

PUBLIC COMMUNICATION AND OPEN GOVERNMENT: COMMUNICATION ACTIONS IN THE GOVERNMENT OF MINAS GERAIS (BRAZIL) UNDER THE PRINCIPLES OF TRANSPARENCY, PARTICIPATION, AND COLLABORATION

Henrique Cordeiro Martins, Universidade FUMEC
Alessandro Ostelino Marques, Universidade FUMEC
Nair Prata, Universidade Federal de Ouro Preto

ABSTRACT

Public communication can be understood as a strategy/action aimed at the public interest, promoting citizenship, and mobilizing collective debate and is directly linked to the concept of open government. International organizations and scholars conceptualize open government differently, using the principles of transparency, participation, and collaboration in their definition. This study aimed to analyze the influence of open government communication mechanisms and actions in the Government of Minas Gerais (Brazil). A qualitative-descriptive study was conducted using a case study involving 12 state secretariats. The results showed that, although they had a systemic perspective on communication, the interviewees pointed to greater relevance and priority for journalism actions in the secretariats' communication departments and, consequently, in the promotion of open government. The events stood out in terms of participation and collaboration, functioning as a mechanism for building relationships and interacting with citizens and society's representative groups. These groups have an indirect influence on the government, either through formal integration provided for in institutional procedures or through attempts at negotiation and pressure. The most common transparency actions presented were those relating to the publication of facts through the production of news and the creation of guidelines for the press.

Keywords: Open Government, Public Communication, Transparency.

INTRODUCTION

Public communication is directly linked to open government and encompasses access to information, transparency, and participation. In this sense, access to information is understood as the implementation of transparency practices that guarantee the right to request information from the government for monitoring purposes. Transparency is understood as the expansion of information to society about the actions carried out by public agents; participation is understood as the path to social emancipation and the reinvigoration of democratic representation processes; social control is the participation of society in deliberation processes and public decisions; and collaboration is understood as engagement, the free exercise of citizens to influence political processes and make decisions in the collective sphere (Oliveira & Archanjo, 2020).

Public communication and open government are associated themes in this study, emphasizing the importance of communication in implementing, developing, and improving open government actions. The debate and practices of public communication contribute to

establishing and strengthening the government's dialog with society, and communication should be treated as one of the aspects of open government (Koçouski, 2012).

The term open government has been used in different ways, from approaches that restrict access to government information to broader ones that incorporate other principles and values into its meaning, such as transparency, citizen participation and collaboration. It refers to participatory experiences and should be understood as a modern method of governance with a space based on transparency and interaction between government and citizens (Oliveira & Archanjo, 2020).

In a democratic society, reliable information on public administration can be accessed straightforwardly. This further allows stakeholders to listen to the population, strengthen relationships, debate, and make decisions catering to the needs and interests of the community. Furthermore, new technologies have facilitated access to information on public administration across a wide range of sources - e.g., websites, portals, and social networks. The government's presence on the Internet, together with legislative progress, enhances democratic processes and helps change the culture of secrecy to one of publicity and access through the creation of channels that provide minimum standards of information on websites (Lamberty et al., 2019).

Public communication is a critical topic that is increasingly gaining attention, especially in the relationship between public authorities and society; however, it is still a recurring topic in Brazil. Public communication is a management tool and an instrument of democratization, a process that requires further study. It is necessary to increase transparency, guarantee access to information, and encourage participation. In this sense, this study seeks to contribute to reducing the theoretical-methodological gap in the effectiveness of open government initiatives through public communication.

As a relatively recent term, open government combines a set of government actions related to democratization and the expansion of public space. In view of the concepts of public communication and open government, we sought to describe what communication mechanisms and actions promote open government in Minas Gerais (Brazil) under the principles of transparency, participation, and collaboration.

Faced with the challenge of meeting social demands and improving the service system and dialog with citizens, the general objective was to describe the communication mechanisms and actions that promote open government in the Government of Minas Gerais under the principles of transparency, participation, and collaboration.

In recent years, open government has become part of the public management agenda as a policy widely discussed and implemented internationally, also garnering scholarly attention (Oliveira & Archanjo, 2020). In this sense, bringing together open government and public communication is opportune. Its performance requires a commitment to prioritizing the public interest over individual or corporate interest; centralizing the process in the citizen; treating communication as a process (not just as information); adapting instruments to the needs, possibilities, and interests of the public; and assuming its complexity (Duarte, 2012).

Initially, a bibliographic study was carried out on the classics of public communication, followed by a search on Web of Science on May 29, 2022, using "*public communication*" or "*communication in public administration*" as the keywords and booleans used. A total of 951 articles were analyzed. The search interval was from 1945 to 2022, with the first publication found being in 1973; then, there was a new publication in 1974, and the intervals between these became longer when compared to the initial year (6 years, 8 years, 9 years, and 10 years, respectively). The years 2020 and 2021 saw the highest peaks of publication on the topic researched, reaching more than 120 publications, a movement also accompanied by citations.

Studies on public communication tend to focus on internal organizational issues or the implementation of communication strategies in specific contexts. Few measure and empirically evaluate the impacts of public policies and the added value benefit of communication strategies.

