity therein, are displayed through online searches. Hess (2015) acknowledged the complexity of what a selfie might reflect, positioning them as assemblages connecting "machines, physical spaces, bodies, and networks" (p. 1,642).

The motivation for selfies varies. Georgakopoulou (2016) suggested that selfies are shared performances and small stories. This assertion aligns with the current #CityHallSelfie campaign, which illustrates a mini campaign for local government. In this campaign, city government officials seek to make their work more visible and connect with their respective communities. Eager and Dann (2016) viewed the selfie as a "deliberate, consciously considered communication approach to maintaining social bonds between friends, family and wider audience" (p. 1,835). Murray (2015) concluded that the selfie is a way for individuals to define themselves and "to make themselves visible" (p. 512).

Regardless of the motivation, people decide how to frame themselves or others. Georgakopoulou (2016) identified three ways people typically depict themselves or others in a selfie: me, significant other, and groups. Page (2019) considered group selfies on Snapchat, noting, "the invitation to share the perspective of a group is much stronger than the individualistic interpretation of selfies might suggest" (p. 91). The groups created an "us-ness" and that is one aim of the campaign, to engage residents with the "us." In the case of

#CityHallSelfie, this would be their local government. Page's (2019) study focused on technology to create the illusion of being part of the group. The #CityHallSelfie images reflected in-person groups in real life commemorating a moment in front of city hall.

#CityHallSelfie

Residents may think of their government as amorphous entities and buildings, like a city hall, and may not think to engage in communication with local governmental departments unless there is an issue such as a water leak, bulk trash pickup, or utility connect/disconnect. Within this context, the Engaging Local Government Leaders (ELGL) developed the #CityHallSelfie campaign to expand on everyday conversation between residents and their local governments. ELGL is a group of "innovative local government leaders with a passion for connecting, communicating and educating" (ELGL, 2014, para. 2). On July 24, 2016, a tongue-in-cheek post from Dan Weinheimer kicked off the campaign. He posted: "Wondering what percentage of #cityhalls have been backdrops for a #cityhallselfie. @ELGL50 any ideas? When is national #cityhallselfieday?" (Weinheimer, 2016).

The next day, ELGL responded on X with the date for the digital event and posted details about the first National #CityHallSelfie Day on its blog (ELGL, 2016a), thereby launching an international campaign to encourage civic engagement. ELGL teased #CityHallSelfie as an effort to break the record for city hall selfies in a day, which organizers then estimated to be nine. ELGL requested participation across social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and X) and email. Participants were promised an ELGL koozie and other prizes (ELGL, 2016a).

Cities encouraged both employees and residents to embrace the campaign and included city-specific hashtags to add to #CityHallSelfie on social media posts. In an effort to set a Guinness World Record, ELGL set a goal of 12,598 selfies in a single day for the campaign (ELGL, 2016b). A spirit of competition began to develop. Mark Van Baale (2016), from Kansas City, Missouri, posted: "Working on the finishing touches for #CityHallSelfie Day on Monday. KCMO goes all out for these types of challenges! :)." The city even set up a Twibbon, a graphic users can add to an avatar, where supporters could easily add a banner of support to their profile pictures on X. ELGL posted a how-to video for creating good selfies. Oakland Park and other cities posted instructions for residents. ELGL developed categories for best selfies including local governments who had the most per state, most creative, best dressed, most people in the selfie, and selfie with the most famous person.

On August 9, four days before the set date, ELGL posted a graphic for members and participants to use as their X avatar. City mascots also got involved. To fuel the competition, ELGL added more categories to its contest, including one for best promotion. The organization even referred to #CityHallSelfie eve, likening anticipation for the event to the excitement before Christmas. On August 15, 2016, municipal governments joined the online selfie and hashtag culture with #CityHallSelfie Day. The first post rolled in from Adelaide, Australia. To capture all

the images, ELGL set up a Facebook album, which overflowed into a second album. ELGL also created a map showing the locations of posts.

The awards promised by ELGL such as Best Animal Picture inspired some of the content, explaining the number of selfies with dogs. Another award challenged participants to post the most, leading one city to post 70-plus images from all of its different buildings. Award-winning selfies, as selected by ELGL and member votes, were posted to the ELGL website within two weeks of #CityHallSelfie. The city of Boulder, Colorado, posted an eye-catching overhead spherical image, winning the Best Promotion Award. ELGL explained why selfies were selected as winners:

> Why They Won: The creativity in this photo fully encapsulates the spirit of local government employees in Boulder, Colorado. We love the interesting and new perspectives they continue to bring into all that they do. Thanks for being cheerleaders for #CityHallSelfie Day as well as avid supporters and content contributors to ELGL! (ELGL, 2019, para. 2)

The hashtag campaign also leveraged local media to spread the message beyond X. One of the award categories was Best from a Newspaper or TV Reporter. Talking points and a media kit were posted on the ELGL site to help participants gain legacy media exposure. Some cities used the campaign to garner legacy media coverage. For example, local media featured the participation of cities including Texarkana, Kansas City, and Phoenix (Gutierrez, 2016; KTAR, 2016). The social media campaign thus served the additional purpose of assisting municipalities in "engendering greater community support, trust and conversations around innovation and policy" (Nyczepir, 2016, para. 2).

