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Increasing Public Value in the Shillong Region of Meghalaya

Leon Miller

Social networking is increasingly being applied to municipalities to improve social-economic performance, improve the relationship between government and the public, and increase benefits for all stakeholders. The literature on social networking stresses that it increases transparency, reduces corruption, and enhances a locale's 'smart municipality' image. However, in spite of the success of social networking in other global contexts there has been no development of a theoretical model that explains the factors that make it effective for improving social and economic conditions in the Shillong region. This article explains how social networking could be applied to the Shillong region to integrate the resources of society to increase benefits for all stakeholders. Thus, this article contributes to literature on social networking by explaining how the fundamental concepts and principles related to social networking provide the basis for a theory of how the concept can improve social conditions.

Keywords: Meghalaya, value rationality, firm-centric, *development problematique*, integrated value creation networks, triangulation, Grounded Theory, natural law, prudence

For assuming that freedom is found in a democracy, and also equality, this would be so most fully when to the fullest extent all alike share equally in [co-creating social reality] - Aristotle

Introduction

This article explains why the Shillong region has the potential of being an ideal model for demonstrating social networking's ability to increase beneficial outcomes for the people of the region. The conviction of the public authorities, organizational leaders, and economists who apply this strategy in other contexts is that it is a knowledge age approach to creating a thriving economy and is the basis for increasing

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public value. That is to say that the Shillong region has the potential to model the ability of social networking to improve the social-economic conditions of society by enhancing the operating effectiveness and efficiency of private organizations and public institutions and by improving the quality of services and products offered to the public. In this respect, the Shillong region has the potential for being an ideal model of using social networking as a means of expressing its own particular value perspective regarding sustainable socio-economic planning. The increased positive outcomes occur as the result of employing social networking to integrate the interests of public officials, the commercial sector, and that of the public in a way that reconciles what often seems to be irreconcilable differences (Porter and Kramer, 2006; Miller, 2017).

A study of the municipalities that successfully apply social networking reveals that it improves organizational and social-economic performance, improves the relationship between government and the public, improves overall social conditions, and there is compelling evidence of increased beneficial and satisfactory outcomes for all stakeholders. Social networking offers an effective strategy for improving social-economic conditions because of its effectiveness in establishing collaborative processes that generate vital knowledge needed for integrating what would otherwise be the conflicting interests of the diverse segments of society. Thus, social networking works to create greater social solidarity by acting to improve the relationship between the various segments of the society.

Employing social networking as an approach to co-creating an increase in public value is in line with the general cultural values of the Shillong region. Co-creating an increase in public value is complementary with the democratic principle promoting a participatory approach to constituting social existence. Social networking promotes democratic peace by reconciling the dichotomy between powerful special interest groups and the endeavor of the public to increase social justice. Thus, social networking is a knowledge age paradigm that shifts the focus of business organizations and public institutions toward a social constructivist or participatory approach to co-constituting social reality. This knowledge age approach to social planning offers a welcome change to the people of the Shillong region who were critical of the prior approach to social-economic development that narrowly focused on materialism, consumerism, and the exploitation of the region's natural resources.

Social networking is an approach to social-economic activity that prompts a shift away from the closed, firm-centric, internally focused, value capturing perspective of the industrial era (i.e. with its focus on profit and claiming value rather than creating value). The new paradigm is a shift toward a humanistic perspective on social-economic activity which is characteristic of the knowledge age (e.g. open, market-centered, and externally focused – with the emphasis on making a better value offer to clients and satisfying stakeholders thus increasing both social capital and public value) (Prahalad&Ramaswamy, 2004; Vargo & Lusch: 2011). In the network society successful business, improving public-private relations, and improving social systems increasingly requires acting as open participatory and interactive systems that endeavor to create value. The change is also indicative of the shift toward

improved relations between business and stakeholders, between the government and the public, and between the media and its users. Thus, social networking's participatory approach to social-economic planning is the best strategy for gaining desired outcomes in democracies. Consequently, the social networking approach democratizes the process of value creation (Miller, 2016: 63-69). The democratized approach to co-creating social-economic reality empowers agents at every level and in every sector with the ability to experience outcomes that they have reason to value (Sen, 1999: 291).