For the reader's clarity and understanding, this article is structured in sections that deal with the conceptual and characteristic aspects of the constructs analyzed. This is followed by the methodological approach, data processing, and discussion of the results. Finally, the final considerations and references are presented.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Public Communication: Tools, Participation, and Reach

The organizational–communication combination is made up of institutional communication, which is responsible for building and shaping the corporate image and identity; marketing communication, which is responsible for advertising products and services in support of the marketing area; internal communication, which stimulates dialogue and the participation of employees and the company; and administrative communication, which provides support for management actions. This mix allows the organization to relate to its public and to society in general (Kunsch, 2003). In this sense, the philosophy of integrated communication emerges, which presupposes the combination of these types of communication in a clear global policy defined in the organizational objectives, thus enabling strategic actions with a view to effectiveness (Kunsch, 2003).

Public communication is a term that has been discussed since the 1980s, mainly in Europe (Kocouski, 2012). In Brazil, two historical references of authoritarian origins mark the trajectory of public communication in the country (Duarte, 2012). The first refers to the creation of the Department of Press and Propaganda (DIP) under Getulio Vargas, which operated predominantly from 1939 to 1945; the second is the Social Communication System, organized by the military government. The changes in the scenario brought about by the end of the military regime, the 1988 Constitution, the strengthening of press freedom, the work of interest groups and the third sector - combined with globalization and technological developments - have enhanced government transparency (Duarte, 2012).

Public communication has been understood as synonymous with government communication, and its understanding as a space “of” and “for” organized society is recent (Matos, 2012). Public communication involves responding to the citizen, feeds the relationship between the state and society, is inseparable from the agents involved in the communication process, and requires the social participation of its segments - not only as receivers but also as active producers.

Public communication in the articulation of the public interest has a mediating function and a democratic nature. It must open up channels that promote the free flow of information appropriate to each reality, be accessible and unrestricted, and promote the common interest (Cesar, 2012).

Communication tools can be classified as follows: mass, in which information is disseminated to as many people as possible, generating debate and establishing an agenda of issues; segmented, aimed at specific interest groups, with greater proximity to the interests and characteristics of the specific public; and direct, personalized contact that includes interaction and, in many cases, face-to-face communication that provides the opportunity to clarify doubts, establish relationships and trust, as well as promoting learning. Despite technology, communication through personal contact is the most effective (Duarte, 2012).

Public communication evokes the right to information, is related to the human process of obtaining knowledge, and can be grouped into the following categories (Duarte, 2012)): institutional, linked to image and identity; management, related to the decision-making process of public agents; public utility, informs, mobilizes, prevents or alerts the population; private interest, concerns the citizen, company or institution; marketing, public products and services that have competition in the market; accountability, explains political decisions, use of public resources and enables oversight; and public data, state control data about society and its functioning (Duarte, 2012).

Lamberty et al. (2020) point out that Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) enable the active participation of citizens in public administration and promote the effectiveness of the right of access to information. ICTs favor the exercise of the right to access information and make an extensive repository of public information available to the population through institutional websites. They also improve communication between public authorities and citizens, with a view to administrative efficiency. Active transparency is the spontaneous disclosure of public information by the public sector in places that are easily accessible, regardless of requests. Passive transparency can be understood as the duty of public authorities to enable society to submit requests for access to information, a right guaranteed by the Citizen Information Service (SIC) (Lamberty et al., 2020).

Communication goes hand-in-hand with social evolution; in public administration, it takes new directions with ICTs, enabling flows between government and society. A more active user of public services and the right to public information make it possible to claim other fundamental rights, forming critical citizens who are aware of their rights and duties. An empowered individual is better able to seek rights, with ICTs being the means and development (Melo & Carniello, 2021).

ICTs can make a significant contribution to bringing the state and society closer together, as well as encouraging discussion of the concept of open government, its purpose, and its principles.

Open Government: Concept, Practices and Barriers

Open government is a new paradigm for public management, with access to information and transparency being central to its consolidation. Internationally, the concept of open government is based on the principles of transparency, combating corruption, citizen empowerment and the use of technology; it should increase the availability of information, encourage social participation, implement integrity standards and expand access to technology (Brelàz & Bellix., 2021).

Different international organizations conceptualize open government (Brelàz & Bellix., 2021), as well as contemporary literature (Oliveira & Archanjo, 2020). It is possible to identify the following points of convergence between these organizations: a focus on transparency policy, considered to be the structural axis of the government agenda; social participation, as a process of collaboration between society and government; the integrating role of technology and the dialogue between the open government agenda and issues aimed at guaranteeing fundamental rights (Brelàz & Bellix, 2021).

De Blasio and Selva (2019), in one of the most recent conceptualizations, state that open government can be conceived as a political agenda oriented toward transparency, participation, and collaboration that relies on digital technologies to achieve its objectives. Transparency involves horizontal *accountability* mechanisms, such as the dissemination of open data and the provision of tools to expand citizens' monitoring and inspection powers.