Resident-government relationships

Like any other public relations and communication tool, social media fulfills a mission to create and maintain relationships between an organization and its stakeholders. Hon and Grunig (1999) established how public relations practitioners can measure relationships through six components of long-term relationships with key constituents: control mutuality (power to influence each other), trust, satisfaction, commitment, exchange relationship, and communal relationship (p. 3). Hon and Grunig (1999) suggested that communal relationships are more important than exchange relationships; the main difference between the two is that benefits are expected to be reciprocated in an exchange relationship, whereas benefits are given without an expectation in a communal relationship. In a communal relationship, each party is concerned with the other's welfare. Extending Hon and Grunig's 1999 work into social media, a hashtag campaign in social media acknowledges the power of influence because the platform allows for two-way communication. Social media outlets provide a space for reciprocated messages and the hashtag communicates a person's desire to be part of the conversation. The other tenets of the organization-public relationships framework (Hon & Grunig, 1999) are hard to pinpoint in a social media campaign such as #CityHallSelfie. As for trust, local governments attempted to

engender feelings of transparency and openness by giving faces to city hall, which could be considered an attempt at trust building. Commitment might be derived from the efforts of some local governments to participate in the campaign in a bold fashion. Having a mayor or entire staff photographed in front of city hall would denote a larger commitment than the public information officers snapping an individual selfie on the way into the office.

Arnstein's (1969) work analyzed the resident-government[2] relationship specifically, creating a ladder of participation (see Table 1). Within an eight-rung line-up, the lower rungs of participation represent elements of nonparticipation, moving toward degrees of tokenism in the middle and ending with levels of resident power at the top. Informing and consultation are two rungs categorized as tokenism. At these levels, residents are heard and have a voice, but they have no power to ensure action or make decisions for the city. A hashtag campaign inviting residents to contribute constitutes an online dialogue and has the potential to empower residents for mobilization. How the campaign actually unfolds and how invested participants become would dictate where it falls on the ladder. A post in front of city hall without any additional participation is tokenism. In social media research, the term slacktivism—slacker and activism—refers to a "disconnect between awareness and action" (Glenn, 2015, p. 81). Along a continuum of participation, slacktivism represents the minimum level of effort.

Table 1

Arnstein's (1969) Ladder of Participation

8	Citizen control	Degrees of citizen power
7	Delegated power	
6	Partnership	
5	Placation	Degrees of tokenism
4	Consultation	
3	Informing	
2	Therapy	Nonparticipation
1	Manipulation	

Note. This is a recreation of the original 1969 image that appeared in the *Journal of American Planning Association*.[3]

Falco and Kleinhans (2018) focused on the flow of information and offered four types of the resident-government relationship that occur in social media: information sharing, interaction, co-production, and self-organization. Through information sharing, government entities use social media as an information dissemination tool—a one-way transfer of information to residents. Interaction entails two-way communication encouraging dialogue and feedback among

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[2] While some literature uses the word "citizen" to describe an individual living in a city, the authors use "resident" as a more inclusive term that does not convey citizenship status.

[3] While Table 1 reflects the use of "citizen" in Arnstein's (1969) original ladder of participation, the terms "resident control" and "resident power" will otherwise be used throughout this article.

government officials and their constituents. Co-production highlights the collaborative efforts between government officials and constituents to effectively utilize each other's assets and resources to enhance governmental processes. Self-organization is resident-driven, such that residents create solutions independent of government officials' input with the expectation that government entities will facilitate the policy process to adopt the solution. Falco and Kleinhans (2018) suggested that self-organization is the goal, involving minimal direct interaction between residents and their government because the overall objective is for residents to self-organize to create solutions.

Framing social presence through selfies

Goffman (1974) suggested that people's view of reality is influenced by frames, or preconceived ideas whose function is to organize and interpret new information and assimilate it to better comprehend their experiences in a larger social context. In messaging, framing entails both selection and salience. Senders "select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient" (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Thus, people's view of reality is influenced by what is and is not included in the frame. Per Entman, "Analysis of frames illuminates the precise way in which influence over a human consciousness is exerted by the transfer (or communication) of information from one location-such as a speech, utterance, news report, or novel-to that consciousness" (pp. 50-51). In the #CityHallSelfie campaign, organizers provided the hashtag, which acts as Entman's (1993) keyword or Gamson's (1985) catchphrases to articulate a frame of local government.

Journalists, news media, and politicians frame messages to influence public opinion (Chong, 2007). Regarding social media, research suggests the critical role of framing in not only "textual but also inside picture-linked context" (Güran & Özarslan, 2022, p. 451). Picture-linked context or visual framing encourages interaction between the viewer and the subjects pictured, creating a shared point of reference by using tonal shades, people's actions and poses, and the portion of the person (e.g., face only, head and shoulders, whole person) (Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011).

The #CityHallSelfie campaign encouraged people and places of local government—namely city hall and what it represents—to be highlighted by a visual image (i.e., selfie) accompanied by a post. Social presence theory describes how the digital realm can be bridged, showing real people in computer-mediated communication. Short and colleagues (1976) defined social presence theory as the "degree of salience of the other person in the interaction and the consequent salience of the interpersonal relationships" (p. 65). Social presence can help project closeness between participants (Cui et al., 2013) and brands (Osei-Frimpong & McLean, 2018). Counts and Fellheimer (2004) added that social presence is driven through the sharing of life events through photographic media that can help create a common social milieu.