However, in spite of the marvelous results increasingly reported from various contexts there has been no attempt at developing a strategy for applying the concept in the Shillong region. This article explains the concepts and principles that are foundational to the development of a social networking approach for the Shillong region in order to increase benefits for individual stakeholders, private businesses, and public institutions. Section two explains why the social networking and co-creation of value concepts emerged as a preferable approach to sustainable social-economic planning. Section three explains the Grounded Theory approach to developing a conceptual framework for a social networking model for the Shillong region. The assumption is that theory development results from determining the conceptual data *grounded* in the literature on social networking and value creation and integrating that data with the foundational concepts and principles of the Shillong cultural context. The factors that make social networking effective are determined by triangulating data obtained from an exploratory study of a case where social networking works effectively, the conceptual data obtained from the study of the literature on social networking and value creation, and the foundational values and principles of the Shillong cultural context. Section four (the concluding section) describes a theoretical model for successfully applying the social networking concept in the Shillong region in order to create outcomes considered desirable by a larger segment of the people of the region.

The Shift to Sustainable Social-Economic Planning in the Shillong Region

The foundational literature on how to resolve the difference between the interests of the various segments of society prescribes social networking as a means of integrating the interests of a disparate public (Mawlong, 2016: 7; Aristotle, 1959: 9-13; Mannheim, 1979, 53-57; Mann, 2005, 2-4 & 310-313). Experts of the cultural values that dominate the Shillong region point out that the foundational principles that shape the culture of the region are prescriptions for having harmonious relations with the natural environment and for promoting social justice based on the principle of mutuality (Bareh, 1964: 37-39 & 46; Shangpliang, 2010: xvi).

Western Civilization's foundational conceptualizations for creating a good society prescribe establishing social relations based on the principle of mutuality. Mutuality — the precursor of the Human Rights Concept — is the means of creating "The good life [which] is the chief aim of society, both individually and collectively for all its members" (Aristotle, 1959: 201). In fact, the foundational principles of Western Civilization prescribe social networking as the strategy for creating a soci-

ety where individuals experience physical, social-psychological, and economic well-being (Aristotle, 1959: 201). Thus, there is a complementary connection between the foundational principles of the Shillong region and those of Western Civilization in that both suggest social networking as an effective strategy for creating social systems that balance the endeavor to satisfy material needs with the concern for fulfilling higher order human values (Thangkhiew, 2015: 75; & Aristotle, 2004: 4-11). That is to say that the network approach to engaging fellow members of society proves to be a viable means of balancing what is in the best interests of individuals (human rights) with what promotes the common good (social justice). In addition it proves to be an effective strategy for balancing economic prosperity with sustainable social economic planning (Pohlong, 2004: xviii & xxi; Aristotle, 1998: 8 & 12-18). The foundational principles and concepts related to creating a flourishing society propose that social networking, as a process of participatory approach to social planning, fulfills the need for a democratic approach to personal, social, and economic development and societal flourishing (Tassopoulos, 2014: 124). In other words the principles and values reflected in the foundational approaches to sustainable social-economic planning (for both the Shillong region and for Western Civilization) advocate collaborative democratic processes as the means of co-creating a prosperous society. The foundational principles and concepts for social-economic planning were the established approach to social-formation until the emergence of modernity and the industrial age. With the emergence of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* there began to be a separation between what has value in cultural terms and what has value in economic terms. Thus, a dichotomy developed between planning economic development and planning how to realize social conditions based on the values of the cultural heritage (Miller, 2017: 173). The change from the foundational values, concepts, and principles to a focus on capturing value has had a pronounced impact on social-economic activity and sustainability planning in the Shillong region.

Although the industrial age, which required an enormous amount of the raw materials of the Shillong region for its productions, did create wealth for some sectors of society and did contribute to increasing the GDP of the region and for India it did not meet the democratic requirement of assuring a participatory approach to social planning. In addition, industrial age development activity in the Shillong region failed to account for factors like the environment, cultural identity, cultural values, and higher order human values as essential aspects of planning economic development. The problem is connected with the industrial age model for political economy which prompted an emphasis on profits, increasing competitive advantage, and satisfying the interests of shareholders (Friedman, 2002 133; Vargo and Lusch, 2004: 1-17). The industrial era assumption was that the exploitation of nature was good for the advancement of civilization and thus necessary. This resulted in very apparent disparities in the social-economic values of various segments of a society that were termed 'the development problematique'.