Several initiatives have influenced the understanding of the term, with the Open Government Partnership (OGP) being one of the most important. The OGP was launched on

September 20, 2011, when the Partnership's eight founding countries—South Africa, Brazil, the United States, the Philippines, Indonesia, Mexico, Norway, and the United Kingdom—signed the Open Government Declaration and presented their action plans. The initiatives of these countries influenced the understanding of the term, gained visibility, and influenced other nations (Oliveira & Archanjo, 2020).

Wirtz et al. (2016) identify five barriers or resistances of public servants in the implementation of open government data: perceived legal barriers, compliance with legal requirements (data protection, storage rules, handling of confidential data and data protection guidelines); perceived bureaucratic decision barrier, bureaucratic decision-making culture, and minimal personal responsibility assumed, combined with the inefficiency and inflexibility of the bureaucratic structure; perceived organizational transparency, distorted public appearance and lack of clarity in work processes; perceived hierarchical barrier, hierarchical top-down, command-and-control culture; and perceived risk-related attitude of administrative employees, greater risk aversion on the part of public servants than private sector employees (Wirtz et al., 2016). These barriers are of a personal cognitive nature and are restricted to the cooperation of public servants with open government data initiatives.

Transparency, participation, and collaboration are the most important principles in the current debate on open government. Here are the specifics of each of them.

Transparency

The term transparency is used to reveal and make transparent an image, a concept, and, in particular, a piece of content when communicated in common speech. In moral terms, it reveals a hidden quality or even criminal activity. Classically speaking, transparency encompasses the simultaneous concept of light and dark, not entirely opaque but translucent, as well as moving from closed to open. What is transparent is what can be perceived, the objects it contains (Teles, 2011).

Transparency can be understood as unrestricted public access to reliable information about public sector decisions and performance. The public interest being paramount is a requirement of integrity and provides the basis for transparency. In this sense, transparency must be fostered by providing the public with quality, accessible, and accurate information (Armstrong, 2005). Transparency is a fundamental value for trust in governments and is proposed as a solution to citizens' mistrust. Therefore, it is not just seen as a means to achieve certain goals but has become a goal in itself (Grimmelikhuijsen & Porumbescu, 2013).

Transparency is made up of the following analytical-empirical categories or conditions: availability and accessibility of information; information flows (symmetrical or reciprocal, effective and simultaneous and active); relevance of information; transparency technologies; intelligibility (accessible language that allows appropriation), inclusion, autonomy (exercise of the subject's freedom and self-determination); participatory isonomy (equal and equal participation in public decision-making) and conversion of information into action (Grimmelikhuijsen & Porumbescu, 2013).

Transparency can also be classified as active and passive (Lamberty et al., 2020). The former is the spontaneous disclosure of public information by the public sector in places that are easily accessible, regardless of requests, and information on official websites is mandatory. As for passive transparency, it can be understood as the duty of public authorities to enable society to submit requests for access to information, ensured by the Citizen Information Service (SIC) (Lamberty et al., 2019).

Participation

Democracy, in principle, depends not only on rights but also on a political culture that supports them. Social criticism and protest movements have opened up new spaces for participation and deliberation in the state. In this sense, it is important to overcome inequalities and deficits in political education, in other words, to increase participation in decision-making processes, in which institutions and government must be understood as a means of realizing the will of citizens (Coelho & Nobre, 2004).

Oliveira and Archanjo (2020) propose a review of participation and its characteristics as a principle of open government. Citizen participation requires real and potent action, transcending the levels of information and consultation, in which citizens are part of decisions and can contribute to a more responsible and effective government. Participation has two facets: political, which aims to influence the political process; and citizen participation, which aims to redistribute power, should be an opportunity for citizens to deliberate on the future of society, an intervention in public life. Citizen participation means improving the system of representation and a form of active control in the state/society relationship (Oliveira & Archanjo, 2020).

Conceptually, participation involves multiple interpretations, ranging from involvement in an activity to the organization of a work agenda for decision-making, and is a determining factor in transparency, accountability, and meeting social demands. From a social perspective, participation has the character of a relationship. Meanwhile in politics, it occurs through processes of representation in the choice of representatives and through interaction with public organizations (Sanchez & Marchiori, 2017).

Participation is ensured mainly through the Internet, a communication channel between representatives and those they represent. Websites, networks and social media have made it possible to strengthen the relationship between government and society. Tools and mechanisms (Internet, apps, telephone services, portals, interaction platforms), form of participation (active - through representations and collectives and passive - access to information and tools); agents (citizens, organized civil society and managers); and democratization (new forms of representation and management) offer an overview of the effectiveness, mediation and opportunities for participation (Sanchez & Marchiori, 2017).

Collaboration

Collaboration can be understood as the coordinated action of people or organizational units working together to achieve common goals (Lucke & Große, 2014). Collaboration can be considered as a process in which actors, with autonomy, interact via negotiations, create rules and structures that govern their relationships and ways of acting or deciding on common issues, a process that involves shared norms and mutually beneficial interactions (Thomson & Perry, 2006).