With theoretical foundations in framing theory and social presence theory, this study aimed to unpack the case of the #CityHallSelfie X campaign, discovering the characteristics of a hashtag campaign positioned at the juncture of activism, membership participation, and

marketing. Our research objectives were to a) examine how participants frame their realities of local government through photos and text and b) better understand how the #CityHallSelfie campaign creates a social presence. To accomplish these objectives, we focused on two areas: what participants chose to include or not include in visual images (e.g., selfies) and textual content (e.g., posts), and the types of resident-government relationships created by these choices. These considerations constituted two key research questions:

RQ1: What kinds of selfies (me, pairs, and groups) were most frequent in the campaign?

RQ2: What kind of resident-government relationship types were present in the campaign posts: information sharing, interaction, co-production, or self-organization?

Method

To examine participants' photo and textual content choices, posts were collected from 2016-2020 of the ongoing #CityHallSelfie campaign that was spearheaded by ELGL. For the sample, posts were collected using a paid third-party data analyst who pulled all historical X data tagged with the hashtag #CityHallSelfie. A total of 20,345 posts were gathered in a spreadsheet; the mean number of reshared posts for the entire dataset was 1.62 and the mean number of favorites was 9.19. The total number of screen names represented was 4,875, where @ELGL represented 2.8% (n=540) and @cityhallselfie represented 2.3% (n=452) of the total. The total number of followers for the participants who posted the hashtag in the dataset equaled more than 137 million. Only 3,058 posts in the dataset included country codes; 94% of these (n=2,862) were posted by X accounts coded with a U.S. country code. Australia represented the next most frequent country code with 2% (n=52), and the 38 remaining countries represented the remaining 4% of posts. Most of the posts were original messages and only 13% (n=2,459) were replies to another message. For this dataset, posts by year peaked in 2017 and 2018 (see Table 2).

Table 2

Historical X Data with #CityHallSelfie

Entire Year	Posts with #CityHallSelfie (n=20,345)
2013	2
2014	52
2015	192
2016	2,609
2017	6,432
2018	6,233
2019	3,745
2020	1,080

Note. This data represents hashtags for the entire year, not just those posted on the day of the campaign. The 2013 tweets occurred before the campaign.

Preliminary one-year content analysis

When selecting one year for a preliminary content analysis, the campaign day for 2019 was selected because, by that year, the campaign was established. The advertised date for the one-day #CityHallSelfie campaign was August 15, 2019, so this date was selected for a preliminary analysis (n=2,184). The posts were reviewed as text displayed in SPSS and as posts collected on TweetDeck, with images visible on the screen. Due to the nature of accessing X data, the dataset may not be identical if viewed on the open web from two different browsers. Word clouds were run for 2017 and 2018 to check for any major differences between the years (see Figures 1 and 2). Posts were input into an online web cloud generator. Word clouds synthesizing 2017, 2018, and 2019 data appeared similar, and the project moved to a sample representing the entire dataset for coding related to post and image function as well as selfie composition. Because the data

appeared similar overall, a sample was derived from the entire dataset rather than sampling each individual year.

Figure 1

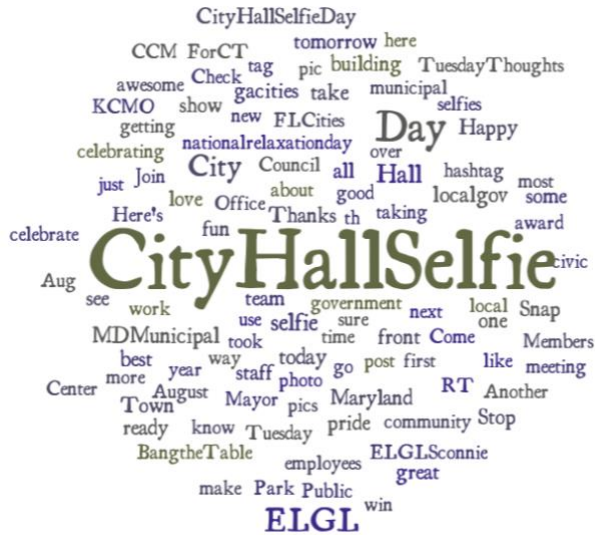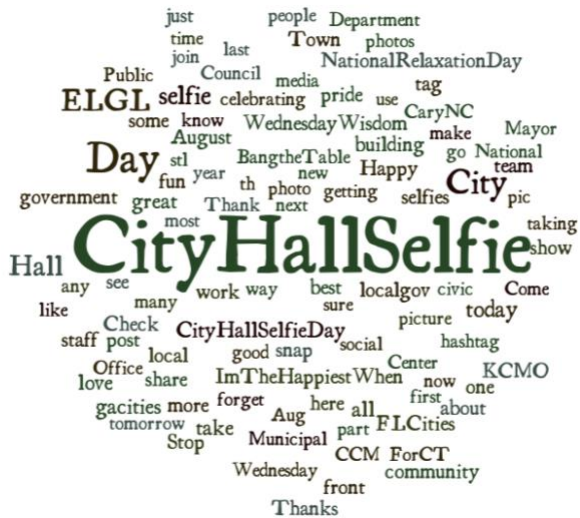*Word Cloud using Tweets from Aug. 15, 2017*

Figure 2

Word Cloud using Tweets from Aug. 15, 2018

To create a dataset for a random sample of images connected to the posts, all posts apart from those posted on the actual campaign days (typically August 15 each year) for the years 2016-2020 were deleted, leaving 12,714 posts. A randomized subset of data (n=500) was created using a randomizer function in Excel. The researchers secured all images attached to those posts in the randomized sample (n=474), assigned a unique identifier for each photo and respective post, and uploaded the images and post text into NVivo 12.0 (Lumivero, 2017).