The 'development problematique' created cultural, environmental, climate change, and social problems for the people of the Shillong region which only heightened during the second half of the 20th century. Consequently, the 21st century ush-

ered in a new perspective on how to improve social, organizational, institutional, and economic performance. The new model for social-economic planning is based on a strategy for co-creating satisfactory and beneficial outcomes for all stakeholders by establishing integrated value creating social networks. Thus, ultimately the economic development discourse was transformed into the network society discourse (e.g. knowledge age conceptualizations of sustainable social-economic planning). The social networking approach is complementary with the conceptualizations of value creation prescribed by the foundational principles and values for creating harmonious relations with others and with nature (Miller, 2011: 134-136).

Developing a Framework for a Thriving Network Society in the Shillong Region

Determining the foundational conceptualizations of social networking and valuation is derived from an analysis of the cultural principles and values that are cherished by the people in the Shillong region. These reflect values that the people would like to put into practice and use as the basis of what shapes their social reality. Thus, developing a theoretical framework for social networking rests upon the premise that implementing the foundational cultural principles and values of the Shillong region is the basis of creating a flourishing society. Social networking is complementary with the cultural principles of the people of the region because it is an inclusive participatory strategy for increasing stakeholder satisfaction and social capital. In this respect theory development is a strategy for explaining how culture itself is the basis of the values that must be manifest as conceptualizations of how to achieve material prosperity for the society. Thus, the value concept is an important aspect of developing a theoretical framework for social networking because culture is a vital and essential aspect of the social capital of the people of the Shillong region thus culture determines how the region's natural resources can best be used to meet current and future social needs.

The definition of the co-creation of value concept is practices that enhance the social-economic conditions of a society while simultaneously increasing beneficial relations between the members of society and planning that establishes complementary relations between the society and its greater environment (Porter and Kramer, 2011: 63). In this respect theory is an explanation of how to employ social networking in order to generate the knowledge necessary for co-creating an increase in benefits for the stakeholders of the society in which an economy is embedded. Developing a theory of social networking for the Shillong region means providing an explanation of how 'Knowledge is not only used to enhance the ability of stakeholders to achieve their desired value ends but to enable the individuals of the society to make the necessary adjustment to complex and dynamic environmental demands' (Miller, 2017: 175).

A theoretical framework explaining the successful employment of social networking in the Shillong region requires analyzing the literature describing the cultural heritage and comparing conceptualizations of social-formation and value creation with that proposed by the literature on social networking. The foundational concepts and principles provide insight into why a certain theoretical framework works best for increasing beneficial outcomes in a particular social context (Cargan,

2007: 29). If the desired outcome is improving sustainable social-economic conditions in the Shillong region then a viable conceptual framework explains the concepts and principles that provide the basis of success while, at the same time, it indicates factors that influence the model's success. However, because there is a no pre-established theoretical framework — based on prior research explaining prior attempts to apply the social networking concept in the Shillong region — the conceptual framework itself must contribute to developing a theory for the successful implementation of this knowledge age strategy. In other words, the conceptual framework must also be an explanation of how the foundational concepts and principles of social networking can act as factors that enhance social-economic conditions in the Shillong region.

Grounded theory is the preferred methodology for theory development because of its effectiveness in determining conceptualizations that apply as a framework for a social theory. Grounded theory proves to be a viable methodological approach to analyzing the factors that make social networking successful because it uncovers the conceptual data *grounded in* the literature. In addition, Grounded theory is a viable means of developing a conceptual framework for analyzing the connection between social networking and co-creating an increase in public value. An analysis of the value creation concept is an essential aspect of a theoretical model for social networking because it is the basis of reconciling the dichotomy between social-planning for the Shillong region based on social value theory and planning dominated by the established economic value theory.