Electronic collaboration and open collaboration are two trends influencing government collaboration (Lucke & Große, 2014). The recent advancements in ICTs have propelled the possibilities of collaboration, and people can work together regardless of location and time. The spread of social media has facilitated communication and collaboration, with information being able to reach an unlimited number of recipients in real-time. In this way, via electronic collaboration, organizations can open up their processes and involve external actors via communication, allowing stakeholders to follow the courses of action. New collaborations enable co-production without overloading organizational capacities (Lucke & Große, 2014).

Collaboration in the public service suggests the need to consider the inclusion of stakeholders, the means of decision-making, the distribution or balance of power, trust between members and potential members, the distribution of resources, the organization of leadership, and issues of accountability (Vangen et al., 2015). Collaborative governance involves authorities and often communities and requires a focus on consensus decision-making. In contrast, government collaborations aim to gain a collaborative advantage.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This qualitative, descriptive study was carried out through a case study of the communications departments of the Minas Gerais State Secretariats of Government.

The unit of analysis studied was the Government of Minas Gerais, through its 12 secretariats, which are members of the government cabinet, head specialized portfolios and assist the governor in administrative activities. The interviews took place with individuals in the communications departments of the Minas Gerais government; they act as a link between the government and society and stakeholders responsible for information management. One communications office— comprising the Secretary of State for Government and the Deputy Secretary of State for Government—reports directly to senior management. The unit of analysis referred to communication professionals who work in content production, event management, relations with society, and campaign development.

Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews via the Microsoft Teams collaboration application. The participants were initially approached via the Communications Undersecretariat and by email, with an invitation and reinforcement of participation by telephone. The researchers guaranteed the interviewees' freedom of expression and the interviewer's maintenance of the objective. An interview script was used based on the constructs studied and the categories and subcategories of analysis described in the reference framework (Chart 1). The information was collected using a script that covered aspects of the day-to-day practice of communication professionals and sought to capture the group's representations. The structured interviews were carried out between 29/11/2022 and 04/01/2023, using a set list of questions for all the interviewees.

The 12 participants were referred to by the respective acronym of their secretariat as follows:

- a. State Secretariat for Agriculture, Livestock and Supply (SEAPA),
- b. State Secretariat for Culture and Tourism (SECULT)
- c. State Secretariat for Economic Development (SEDE),
- d. State Secretariat for Social Development (SEDESE)
- e. State Secretariat for Education (SEE)
- f. State Secretariat for Finance (SEF)
- g. State Secretariat for Government (SEGOV)
- h. State Secretariat for Infrastructure and Mobility (SEINFRA)
- i. State Secretariat for Justice and Public Security (SEJUSP)
- j. State Secretariat for the Environment and Sustainable Development (SEMAD)
- k. Minas Gerais State Secretariat for Planning and Management (SEPLAG)
- l. State Secretariat for Health (SES)

Of those interviewed 11 works for the Government of Minas Gerais as broadly recruited professionals and 1 as a permanent employee. There were 9 female and 3 male interviewees, 11 with a degree in journalism and 1 with a degree in public relations. Of the 12 interviewees, 10 hold the position of chief advisor. The predominance of the interviewees' training in journalism reveals an emphasis on the production and dissemination of news, as well as investment in press relations as a central communication action.

The data was analyzed using the categorical content analysis technique (Bardin, 2016), according to the categories described in Table 1.

Table 1 CATEGORIES OF ANALYSIS		
Category	Description	Authors
Public Communication	A communicative strategy or action that takes place when the public interest is the focus, based on the responsibility that the agent has (or assumes) to recognize and attend to the citizens' right to information and participation in matters that are relevant to the human condition or life in society.	Bucci (2015); Duarte, (2012); Koçouski, (2012)
Transparency	What allows itself to be perceived as unrestricted public access to public sector decisions and performance; a fundamental value for trust in government.	Armstrong (2005), Grimmelikhuijse n et al. (2013); Teles (2011).
Participation	Real and active action by citizens as part of the decision-making process, which takes place institutionally, can contribute to improvements in inclusive policies.	Oliveira & Archanjo (2020) ; Sanchez & Marchiori (2017).
Collaboration	Working together to achieve common goals; a process of interaction via negotiation to reach decisions; requires continuous energy and commitment, and skills from those in charge of managing collaboration.	Lucke & Große (2014), Thomson & Pery (2006); Vangen (2015).

Source: Prepared by the author, 2022.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The results of this survey were presented in two parts. The first recorded the professionals' perception of the role of communication in the public sector. The second focused on the interviewees' perceptions of open government and how this type of government affects their work, on the central principles of transparency, participation and collaboration.

Structure of the Government of Minas Gerais: description of the case

The Government of Minas Gerais is made up of 15 autarchies, 22 councils, the Public Defender's Office, 15 state-owned companies, 12 foundations, the State Public Prosecutor's Office, 9 autonomous bodies, the State General Secretariat, the vice-governorship, 12 state secretariats, as well as the Judiciary and the Legislature. The MG Portal - www.mg.gov.br - is the official services page of the Minas Gerais executive and aims to provide access to the main services offered by the agencies and entities of the Minas Gerais public administration, managed by SEPLAG. The Government of Minas Gerais has a profile on the following social networks: TikTok (governomg), Instagram (governomg), Facebook (Government of the State of Minas Gerais), Twitter (@governomg), LinkedIn (Government of the State of Minas Gerais) and Youtube (@governodeminasgerais).