Analysis occurred in a series of steps using the software program NVivo 12.0, designed to organize and analyze data such as unstructured text and visual images. To consider how participants frame their realities of local government, the first step was to categorize images to examine what participants had chosen to include in their photos (see Table 3). Four major categories were identified: campaign features, other, participants, and selfie. Guided by Georgakopoulou's (2016) categories, researchers divided the participant category into subcategories of individual (one person), pair (two people), or group (three or more people), mascot, and prop. The campaign features category included subcategories of campaign logo, city/town hall, and other-building. Photos were also labeled as a selfie or a non-selfie. Selfie was operationally defined as a photo where someone in the frame shot the image themself with evidence of an extended arm or selfie stick, or the close-up nature and angle of the shot was otherwise identifiable as a selfie. While some teams may have used clickers or Bluetooth-enabled automation, the photo had to present classic selfie characteristics to be coded as a selfie.

Table 3

Features of Photographs from Code Book

Category	Subcategory	Definition
Campaign Features	City Hall or Town Hall	The building is clearly identified by signage indicating it is a city or town hall.
	Other building	The building does not have identifiable signage.
	Campaign logo	The campaign hashtag and/or city hashtag is evident.
Other		No subcategories of Campaign Features and Participants are evident in the photo and/or graphics are used.
Participants	Individual	One person is purposefully posing for the photo.
	Pair	Two people are purposefully posing for the photo.
	Group	Three or more people are purposefully posing for the photo.
	Mascot	A mascot is purposely used as a brand.
	Prop	The prop (digital or nondigital) is purposely used to draw attention to city services or departments. The prop is not related to the city services or departments but does add interest to the photo.
Selfie		A person in the photo shot the image him/herself with evidence of an extended arm or selfie stick or the close-up nature of the shot is obviously a selfie.

The next step in analysis was to categorize the textual information (i.e., posts) that accompanied the visual images to discover how the #CityHallSelfie campaign creates a social presence. Guided by Falco and Kleinhans' (2018) resident-government relationship typology, researchers used the following categories to examine the levels of communication, interaction, and involvement that were reflected in the posts: information-sharing, interaction, co-production, and self-organization.

To tease out the nuances of the resident-government relationship typology, researchers used a grounded theory approach to guide the content analysis of the posts, thus allowing a theoretical framework to emerge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Peterson et al., 2010). To do so, the researchers first identified common themes across the posts to create thematic categories reflecting conceptual nuances of local resident-government relationships; per Corbin and Strauss (2008), this process included constant comparison between preexisting thematic categories and emerging thematic categories. These thematic categories were then further clarified by consistently questioning the formulation of the categories and analyzing ideas about the thematic category formulation. Saturation (i.e., no new thematic categories emerged) was reached after creating

two thematic categories (Appreciation and Engagement) with thematic subcategories (see Table 4).

Table 4

Tweets: Types of Resident-Government Relationships and Themes

Category	Subcategory	Definition
Information Sharing		Tweets convey information from the government entity to the resident; i.e., one-way information flow.
Interaction		Tweets convey information between government and resident; i.e., two-way information flow.
Co-Production		Tweets convey information to make use of government and residents' resources to achieve positive outcomes.
Self-Organization		Tweets convey information where residents offer solutions that are adopted and acted on by government.
Appreciation	External	Tweets convey appreciation for the city, its residents, or visitors.
	Internal	Tweets convey appreciation for specific city departments or services.
Engagement	City Hall Selfie Campaign	Tweets convey information to encourage participation in the campaign.
	City Services	Tweets convey information to encourage use of city services.
Facts		Tweets convey the who, what, where, when of the campaign or city entities.

A codebook was created to define all categories, train coders, and ensure intercoder reliability (Krippendorff, 2013). Coders used NVivo 12.0 to code photos and posts. The unit of analysis was each photo and post. Each unit of analysis was coded in multiple categories if it fit more than one category. For example, if a photo depicted two people standing in front of a city hall building, it was coded as both a pair and city/town hall. Two people independently coded all photos and posts. Intercoder reliability across all photos and posts was $\kappa=0.93$ (Cohen, 1968).

Results

Both the photos and posts demonstrated different ways participants chose to frame what it means to celebrate the presence of local government.

Selfies framing local government presence

Analysis of the #CityHallSelfie photos revealed that most of the pictures included people in front of local government buildings like city hall. Of these photos, 78% were selfies. Single selfies, group selfies, collages of selfies, and video montages of selfies helped salute local government. Other photos were quick snaps as individuals headed into the office or left at the close of business. Within the sample, 22% of the photos were not selfies, but rather elaborate set-ups requiring the coordination of large groups and drones.