That is to say that developing a conceptual framework for an effective social networking model explains why a certain approach to employing the concept works best in the Shillong region. The most effective model for the Shillong region is determined by *triangulating* the conceptual data derived from the foundational cultural principles of the region along with the conceptual data derived from literature on social networking and value creation. Thus, developing a conceptual framework results from triangulating data derived from four sources. The first is the conceptual data derived from the foundational cultural concepts, principles, and values of the region. Second is conceptual data derived from an analysis of the literature on the relationship between social networking and increasing public value. Third is determining the factors that make social networking effective by means of an exploratory study of an exemplary case where social networking works well. The fourth is a *triangulation* of the data from the first three sources to determine the factors that play a role in improving social-economic conditions in the Shillong region.

The Foundational Cultural Principles, Values, and Concepts for the Shillong Region

The Shillong region (referred to as *the abode of the clouds*) is renowned for its fertile highlands that produce abundance of agricultural, mineral, and forest natural resources. The economic and social conditions of the region flourished in accordance with the local population's adherence to the values and principles established by the cultural and folk tradition that are predominate in the region (Mawrie, 1981: 10 & 15-22).

The cultural and folk tradition of the Shillong context depict a worldview, cultural values, sense of identity, and social-economic principles that establish the basis of the region's approach to social relations, managing natural resources, and social-formation. Tradition makes it clear that human affairs and social existence are a mixture of the temporal or material forces that shape society as well as those related to the higher transcendental aspect of human affairs (Mawrie, 1981: 10-26). Thus, the people of the region believe that effective social-economic planning cannot focus on merely increasing wealth (e.g. increasing GDP). Social economic activity that does not take into consideration higher order human values betrays the ethics that stem from the foundational principles of the culture and the outcome is disastrous (Dkhar, 1999: 7).

The cultural principles and values and the folk tradition that predominates in the Shillong region promote unity, a respect for individuality, and promote having complementary interactions with the forces shaping the natural order. In this sense the values and principles that most people in the region abide by are rooted in the belief that networking (i.e. collaborative deliberation) promotes cooperation and harmony between all the various strata of society. Collaboration between the members of the social body is meant to maintain peace, freedom, the elevation of people of the society, Holistic well-being, and social-economic prosperity — based on promoting what has intrinsic worth according the cultural heritage (Mahabharata, 2009: 52). Social economic planning that is inclusive of cultural as well as economic value tends to enhance the possibility of effectively networking to increase benefits for all stakeholders.

Conceptualizations of how networking contributes to a flourishing society — as put forth in the foundational tenets of the folk traditions that are predominant in the Shillong region — prescribe the principle of participatory deliberation in a community council as the means of planning how to elevate the life experience of the people of the various segments of society (Lyngdoh, 2015: 34). In other words, the foundational principles espoused by the folk traditions that are predominant in the region propose that the elevation of people occurs when society is planned in accordance with principles ordained by the natural order. Adhering to principles ordained by *Higher Authority* results in social relations that promote human rights, mutuality, the democratic peace, acceptance of an essential interdependence with others, and freedom from self-seeking and greed in order to promote the common good.

The foundational principles, traditional beliefs, and cultural heritage must be a part of the planning for satisfying both the material and higher order needs of the people of the region. Because the temporal matters involve the material aspects of social existence they focus on what has economic value and on counting tangibles thus things that are quantified. However, higher order human values involve the transcendental aspect of personal and social existence (i.e. things that of a qualitative nature thus are beyond quantification). Social-economic planning that focuses exclusively on the material aspect of life but leaves out qualitative cultural values and beliefs cannot produce quality social outcomes. For how can quality be the outcome if quality is not part of the theoretical model that is the basis of the planning?

The Literature on Social Networking and how to Increase Public Value

The prior section explained the concepts and principles connected with increasing public value from the perspective of the foundational principles of the cultural heritage of the Shillong region as compared with the foundational principles of western civilization. This section provides an explanation of the principles that contribute to social networking's effectiveness in other contexts — from the perspective of the literature on social networking and public value. Increasing public value is defined as 'Increasing the goods and services that are considered by the individuals and social groups of a particular social context to improve their quality of life, prosperity, well-being, and social relations' (Meynhardt, 2009: 205-206). Gerry Stoker, specialist in governance, argues, 'The judgment of what is public value is collectively built through deliberation involving elected and appointed government officials and key stakeholders' (Stoker, 2006: 42).