Minas Gerais ranks second nationally in the transparency and public governance performance ranking of Transparency International (<https://indice.transparenciainternacional.org.br/>)—a Berlin-based non-profit anti-corruption organization that operates internationally. The global institution's index is a tool for verifying requirements at various federal levels and branches of government. Minas Gerais ranks second overall in the 2022 ranking, with 90 points in the performance evaluation, an index considered excellent by the evaluation committee, second only to the state of Espírito Santo. The methodology used to classify the

institutions is made up of eight dimensions: Legal, Platforms, Administration and Governance Financial and Budgetary Transparency, Digital Transformation, Communication, Participation, and Data.

Communication in the Secretariats of the Government of Minas Gerais

According to the interviewees' statements, communication in the public sector is of great importance and is related to the function of publicizing government practices to society. The interviewees associate public communication with its mediating function; it presupposes dissemination and dialog; it establishes a dialogue with society, especially via the press. Public communication is also frequently associated with transparency.

Public communication is linked to the construction of citizenship, whose act of informing must involve consultation and dialog in the government's relationship with society, participation, access to information, an action aimed at the public interest, and collective debate (Koçouski, 2012; Bucci, 2015).

I see it as accountability. Bringing the work of transparency to society, bringing to society's attention what is done in the public service (SEE interviewee)

Communication is essential. We work for the citizens and the public. We develop policies, activities, and actions. If we don't communicate with the public, we don't fulfill our function (SECULT interviewee).

Communication in the public sector has two aspects: one internal, to bring information, daily life, and updates to the internal public, and the other external, to help them understand what the government is doing (SEMAD interviewee).

One can see in the interviewees' statements that the centrality of the communication process lies with the sender, which leads one to infer that there is a belief in the hypothesis that the sender is highly credible, i.e., most of the secretariats have significant credibility as sources of information, which means that their messages are significantly accepted by society. However, no arguments are presented to prove this credibility.

The following reports show that the communication process is also at the receiving end, with interaction and activities that promote a closer relationship between the government and society.

Communication at SEJUSP has the function of transmitting a sense of security to the population. We have various programs ranging from socio-education, the prison system, preventive activities, and the integration of security as a whole to promote a safer state (SEJUSP interviewee).

Communication has this role of interfacing with the population and the press. In addition to publicizing projects, we interact with citizens and media outlets through our channels (SEINFRA interviewee).

The reports converge with the idea presented earlier that information should expand knowledge, drive action, and, in the public context, be an asset of society and can change the environment and social structure (Batista, 2010; Vroniuk et al., 2019).

The general perception is that communication plays a strategic role in the secretariats, which not only supports public management but also contributes significantly to decision-making and social returns.

Communication is totally strategic in the Health Department. We think about the dialogue with the population and with health professionals, the way it will be communicated, and the objectives to be achieved (SES interviewee).

Communication accompanies the entire secretariat's projects; we are the interface for everything that happens in the government, and this demonstrates a strategic role (SEDE interviewee).

Communication mechanisms are understood by professionals as communication channels and are divided into two groups: internal and external. The most common are

- a. **Internal:** Intranet, newsletters, bulletins (daily, fortnightly, or weekly), visual communication, and emails;
- b. **External:** website, social networks, specific service systems, production of articles, and press relations.

The official website and social networks were named as the most important mechanisms, in addition to the press office. Campaigns and events appear as a supporting role and, in most cases, are not mentioned. In some secretariats, internal communication is the exclusive responsibility of the human resources department and is largely shared or fully developed by the communications department.

The responses regarding the structure of the staff working in the advisory services varied significantly, and no uniformity would allow a comparison to be made regarding the formation of the secretariats' work teams. There are extremely lean teams with very complex advisory structures.

We are two journalism professionals working in the advisory department (SEF interviewee).

SEJUSP is large and has five sub-secretariats. The communications department is divided into journalism, events, press, and general coordination. There are 15 professionals involved in content creation, social networks, events, photography, and journalism (SEJUSP interviewee).

Within Health Communication, we have 6 nuclei, 32 people at the central level, and around 55 collaborators at the regional level. (SES interviewee, 2022).

“According to the reports, the criteria applied to define press content, campaigns, and events aimed at citizens are related to what each secretariat is developing, the power of integration of the themes with the public involved, the demands of the press and the projects of the thematic areas of each secretariat.”

Perceptions of Open Government: Transparency, Participation and Collaboration

The term open government implies transparency and access to government information from a limited perspective that does not incorporate principles of citizen participation and collaboration. In the survey, a significant number of respondents had initial difficulties in conceptualizing open government. Many respondents associate open government with the mandatory services provided under the Access to Information Act.

Every government should aim to be as transparent as possible - this proposal for transparency borders on social justice. Nothing could be fairer than for the government to present everything it does for society in a transparent manner (SEF interviewee).