   RQ1 asked: What kinds of selfies (individual, pair, and groups) were most frequent in the campaign? Group photos were the most used in the campaign sample (n=474) with 43% (n=204), individual photos numbered 152; 18% (n=87) pairs were featured; and 6.5% (n=31) coded as other. Roughly 40% of the photos (n=186) in the sample showed the city hall or town hall, 6% showed the campaign logo, and nearly 2% included both the city hall and campaign logo. Other buildings were featured in 18% of the sample.

   Buildings—or at least city signage—were prominent in many photos. Selfies were often shot in front of iconic parts of the buildings: seals, entrances, or areas such as a wide staircase where all participants could squeeze into the picture. Several selfies were shot in chambers as city councils prepared for or finished their sessions. Selfies in front of city hall were almost evenly split between group selfies (17%; n=79; see Figure 3 as an example) and individual selfies (16%; n=77), followed by duos in front of city hall at 5% (n=25).

Figure 3

TownofPikeRoad's Group Selfie in Front of a Town Hall

Note. This selfie was posted to X accompanied by the text "And we're off! It's #CityHallSelfie Day, and the Town Hall team is up early to show you how to participate. If you stop by Town Hall on any given day, chances are you will be greeted by one of these smiling faces" (TownofPikeRoad, 2019).

Props were used in 22% of the photos (see Figure 4), and 3% featured a city mascot (see Figure 5). The images featured a range of city departments including public works, libraries, police and fire departments, city management, sustainability, and others. Mascots, police canines, horses (see Figure 6), and gear were on display. The tone of the photos ranged from silly to professional yet approachable. Most felt welcoming and fun. Images showcased groups in more relaxed poses and set-ups than a traditional staged group photo. Police officers snapped selfies from inside their squad cars, and librarians donned party accessories for their pictures.

Figure 4

Little Rock Parks & Recreation's Individual Selfie with Props

Note. This selfie was posted to X accompanied by the text "One of the CIC's with a fist bump for #CityHallSelfie day. @LRParksRec @CityLittleRock" (Little Rock Parks & Recreation, 2017).

Figure 5

Charlottesville City's Selfie Featuring a Mascot

Note. This selfie was posted to X accompanied by the text "But first...let me take a selfie! #cityhallselfie @CvilleCityHall #Charlottesville" (Charlottesville City, 2019).

Figure 6

Michael Vega's Individual Selfie with a Horse

Note. This selfie was posted to X accompanied by the text "Happy City Hall Selfie Day #CityHallSelfie" (Vega, 2016).

RQ2 considered which kind of resident-government relationship types are present in the campaign posts: information sharing, interaction, co-production, or self-organization (Falco & Kleinhans, 2018). Analysis revealed that most of the posts fell into the information-sharing function (98%, n=465), and only four were categorized as interaction. Five did not include text beyond the hashtag to accompany the picture. None were coded as co-production or self-

organization. Overall, the posts largely conveyed information about the campaign and fostered a social environment of appreciation for and engagement with local government.

The content analysis of X posts that focused on appreciation totaled 80, with 29% (n=23) focused on expressing appreciation of external entities such as a city and its residents or visitors. This external appreciation for the city was usually expressed by naming a geographical location such as "Happy #CityHallSelfie Day from @Tempegov and Arizona! I love this city!" (Gomez, 2019), "It's city hall selfie day! Hello from beautiful Pismo Beach!" (Lewis, 2016). Sometimes the community as a whole was recognized as illustrated in this post, "Happy #CityHallSelfie Day! Woodridge staff snapped some photos to show their civic pride in serving the community for #CityHallSelfie Day" (Village of Woodridge, 2018). Other times appreciation was conveyed by recognizing specific groups such as "In honor of #CityHallSelfie Day we knew we had to save this keeper from last night's Council Meeting honoring the Marietta City Schools Football and Cheerleader seniors! GO BIG BLUE!" (City of Marietta, 2019) or "Today is #CityHallSelfie Day. Selfies #CityofDouglasGA. Thanks Georgia Municipal Association for hosting" (City of Douglas, GA, 2016).

Of the 80 posts that expressed appreciation, 57 posts conveyed appreciation for the internal workings of specific departments and city services. City accounts thanked their employees for their GovLove (government love) and used the campaign to feature employees and teams that served the public through legal enforcement that offered "friendly smiles! Sharing a warm #CityHallSelfie greeting...and reminding us @srqparking Parking Enforcement employees are people too. Kudos!" (City of Sarasota, 2018) and "#CityHallSelfie photos with the cops of #NorthChicago, including the chief. It's been an honor working with them during my time in #localgov" (Frumkin, 2018).

Other posts recognized members of government such as mayoral positions— "#CityHallSelfie Hazlet's AWESOME Mayor Terry Bailey!10 plus years as Mayor…" (Hazlet Saskatchewan, 2017)—and others expressed appreciation for public servants—"Its #CityHallSelfie Day, and I want to thank from the bottom of my heart each of the more than 8,500 public servants who work for the City and County of Honolulu. Every worker and the jobs they do make this city our amazing home. Together, we say MAHALO!" (Caldwell, 2019). Posts recognized public servants and departments, including city planners, IT departments, parks and recreation staff, library staff, housing support staff, accounting departments, intergovernmental coordinators, economic development departments, and health departments for pumping "it out day after day to help our residents know more about city government services! #ELGL #CityHallSelfie" (Kansas City, 2018). Appreciation for what public servants do was well articulated in this post: "My @LongBeachCity team inspires me every day, and I am grateful to work alongside them. Happy #CityHallSelfie Day!" (Lee, 2019).