Social networking works is a strategy for engaging policy-makers, stakeholders, and economists in Constructivist communication processes where they collaborate to generate the knowledge (i.e. or cooperate to co-create the means) to increase public value. Public value is a manifestation of what the people of the region consider to have essential and intrinsic worth — that are manifest in terms of the goods and services produced by the institutions and organizations of the Shillong region for its citizens. Contemporary communication theory describes social networking as a technological age approach to establishing a social contract in order to create the common good.

Social networking is a knowledge age means of establishing the social contract because it engages individuals, organizations, institutions, economic agents, and advocacy groups in constructivist processes for co-creating public value. As a strategy for increasing public value social agents engaged in the network able to generate a type of power that can be used to 'Set compatible goals between [segments] of society' (Castells 2011: 777). In this respect contemporary literature concurs with the classical precepts of social-formation which claims that stakeholders enjoy more beneficial outcomes when engaged in social networks that generate pertinent information and disseminate it to the right people. According to Amartya Sen social networking offers the possibility of realizing Ambedkar's vision of participatory democracy in which citizens would co-create the means for the equitable distribution of power and benefits (Sen & Drèze, 2013: ix-xi & 11, 12 & 16). Thus, the contemporary literature on social networking stresses that it appeals to the general public because of its ability to improve the quality of democracy (O'Toole, 1997: 445; Kumar, 2010: 53-57; also see Frederickson et al., 2012: 110).

Joseph Stiglitz argues that a failure to plan on the basis of an inclusive approach to information gathering results in 'imperfect information', at best, or 'misinformation' at worst resulting in social-economic planning that produces unfortunate and problematic outcomes. 'Some of the huge mistakes made in the last decade might have been avoided if there had been an understanding of the new information economics [the network economy]' (Stiglitz, 2004: 7; Ormerod, 2012: 7-12). Stiglitz claims that a narrow focus merely on materialism alone merely satisfies the instru-

mental interests of one segment of the society. Social networking provides an alternative to the narrow focus of the established approach to exchange by demonstrating that interacting in accordance with the principles of mutuality and interdependence can resolve the seeming discrepancy between the interest of shareholders and the interest of the stakeholders (Stiglitz, 1999: 64). It is the realization that organizational, institutional, and social-economic activity are improved by collaboratively integrating the interests of all stakeholders that prompts the shift toward the co-creation of value approach to producing the most beneficial outcomes.

Social networking broadens the scope so that social-economic planning is enhanced by inclusiveness of insight into what increases public value by improving the quality of products and services experienced by the public (Iyer et al., 2005: 1018-1021). C. K. Prahalad and Venkat Ramaswamy, largely responsible for the worldwide popularity of the networking and value creation approach to organizational behavior and social-economic performance, argue that interactions taking place within networks is the new locus of co-creating qualitative benefits for society that are also evident in appreciable quantitative terms. The quality outcome results from 'High-quality value creating interactions enabled by networked, active, informed communities, and their capabilities' (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004: 7 & 8).

Developing a Theoretical Model for Applying Social Networking in the Shillong Region

'Theory is a structure of general statements that explains some phenomena and permits predictions about them' (Risjord, 2014: 38-40). The question that this article addresses is what is the most effective theoretical model for applying the social networking concept in the Shillong region? Developing a theoretical model that researchers can use to test the effectiveness of social networking to co-create increase in public value in the Shillong region involves transforming the categorical conceptualizations derived from the data into factors that can be applied to increase benefits for individuals and the overall society. Grounded theory is the method for discovering the conceptual categorizations *grounded in* the literature. Once the general conceptualizations are determined they are integrated with data indicating the factors that contribute to success for an exemplary model. Triangulation is applied as the method for synthesizing various data to determine the casual factors that play a role in gaining the desired results. The areas of congruence indicate the factors that make the model successful thus provide the basis for developing an effective theoretical model for the Shillong region.