Open government is when we manage to provide the greatest possible transparency of information. Communication is a crucial tool for transparency, in addition to the mechanisms already legally defined (SEPLAG interviewee, 2022).

Open government is the best way to show what is being done and seek maximum transparency. As well as responses to the press, we have the Access to Information Law that people can use (SEMAD interviewee, 2022).

In a broader analysis, some answers about the understanding that a public communication professional should have of transparency were imprecise and even evasive, demonstrating the interviewees' familiarity with the word, but difficulty in elaborating a meaning for it. Some arguments included mention of the Access to Information Act and ethics, while others translated the meaning of clarity of content, truth, and disclosure, but in a restricted sense of access to information through newsworthiness and responses to requests from the LAI and the press.

Transparency

The publicity of government activities showed a significant relationship with the theme of transparency, demonstrating that all acts of public administration must be widely publicized in order to provide accountability. The SEF interviewee's response was associated with holding government officials accountable for their actions, which gives the term greater breadth.

The answers to the question of transparency also did not mention its classification into active and passive. However, there were constant examples involving the handling of requests for access via the Access to Information Law and the availability of data on the secretariats' official websites.

A communications professional should be guided by transparency, giving clear and objective answers (SEE interviewee).

A professional must understand that public administration must be based on transparency (SECULT interviewee).

The understanding of transparency is to work within the content of the reality that we have, of what it is. There's no way to sugarcoat it. In general, people are aware of this. We respond to all the demands of the Access to Information Law, respecting the deadlines of the press and the law (SEMAD interviewee).

Journalists deal with transparency issues all the time. It's inherent to their work (SEAPA interviewee).

Regarding the incorporation of transparency into communication processes, the majority of the secretariats reported that the management of transparency is the responsibility of the advisors, maintaining its own field on their websites, and managing the Electronic System of the Citizen Information Service (e-SIC), which allows requests for access to information to be made, deadlines to be monitored and requests to be answered by the state executive. Different routines were described regarding transparency and its incorporation into the praxis of communication activities. There was a common observance by the respondents of the requirements imposed by the Access to Information Law for websites and the deadlines for responding to requests.

Regarding the types of transparency, active and passive, according to the reports, the main channels are the website of each secretariat, the e-SIC, the Public Transparency Portal, and social networks. As discussed earlier, active transparency is the spontaneous disclosure of information with easy access, regardless of request, and is mandatory on official websites. Passive transparency is the government's way of making it easier for society to submit requests for access to information, which is guaranteed by the Citizen Information Service and provided for in the LAI (Lamberty et al., 2019).

We use our website, where most of the data is available, social networks, where our figures are also presented, and also via the press. The e-SICc is in our observatory. The communications department also answers queries sent through the Contact Us option (SEJUSP interviewee).

The question "*What government information is most made available to the general public?*" was the basis for explaining the content of interest to the government and society. In this sense, the context of each secretariat was particular to the answers.

The most recurrent information relates to content and service channels, via the press about the budget, public accounts, the processing of processes, as well as demands from pensioners about procedures (SEPLAG interviewee).

Episodes of the moment, like rains, dams, moments, and certain situations. They're linked to interests; there's nothing very specific (...) (SEMAD interviewee).

According to the Access to Information Law No. 12.527 of 2011, content that could compromise the security of society or the state can be classified in one of three degrees of secrecy: reserved, secret, or top secret. With regard to information classified as reserved or secret, the interviewees said that there is classified information at SEF, SEPLAG, SEDESE, and SEJUSP, while there is no classification at the others. Some interviewees were unaware of this classification, and in these cases, statements such as “*There is no such classification in communication*” or “*Not in communication*” recurred.

When asked about the importance of information and communication technologies in promoting open government at the secretariat, the respondents highlighted the current importance of interdisciplinary areas as a way of modernizing and reaching out to society.

Respondents often considered it advisable to promote the use of technology in communication processes in order to increase public transparency. Despite the benefits achieved by combining the two areas - technology and communication - for transparency, such as the increase in the volume of public information made available, bureaucracy was presented as a recurring negative element and a challenge to be overcome in this process.

Participation

The interviews showed that social participation from a communication perspective is mostly understood as a form of rapprochement and interaction; in other cases, it is considered without presupposing shared decisions and social control.

The structure of communication mechanisms as promoters of participation was pointed out by some interviewees, especially those who demonstrated closer ties with society, such as SEJUSP, SEE, SEGOV, and SES, who addressed the importance of the citizen for the government and also the way in which information should flow from society to the government.

Social participation is important in any area. In education, this interaction exists all the time. We receive demands and suggestions (...). We are very close to society, identifying problems and good practices’ (SEE interviewee).

Social networks promote a lot of interactivity with society. At events, we have live streams and public hearings, as well as face-to-face events with mayors and the meetings that take place every day (SEGOV interviewee).

As discussed in the theoretical framework, participation as a principle of open government encompasses action and goes beyond levels of consultation and information, allowing citizens to contribute to decision-making (Oliveira & Archanjo, 2020). Participation occurs in an institutionalized way and through inclusive policies (Sanchez & Marchiori, 2017). The SEPLAG interviewee understands the importance of participation and realizes the need to promote improvements that include society in this process.