City accounts also invited people to engage or participate in the campaign or with city services. Posts that conveyed engagement totaled 72, with 48 encouraging campaign engagement. The posts often suggested that city officials were having fun: "Our consultants are getting in on the fun! Here's Greg Nelson bringing the #cityhallselfie to Carson City, NV!"

(Ralph Andersen & Associates, 2016). Other posts invited people to join in on the fun: "We are loving #CityHallSelfie Day in Goose Creek! Join the fun by stopping by City Hall or any City park or facility today to take a quick selfie ..." (City of Goose Creek, 2019).

Some posts invited people to visit specific locations: "Don't forget! It's #CityHallSelfie day! Stop by your favorite AZ city or town hall to celebrate! #AZCitiesWork" (City of Phoenix, 2016) or "#CityHallSelfie day is today! Stop by Meridian City Hall and snap a picture!" (Meridian Idaho, 2018). Some enticed participants with incentives: "To join in on the fun, come take a selfie at Hurst City Hall today and tweet us. While you're here, come to reception, and we'll give you a #HurstHearts t-shirt!" (City of Hurst, TX, 2018). Other posts asked that selfies be shared: "City of #Avl Human Resources Dept #cityhallselfie. Post yours!..." (City of Asheville, 2016) or "It's National #CityHallSelfie Day! Stop by Shawnee City Hall at Johnson and Nieman, snap your own #CityHallSelfie and tweet it to us!" (City of Shawnee, KS, 2017).

Of the 72 posts that conveyed engagement, 15 posts encourage people to participate in or promote specific city services. For example, some used the campaign for engagement with residents and posted their own #CityHallSelfie statistics with numbers of visitors to city hall that day or social media traffic. These posts enticed residents to make use of city services by challenging people to learn something new: "Don't be a dummy! Come check out all of the cool new things at the Florence Library and Community Center! #CityHallSelfieDay #cityhallselfie #TownHallSelfie" (Town of Florence, AZ, 2019) or "Did you know our Department has a social services home visiting program called Healthy Families America? They took a moment to take a #CityHallSelfie at a meeting with state partners. Learn more about the program: https://t.co/2NbyMt4wVj #ShowMeCoMo" (Columbia/Boone Co., 2019).

Many posts encouraged people to attend events such as art shows or community workshops or to be physically active: "...while exploring new potential water trails at Hindman Park! #CityHallSelfie" (Little Rock Parks & Recreation, 2019) and "...a cool Ninja obstacle course at Howdershell Park with races throughout the year! #parksandrec #CityHallSelfie #DiscoverHazelwood" (City of Hazelwood, 2019) and "Chip's #CityHallSelfie invites you to check out @LRParksRec's Rebsamen Tennis Center! We have 17 Lighted Courts ready for you all your tennis fun in @CityLittleRock" (Little Rock Parks & Recreation, 2019).

Discussion

Overall, the #CityHallSelfie campaign offered participants opportunities to frame aspects of local government to increase its presence serving its communities. The selfies and X posts created "small stories" (Georgakopoulou, 2016, p. 300) about local government and encouraged others to become producers of government-focused social media content. Falco and Kleinhans (2018) lamented that government communication is locked in a one-way pattern, viewing residents as merely passive recipients of content. However, #CityHallSelfie invited residents to produce content and co-create a campaign about government, thus bridging the digital realm and showing

real people in computer-mediated communication. These "conscious producers or creators of information, data, ideas, solutions and decisions" (Falco & Kleinhans, 2018, p. 32) are partners and stakeholders in governance.

The #CityHallSelfie campaign sought to involve stakeholders in the discussion and encourage a self-organized social media relationship between government and residents (Falco & Kleinhans, 2018). How residents and city hall employees chose to participate could move the campaign from a simple interaction to co-production. Had residents co-opted the campaign or spun off their own campaigns to solve a city problem, the optimal level of self-organization may have been reached. From the digital evidence of the campaign, most participants created their own one-way information-sharing messages and did not elevate to a higher level of interaction in their resident-government relationship.

Chon and Park (2020) suggested that those participating in social media activism are the ones motivated on the related issue. In the #CityHallSelfie campaign, the issue was appreciating the work of local government. While this study did not measure how many participants were city employees or public information officers, it is our sense that those would be the most motivated to join the campaign because they are the individuals most invested in this issue. Communication officers at municipalities can accept the challenge to move beyond token participation efforts, climb higher than the low ladder rungs of participation, and prioritize two-way communication. Zavattaro (2013) asserted that cities are for sale, and a city's communication efforts are largely those of a marketing/public relations firm. The key for public communicators will be to push campaign efforts beyond superficial marketing and parlay the efforts into higher-level engagement with residents. Viewing the #CityHallSelfie campaign as a public interest communications effort, communicators could strategize how they planned to move up Arnstein's (1969) ladder or into Falco and Kleinhans' (2018) more advanced resident-government relationships of co-production or self-organization. Cities would be wise to add their own city-specific hashtag to the efforts and follow-up with their residents who participated. To engage residents and move toward higher measures of involvement, cities could, for example, extend offers to participate on boards, solicit feedback on issues, or have individual residents take over the city's social channel for a day.