'Sweden is chosen as an exemplary model because Sweden continuously scores first place on the European Innovation Scoreboard, has a globally top ranked standard of living, plus balances technological and economic development with environmentalism (Miller, 2015: 21). In addition Sweden is noted for defining social-economic development in holistic terms and, most important, Sweden ranks first globally for integrating its resources for the benefit of the entire society (Economic Weekly, November 2010). Sweden has an outstanding record of creating public value and increasing social capital by operating private and public organizations in accor-

dance with the value creation concept. Sweden devises performance measures in order to identify the factors that improve performance and increases innovative activity. Sweden's strategy for value management involves structuring multi-level incentives for effectively appraising the effect that accounting for value intangibles and improving efficiency to promote sustainability has on willingness to invest in a particular company.

Swedish organizational and institutional specialist takes a systems theory approach to organizational and social systems. As a result they employ collaborative, interactive, and integrative strategies for improving social relationships and co-creating social value (which includes generating innovative knowledge, enriching cultural life, enhancing the eco-aesthetic dimensions of culture, and improving the competencies of the members of the society) (Swedish Innovation Strategy, 2012: 9-11 & 30-51; European Cultural Parliament, 2006: 7 & 10). In fact, Sweden ranks amongst the least corrupt countries in the world with the highest amount of transparency. Sweden also ranks first in nations that implement policy drivers for improving business and economic activity plus Sweden provides guidelines for integrating performance in terms of environmentalism and social performance into investment processes (Semenova et al., 2010: 266 & 273). Forbes magazine announced Sweden as the best country in the world for doing business (Forbes, 2016). Finally, Swedish companies hold three out of the top five positions and seven out of the top ten for best performing companies in the Nordic region – based on a mix of four metrics: sales, profits, assets, and market value (see Forbes, 2012).

Factors for Making Social Networking Effective in the Shillong Region

The exploratory study of Sweden reveals that there is congruence between social networking and effectively integrating the resources of society in a way that increases benefits for more members of the society (Laamanen & Skålén, 2015: 381-400). Thus, determining the factors that make a theoretical model for social networking effective in the Shillong region can be derived by comparing the conceptual data obtained from the exploratory study of Sweden with that obtained from the literature and synthesizing that data with the foundational principles and values espoused by the folk tradition that is dominant in the region. The data from the three sources are then triangulated to create a synthesized wording of the factors that apply in the Shillong region. A synthesized wording of the triangulated data reveals that there are seven factors that play a role in successfully implementing social marketing in the Shillong region:

1. Open public collaboration which takes the form of participatory planning structured as some type of social network — which includes balancing what is in the best interests of individuals (human rights) with what promotes the common good (social justice) and, as well, establishing public-private partnerships (Giddens, 1984: 26),
2. Defining sustainable social-economic development in Holistic terms (i.e. planning that addresses material and higher order value concerns),
3. Networking to establish cooperation amongst all strata of society — which

includes the equitable distribution of power and benefits and increasing social solidarity,

4. Sustainable social economic planning (sustainable techno-economic planning),
5. Planning on the basis of cultural values (e.g. the learning society, improving social relationships, enriching cultural life, enhancing the eco-aesthetic dimensions of social existence, and improving the competencies of the members of the society,
6. The effective management of and accounting for society's material resources and intangible (value) resources (Edvardsson & Tronvoll, 2013: 20), and
7. Establishing performance measures.

Thus, a social networking theory for the Shillong region reads:

When applied to the Shillong region the foundational concepts related to social networking and valuation (e.g. cooperative collaboration, co-creating value, and enhancing structure-stakeholder relations) play a role in creating outcomes that are found to be beneficial and satisfactory for individuals and the overall society. The concepts related to social networking and valuation —when applied to the Shillong region — increase benefits for individuals, improve organizational performance, improve the relationship between government authorities and the overall public, enhance social-economic activity, and increase public value (see figure 1 in the appendix for an illustration of the multi-dimensional and multi-level benefits of applying social marketing in a social-economic context).

The Practicalities of Establishing an Effective Social Network in the Shillong Region

According to evidence-based reports, ranking as a 'smart municipality' increases in accordance with the use of smart technologies, the development of human and social capital, the development of sustainable environments, and the extent to which the municipality employs social networking (Angelidou, 2016: 18). In fact, it is Sweden's ingenuity in employing social networking to increase public value that affords it being top ranked globally for having 'smart municipalities'. What Sweden and the Shillong region have in common is that both are committed to sustainable social-economic planning that balances economics and a deep respect for the environment, both intend to develop their human and social capital, and both are committed to sustainable environments. It is the desire of the people of the Shillong region to also use their ingenuity to create a balance between social-economic prosperity and a deep respect for the environment that gives it the potential of also being recognized for creating smart municipalities.