This can be improved and is a goal. To intensify this two-way communication, we must increase communication with citizens so that we receive more feedback (SEPLAG interviewee).

The reports lead to the development of a system that makes it possible to broaden the concept among civil servants and create a favorable environment for the participation of society, as indicated by Sabioni et al. (2016), which is based on structure, the presence of the public institution in the life of society and mobilization for social control.

When asked about the secretariat’s mechanisms for interacting with society, the interviewees gave similar answers to the question of transparency channels. Little was added about obtaining feedback. When citizens not only receive the message but interact with the public sector, it can create a rapprochement with the government.

The answers to the question about which pressure groups and entities work with each secretariat and their participation in the processes that influence decision-making revealed a plurality of organized subjects. These groups are segmented according to the issues dealt with in each secretariat and are understood as those organized groups that defend various interests and work with the government to obtain benefits and improvements and, in a way, influence public management. As far as we can tell, in the majority of cases, the interference of these groups is frequent in times of crisis, the most frequently cited being competition candidates, unions, state councils, civil servants, opposition MPs, and NGOs. The participation of these groups occurs primarily over calls for debate and negotiation via the press, public hearings, and formal meetings.

Collaboration

For the most part, the participants in the interviews did not distinguish between collaboration and participation, in many cases treating the terms as synonyms rather than distinct concepts. Questions such as measuring engagement and defining responsibilities in the collaborative process were not answered on the grounds that they were not familiar with them or that they were not part of the communication area's activities. The aspect of representativeness in deliberations proved to be a complex point in the collaborative process, with this principle being perceived strongly in councils, chambers, and formal groups that act in power and minimally as an open culture.

With regard to the understanding that a communications professional should have and the challenges encountered in promoting social collaboration in government activities, the responses addressed aspects of importance, control, knowledge, and action. Little was said about influencing decisions and sharing government power with society.

By following the government's actions, society can have a say in government projects, and there is a greater chance of their wishes being met (SEINFRA interviewee).

The population's collaboration is still small (...). People complain a lot and do little (SECULT interviewee).

There are various contexts for dialog between citizens and public administration, and, understandably, forms and tools need to be developed to increase collaboration. When asked about the existence of collaborative groups, the majority of interviewees identified groups in their secretariat's daily activities and presented arguments about dialogue with society:

We have many types of council, two large ones, including those formed by large supervisory institutions (SEJUSP interviewee).

We have various committees with public hearings. We take part in activities in the Legislative Assembly and other instances, such as public purchases that involve society as a supplier to the state (SEPLAG interviewee).

The results of the collaboration process are disseminated in the routine activities of the area through articles, in the balance sheets of the actions of the secretariats, as a form of accountability in reports, periodic videos are also produced, technical responses in the case of public hearings and making meetings available on Youtube.

The interviews suggested that the government's relationship with citizens and social groups is at a level where each person's responsibility is quite distinct in the collaborative process. Compared with the theoretical framework, we saw the possibility of raising this interactivity to a level that enables the sharing of the decision-making process, going beyond the adoption of the perspective of the citizen as a client to a collaborative agent.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Communication is critical to the performance of organizations. Therefore, the most appropriate mechanisms must be adopted for it to be assertive. Related to this, the guiding question of this investigation sought to answer: What public communication mechanisms and actions promote open governance?

Although they had a systemic perspective on communication, the interviewees pointed to greater relevance and priority for journalism actions in the secretariats' communication departments and, consequently, in the promotion of open government. Textual production and press relations are central to their arguments.

The events stood out in terms of participation and collaboration, working as a mechanism to bring citizens and representative groups of society closer together. These groups have a direct or indirect influence on the government, either through formal integration provided for in institutional procedures or through attempts at negotiation and pressure.

It was found that the institutional websites and the e-SIC service are widely used by the secretariats. The websites are seen as central mechanisms in the relationship with society, which also includes the dissemination of spontaneous information of public interest. The structures of each advisory body do not reflect uniformity or strategic treatment by the government but rather respond to the needs and resources that each secretariat has or can obtain to carry out communication work.

In the survey results, the perception of open government prevailed as synonymous with transparency, access to information, and compliance with the obligations imposed by the Access to Information Law; it did not include citizen participation and collaboration or the accountability of public authorities in this formulation. Technology was considered a fundamental resource for promoting open government, but bureaucracy remains a challenge and an obstacle to achieving this demand.

Although transparency is an everyday word, the concept is still hazy, and it is often associated with fulfilling requests and the LAI. In the perception of transparency, the provision of up-to-date information that is easy for citizens to access and understand, as well as accountability to society, stood out. There were no arguments about the classification of transparency as active or passive. Participation was perceived as a way for the government to get closer to and interact with society without presupposing shared decisions and social control. Collaboration was not broadly distinguished from participation. The aspect of representativeness in deliberations proved to be a complex point in the process of collaboration, with this principle being perceived significantly in the councils, chambers, and formal groups that act in power and in a small way as an open culture.