The social presence of city employees snapping selfies outside city halls, in offices, or at city service locations to showcase their city was a primary driver of the campaign. Selfies represented a mix of individual frames, with one person documenting a place of employment and pride, and groups framing the collective energy of local government. Selfies with small groups and departments were framing their contributions as a team or department. The composition of the campaign centered on city employees and their city halls. The campaign aimed to humanize city government and celebrated the people behind the city hall facade by expressing appreciation for their services and actively inviting residents to engage with local government. Its impetus was to honor local democracy and its actors in action. A sense of pride was conveyed in the selfies and the act of publicly posting them. In a blog post, ELGL said:

> #CityHallSelfie Day is more than a reason to take a break from work. It's about getting your community thinking about local government whether they realize it or not. For some community members they may finally figure out where city hall is, but at least they're getting involved. (ELGL, 2018, para. 2)

The main function of the posts reflected the lowest level of resident-government relationships, information sharing. While 72 posts attempted engagement, that engagement did not move toward true interaction. It may not be fair to say interaction was not evident. Some residents did participate as evidenced by mention of them as residents in the body of the post, but the digital part of the campaign was mainly a one-way blast into cyberspace. Posts did not use the @ symbol or other ways to engage online. The overall average for reshared posts was 1.62, but the average favorite was 9.19. People may have enjoyed a picture in their feed enough to click the heart icon, but maybe not enough to share the post on their own feeds with a reshared post.

Overall, the #CityHallSelfie campaign hints at transparency. It may not go so far as to invite resident partnership and participation in local government, but it is a move in that direction. #CityHallSelfie posts were mostly single one-way messages but gave information that would help residents participate and engage. When engagement is done well, ICMA suggests that it helps engender trust between residents and government, build community, and foster residents involvement instead of "demanding customers" (ICMA, 2016, para. 3).

In past campaigns, either the organizers or a select few key screen names have generated the bulk of related content (Bastos et al., 2013; Morales et al., 2012), but in the #CityHallSelfie campaign, no single entity was responsible for the majority of posts. The almost 5,000 different screen names in the dataset are a strong indicator of participation. Posts typically included other city-specific hashtags and @ELGL. Individual X accounts and the official city ones were used to post. Some campaign participants used the provided #CityHallSelfie media packet and logos to create selfie frames for resident involvement—one group even made a large banner for the centerpiece of their selfie (ironically, as it was not shot as a selfie). Others tied into community events or programs for added visibility. A few cities even used the hashtag to promote careers in certain departments and highlight job openings. One couple used the day to announce the newest resident in their #CityHallSelfie baby announcement.

Similar to how Mergel and Bretschneider (2013) outlined a three-stage adoption process for governments to use social media, a low-stakes campaign like #CityHallSelfie offered easy points of entry, such that a single post could be the first stage for digital resident engagement. One advantage of this campaign was the ease of entry. Local governmental officials could have snapped a quick selfie on the way into a building in a singular act and posted on their personal X account, tagging their city and the campaign hashtag. Some cities chose to make the campaign a much larger affair with props and planning, and even invited residents to participate.

The #CityHallSelfie campaign gave a glimpse into the people keeping city services moving and the buildings that represent local government. In his discussion of selfies, Murray (2015) suggested the selfie as a way for individuals to define themselves and "to make themselves visible" (p. 512). For local government employees, the hashtag is a small way to bring relevance

to the concept of city government, embodied by the representative buildings. Many local government employees are hidden, silent actors of civic service. They work behind the scenes and are rarely highlighted, except maybe in internal communication. A campaign like this asks them to stand in the spotlight for a moment and take credit for their work.

Implications

In this campaign, local governments were figuratively and literally framing their cities. They wanted to highlight people and places of local government—namely city hall and what that represents. Framing theory offers a framework for describing how the narrative is cast. The selfie-takers selected a governmental building and the characters to include in an image that was shared publicly to celebrate local government. Edelman (1993) explained that observations are framed and characterized. The decisions made in the construction of the selfie tell a particular narrative. Additionally, social presence theory offers additional context; when we say city hall or local government, we are talking about people and their roles in running a city. However, the term "city hall" conjures images of a building of bureaucracy, and not so much the individuals who conduct the daily tasks required for residents to work, live, play, and stay in their communities. By seeing images of the people of local government in front of their city halls, a social presence emerges—residents were reminded that a real person is behind that main phone number at the public works department. These selfies tended to highlight the individuals who run city departments, putting real faces with the city hall image and projecting these individuals into the physical site of local government—creating a social presence. Social presence theory describes how the digital realm can be bridged, showing real people in computer-mediated communication. In this case, the relationship was between the local government and its residents, who might otherwise view city hall as nothing more than a building.

Regarding framing theory, this study expanded on extant literature about hashtag campaigns. While #CityHallSelfie sought to inform about our local governments, it did not have the same level of activism inherent in other hashtags. The hashtag represented and still represents a pseudo-event meant to draw attention to how local government affects residents each day and therefore deserves resident engagement. Instead of just a building, the campaign helped to transform city hall into a place for change and growth for communities—if residents choose to invest their time and energy by engaging.

