BACKGROUND:

Service delivery schemes that involve citizens in co-production tend to be celebrated because they offer a possibility of reducing costs as they increase user satisfaction and promote a sense of ownership. There are equity and quality concerns that should be taken into account, especially with the incorporation of information technologies in public service delivery. This issue brief will use the case of Nextdoor.com to analyze the role of information technology as an innovative mechanism to co-produce public services in times of fiscal stress.

Co-production refers to the involvement of “individual citizens and groups in public service delivery”. The most visible examples of co-produced services in New York State are community-policing schemes, like Neighborhood Watch, and volunteer fire departments. Co-production efforts are also common in education, where parents, students, and teachers are important co-producers of student educational outcomes.

Citizen involvement in service delivery has been around for centuries, but it was not until 1978 that Nobel laureate, Elinor Ostrom coined “co-production” in the public administration literature (Meijer 599). In recent years the concept has re-emerged in policy circles as an innovative way to provide public services under fiscal stress. This approach came forth when dissatisfaction with police service provision was increasing. The New Public Management paradigm promotes a leaner, more responsive type of governance in which government facilitates service delivery, but does not necessarily provide services via a centralized public agency.

THE CASE OF NEXTDOOR.COM:

Nextdoor is a private social network with the mission of “using the power of technology to build stronger and safer communities.” It could be described as a Facebook for residents of a given neighborhood. The platform connects neighbors, allowing them to share information about different issues and create a stronger sense of community. It is mainly used for: 1) Sharing recommendations about issues, like babysitters, handymen, etc. 2) Sharing information related to crime and security and, 3) Posting and commenting about community issues. It was launched in 2010 and it is already used by more than 47,000 neighborhoods in the country. Graph 1 illustrates the way citizens use the site.

Graph 1: Nextdoor.com Uses. (Nextdoor.com, November 2014)

NEXTDOOR.COM FOR PUBLIC AGENCIES:

Nextdoor for public agencies allows city agencies to create a profile and connect directly with residents. According to Sarah Leary, Co-Founder of Nextdoor, the service was created because most residents use the network to post and read about security and crime, and they were interested in connecting with their local agencies. After being piloted in 250 cities, the service was launched September 2014 for “police departments, sheriff’s offices, fire departments/EMS, and departments of emergency management” in 14,000 municipalities. These agencies can use the platform to inform residents about important issues, coordinate events, and receive relevant information.
The “community building” through Nextdoor happens in subtle ways. For example, trust can increase by opening channels of communication among residents who otherwise don’t talk to each other. By creating an enabling environment for low cost collaboration, like helping a neighbor find a lost cat, citizens are prone to get more involved in issues that affect their community. Nextdoor promotes active leadership positions through ‘neighborhood leads’, who voluntarily serve others. The notion of individual interest is subtly linked to an idea of collective wellbeing, which can help promote neighborhood cohesion and shape individual behavior.

Increase communication and proximity: Nextdoor works as an additional communication channel that can increase direct interactions between citizens and government, which in turn has the potential of increasing responsiveness and proximity.

**REFERENCES:**