Obviously, this study is not exhaustive, but it does provoke possibilities and glimpses of other paths to be followed. It is recommended that the practices, possibilities, and contributions of publicity and public relations professionals to open government be verified beyond the perception of communication managers in a synergy and integration of these areas with corporate journalism in a comprehensive vision of public communication needs. Future studies should investigate the citizen's perspective on open government and evaluate their needs to act effectively in an expanded democracy, converging with modern Latin American studies on the reception of communication theories.

REFERENCES

- Armstrong, E. (2005). Integrity, transparency and accountability in public administration: Recent trends, regional and international developments and emerging issues. *United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 1*(10), 1-10.
- Batista, C. L. (2010). The dimensions of public information: Transparency, access and communication. *Transinformação, 22*(3), 225-231.
- Blasio, Emiliana; Selva, Donatella (2019). Implementing open government: A qualitative comparative analysis of digital platforms in France, Italy and United Kingdom. *Quality & Quantity: International Journal of Methodology, vol. 53*, issue 2, No 18.
- Brelaz, G. de, Crantschaninov, T. I., & Bellix, L. (2021). Open Government Partnership in the city of São Paulo and the São Paulo Aberta program: Challenges in the diffusion and institutionalization of a global policy. *Cadernos EBAPE.BR, 19*(1), 123-137.
- Bucci, E. (2015). The State of Narcissus: Public communication at the service of private vanity. Companhia das Letras.
- César, R. C. E. (2012). Public communication as praxis in the process of mediation and mobilization of civil society in the public sphere. [PhD thesis in Communication.] University of São Paulo, School of Communication and Arts.
- Coelho, V. S. P., & Nobre, M. (2004). Participation and deliberation: Democratic theory and institutional experiences in contemporary Brazil. Editora 34.
- Duarte, J. (2012). Public communication tools. In: DUARTE, Jorge (Org.), *Comunicação Pública: Estado, mercado, sociedade e interesse público*. Atlas.
- Grimmelikhuijsen, S., & Porumbescu, G. (2013). The effect of transparency on trust in government: A cross-national comparative experiment. *Public Administration Review, 73*(4), 575-586.
- Koçouski, M. (2012). Public communication: building a concept. In: Matos, H. (Org.), *Comunicação pública: Interlocuções, interlocutores e perspectivas* (41-57). ECA/USP.
- Kunsch, M. M. K. (2003). Planning public relations in integrated communication (Revised edition). Summus.
- Lamberty, A. O., Gomes, T. B., & Silva, R. L. da. (2020). Right of access to public information and electronic government: Transparency in the portals of the Executive Branch of Argentina and Brazil. *Revista da Faculdade de Direito, 65*(1), 157-184.
- Lucke, J. V., & Große, K. (2014). Government collaboration: Opportunities and challenges of open collaborating with and within government. In: Gascó-Hernández, M. (Ed.), *Open Government: Opportunities and challenges for public governance (189-204)*. Springer.
- Matos, H. (2012). Public communication, public sphere and social capital. In: DUARTE, Jorge (Org.), *Comunicação Pública: Estado, mercado, sociedade e interesse público*. Atlas.
- Melo, L. A. de., & Carniello, M. F. (2021). Public communication as an instrument of development, democracy and citizenship building: Analysis of transparency practices and access to information in the Municipality of São Luis. MA. *INTERAÇÕES, (22)*3, 819-837.
- Oliveira, E. C. de., & Archanjo, D. R. (2020). Transparency legislation and the population's perception of democracy: insights from Latinobarometer data. *Gestus Caderno de Administração e Gestão Pública, (3)*, 4-23. *United Nations Organization* (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.
- Sanchez, C. S., & Marchiori, P. Z. (2017). Elements that characterize popular participation in the context of open government initiatives: A systematic literature review [Poster presentation]. *IV Brazilian Meeting of Public Administration, João Pessoa, Brazil*.
- Teles, G. M. (2011). The chiaroscuro of literary transparency. *Guará, 1*(1), 95-108.
- Thomson, A. M., & Perry, J. L. (2006). Collaboration processes: Inside the black box. *Public Administration Review, 66*(1), 20-32.
- Vangen, S., Hayes, J. P., & Cornforth, C. (2015). Governing cross-sector, inter-organizational collaborations. *Public Management Review, 17*(9), 1237-1260.
- Voroniuk, C.R. Motta, I.D. da., & Séllos-Knoerr, V. C. de. (2019). The role of the State in the face of the challenges imposed by social control through information and communication and its reflexes on the preservation of the free will of individuals. *Economic Analysis of Law Review, 10*(2), 261-277.
- Wirtz, B. W., Piehler, R., Thomas, M. J., & Daiser, P. (2016). Resistance of public personnel to open government: A cognitive theory view of implementation barriers towards open government data. *Public Management Review, 18*(9), 1335-1364.

Received: 27-Mar -2024, Manuscript No. AAFSJ-24-14675; **Editor assigned:** 29-Mar-2024, Pre QC No. AAFSJ-24-14675(PQ); **Reviewed:** 04-April -2024, QC No. AAFSJ-24-14675; **Revised:** 05-April-2024, Manuscript No. AAFSJ-24-14675(R); **Published:** 30-Jul-2024