Where we might think of our local government as an app on our phones for reporting potholes or a website to check for bulk trash pick-up days, the faces in the selfies remind us that people are behind our local governments. This campaign was unique in that it asked participants to frame their social presence. The study of the campaign aligned with Page's suggestion that the research could extend to explore selfies for participation and protest activities.

Participants created a digital database of images with city buildings and local government employees. It is a visual campaign, and thus a discussion of visual narratives is necessary. In Lambiase's (2018) study of city websites, she found that a quarter of the sample showcased an

image of city hall, but none of the homepages included a photo of people near city hall. Of the included images, only 20% showed people at all. The #CityHallSelfie hashtag filled a gap in the documentation of activity in and around city hall, even if staged for a selfie. Visual rhetoric seeks the meaning in images and expands upon the broader rhetoric of language. The study of photographs, including selfies, can be used as artifacts to build our understanding and decipher meaning from the campaign (Foss, 2005). Giroux (2015) acknowledged the power of selfie culture to "expand the parameters of public dialogue, public issues" (p. 162), effectively enabling others to be heard.

 #CityHallSelfie offers a teachable case study for public information officers as well as public relations students. Students could brainstorm creative methods for participation for different departments within their own city's government. They could think through incorporating the department's mission or values into a #CityHallSelfie post. The campaign is a great example of a pseudo-event, where the organization found advocates, built up excitement prior to the event, fanned the flame during the day, handled media relations, and followed through with objectives (e.g., "if you liked this, you'll love being a member"). This campaign highlights the potential in seizing an opportunity and the advantages of environmental scanning, or the constant analysis of future opportunities, threats, and weaknesses. If ELGL was not actively checking posts, the organization could have missed the original post that sparked this multi-year campaign.

Limitations and future study

ELGL suggested the X platform for use in its original selfie day media kit. However, as of June 2020, there were 7,102 posts on Instagram, a photo-oriented social media site. In future studies, multiple platforms should be included in the campaign. Haro-de-Rosario and colleagues (2018) found that resident engagement with local governments was different for Facebook and X users. The effects of Twitter's transition to X and changes on the platform should also be considered. This study included only one hashtag and no variations of it, but more than 1,300 posts on Instagram used the variation #CityHallSelfieDay. #OurDay was a similar initiative by the Local Government Association to celebrate the "people who keep our communities running" ([Local](#) Government Association, n.d., para. 1).

 Future studies could review a larger sample and investigate #CityHomeSelfie, a 2020-2021 addition to the campaign accommodating virtual workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Investigating participant motivation for posting and the strength of their online social ties could align with the work of Won and colleagues (2018), who drew connections between campaign awareness, motivation, and social ties. The current study did not identify screennames as residents, public information officers, or others, but it is our feeling that public information officers drove this campaign. Future research could look at this group, their participation as a community of practice, and their efforts to raise the visibility of their profession. It would be worthwhile to ask public communicators about their motivations to have their cities participate in

the campaign and whether they view it more as public interest communications or marketing. In 2026, a 10-year trend study could offer insights into attributes for a long-term reoccurring hashtag campaign.

The aesthetics of the group selfie with Page's (2019) synthetic collectivisation could also be analyzed, as she states that the research might inform collective activities like protests and participation. Images could also be analyzed for Gandhi and Kar's (2022) dimensions of social presence. Originally tied to the richness provided by the medium, social presence has developed to include the behavior of individuals in computer-mediated communication. Co-presence would represent the feeling of being with others; psychological involvements would include emotions and the salience of others; and behavioral engagement would include deep involvement (Gandhi & Kar, 2022). Visual and linguistic features of social media posts can influence the social presence of the message (Gandhi & Kar, 2022). For example, posts with human faces may elicit low-level engagement, but direct gaze ensured engagement at higher levels. In large, the campaign and its participants were framing the social presence of local government through their posts and photos shared on X.

Lines of inquiry could measure impact: Did more residents discover the location of their own city halls, and did they engage more with local government? Kim and Phua (2020) asserted that consumers can learn about brands from campaign hashtags, and with this campaign, the hope is that some residents took a moment to engage with their local government. At the least, #CityHallSelfie had the potential to reach 137 million X followers in its first five years.

Conclusion

With 20,345 posts using #CityHallSelfie, the hashtag garnered some steam but has lost some traction since 2018. For 2020, the date was moved to August 14, to keep the campaign in the work week. However, #CityHallSelfie celebrated its eighth consecutive year on August 15, 2023. Through a single-day hashtag campaign, local governments have celebrated love for their cities and what they do for their communities. The #CityHallSelfie campaign emphasized local government pride and revolved around photographs of government employees, their city or town halls, and the hashtag #CityHallSelfie to showcase local GovLove (CityHallSelfie, 2020). The campaign highlighted local governments' desire to capitalize on the use of a hashtag and selfie culture to celebrate their collective efforts to govern. The campaign ultimately provides an opportunity to examine how one hashtag personalized city governments, their various departments, and employees—and the potential to transform a potentially lackluster image of a city hall building into a symbol of celebration of multifaceted local governance and its people.

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