This concluding section of the article explains how the Shillong region can take steps to increase recognition for its 'smart' capabilities by effectively making use of one of the criteria for smart municipalities — establishing an effective social network. 'A social network is a social structure made up of individuals (or organizations) tied (connected) by one or more specific types of interdependency such as common interests' (Fadul & Estoque, 2010: 105). Immanuel Castells points out that

social networking is a new paradigm that is ‘Redefining social structures, and the organizational arrangements of humans in relationships of production/consumption, experience, and power as expressed in meaningful interactions framed by culture’ (Castells, 2000: 695).

However, putting the social networking strategy into place requires undertaking practical steps to apply the factors in a way that gains the desired outcome. The first thing to keep in mind when establishing a social network in the Shillong region is that the desired outcome is to increase the value creation capability of the network (i.e. increased benefits for individuals, organizations and institutions, increased public value, and increased social capital). Although telecommunications is the medium (thus the resources needed are readily available) the network is most effective when the target group includes those in position to influence change and concerned stakeholders. Establishing such inclusiveness is the first practical step in initiating an effective social network. In addition, the social network should be established with the intent of achieving some significant higher goal (e.g. increasing the ability of the people of the region to experience what they have reason to value).

To facilitate the growth of the network so that the impact increases it must first reach a specific target group yet continue to reach an ever growing audience. As the network grows it must become integrated with other communication media to connect the network with other programmes that are effective for reaching the target group and those who share a common purpose. Because the content is user generated the network must be set-up so that it is interactive (e.g. generating response and the increased participation from the audience). It has to be kept in mind that social networks are integrated systems that use appeals that are built from integrated multimedia sources to attract and sustain audience interests.

The social-economic, sustainability, and environmental issues of both the Shillong region and of India are complicated challenges that are best solved by strategies planned with in-put and participation from as many sectors of society as possible. With the emergence of the 21st century social networking is increasingly considered as the best basis for planning in a way that addresses and resolves the concerns of most social stakeholders. However, the success of a network is determined by how effective it is in connecting the right people, communicating vital information, improving the quality of services and products offered to the public, facilitating the integration of resources for the benefit of the overall society, and how effective it is in addressing and solving problems (DeSeve, 207: 217).

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Appendix

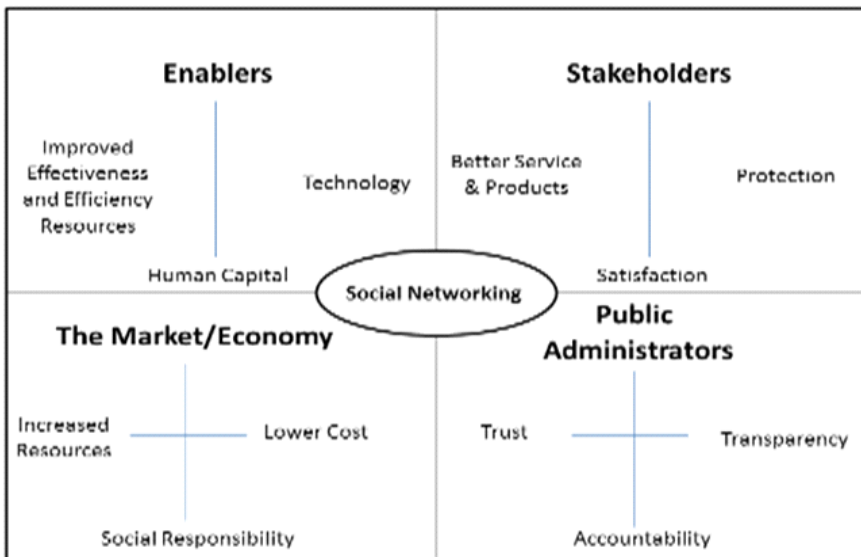


Figure 1-illustrates the multi-dimensional and multi-level scope and benefits of social networking.