

**PUBLIC GOVERNANCE AND TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT DIRECTORATE
PUBLIC GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE**

OECD E-Government Project

Social media use by governments: Focus on Twitter

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In the context of OECD e-government indicators development, this report aims to provide analysis and empirical evidence on how governments use one of the most popular social media platforms globally, Twitter. The analysis covers supply and activity, uptake and popularity, interactions and content.

Delegates of the Network on E-government are invited to discuss this report with a view to its wider dissemination as well as to inclusion of selected data in the 2013 edition of OECD "Government at a Glance".

Data presented here are entirely in the public domain, i.e. no additional data collection via surveys is required.

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MAIN POINTS

- Very little cross-country analysis and empirical evidence exists on government use of social media and on the popularity and impact of using social media channels for interaction with government. This report starts to fill the void by exploring new data sources to ground analysis.
- Social media use and in particular Twitter activity is growing among OECD governments. 22 out of 34 OECD countries have an active account that represents the office of the highest executive institution, i.e. the President, Prime Minister or central government as a whole. Some governments “post” as many as 70 messages per week on Twitter.
- Popularity of governments on social media platforms is clearly growing. The United States *Whitehouse* Twitter account enjoys a community of over 3 million “followers”; the United Kingdom *Number10gov* reaches 3.5% of the population via this channel. Besides these two social media pioneers, Chile’s *Gobiernodechile* and Norway’s *Kronprinsparet* are less well-known but enjoy similar popularity levels.
- Nevertheless, the level of government activity is not yet matched by the level of uptake within the population. This echoes lessons learned in the early days of e-government when increasing supply of digital public services did not automatically lead to greater use of digital channels. Governments that wish to achieve greater popularity levels on social media platforms will need to explicitly address important questions about content, communities and the complementary nature of different social media channels.
- Popularity does not necessarily mean participation. So far, governments tend to use Twitter and other social media platforms as a channel for one-way communications. This is a deliberate choice and it seems that some countries are changing attitudes towards social media as they recognise the growing tendency of the public to discuss public policy issues online. Recent events clearly show that social media can be instrumental to not only “push” information, but also to gauge, in some cases even shape, public opinion. And they can be important resources in responding to sudden emergencies, e.g. to steer collective action.
- Some governments are therefore channelling experimental social media use towards concrete government objectives, e.g. more efficient communication, better delivery of official information, greater uptake of digital public services, greater openness and transparency. Empirical evidence presented in the report should facilitate the development of such strategies, e.g. when it comes to identifying determinants of popularity and participation.
- Finally, social media can surely be a vector for more open government. On the other hand, the degree of openness also influences how government uses social media. In setting objectives, central government strategies should therefore carefully consider external factors that tend to determine popularity of government and participation of the public via social media platforms, e.g. the prevalent political culture and the degree of public trust in government.

RATIONALE

1. Social media, social networks and Web 2.0 in general are profoundly changing communications patterns between individuals, businesses and governments. While emails alone did not succeed to bring about 24/7 availability and responsiveness, this has clearly changed with the emergence of a global ecosystem that is shaped by the rapid diffusion of mobile technologies, mobile applications (“apps”) and social media outlets such as Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, Google+, YouTube and Cyworld (see also OECD, 2012a, 2012b).

2. Governments are not exempted from expectations of greater responsiveness and more direct interaction. Political campaigns, information dissemination programmes and public opinion polls in OECD countries today include a social media component. In certain cases this component is even considered to have decisive impact, e.g. in the United States presidential election campaigns of 2008 and 2012.

3. Despite the pervasive use of social media across all spheres of public life, relatively little analysis exists as to the drivers, barriers and impacts of social media use in government. This stands in contrast to the large body of analysis and advice on social media use in the private sector where topics such as branding, product and firm placement receive great attention.

4. But analysis of government social media activity is slowly emerging, e.g. through country-specific studies, technical and strategic guidance aimed at governments. This report aims to complement this emerging analytical discussion by providing a comparative perspective on the ways in which government institutions across different countries use Twitter and the impacts this has. Three dimensions appear to be of particular interest when looking at social media use in the public sector: a) *supply*, i.e. the degree to which governments use social media and to what purposes, b) *uptake*, i.e. the popularity of government with online communities and the interest of the general public in using this channel to interact with government, and c) the *content and patterns* of social networking with and by government institutions.

5. Using these three dimensions helps to create an evidence base to inform policy choices of governments relating to the use of social media. It also has the immediate advantage of rendering the analysis compatible with existing e-government measures, e.g. on the supply and uptake of online services, and on channels used for communications and transactions with government. At the same time, the analysis is designed to be forward-looking in that it can complement analysis of other emerging trends, e.g. the use of ICTs for more “open government”; and it is designed to be scalable, which means more government entities can be analysed in the future than is done in the current paper. Analysis can for example be expanded to institutions pertaining to specific government functions, e.g. tax administrations or regulatory authorities, and it can also look at other actors in the political system, e.g. the legislature, judiciary and non-government stakeholders (cf. OECD work undertaken with national tax administrations: OECD, 2011). Finally, the analytical insights developed here can also be adapted to examine government readiness in using this channel to react to crises and emergencies as part of national risk management strategies.

METHODOLOGY

6. Multiple social media outlets exist today, e.g. Twitter, facebook, flickr, Google+. The Twitter service (i.e. its web, mobile and developer applications) stands out as one of the leading social networks globally, with half a billion individuals and organisations of all sorts using the service as of July 2012. The website www.twitter.com is within the top 10 of most visited websites globally, although geographical variations exist. Twitter “apps” (i.e. mobile phone applications) are amidst the most downloaded applications for the Android and iOS platforms. This social media service therefore represents one of the best possible “proxies” for social media activity today.

7. Twitter is also suitable as a “proxy” for *government* social media activity. Central government institutions in most OECD countries and in many partner countries use Twitter to engage with the public. Anecdotal evidence, e.g. from the United States, show that Twitter is the most commonly used social media channel across the executive branch of government (Snead, 2013). Facebook, podcasts, RSS and YouTube are used relatively often too; blogs and Flickr to a lesser degree.

8. To clearly delimit the scope, this report in its current version considers only Twitter activity by *institutions* at the central government, i.e. the highest executive institution. This covers the Twitter accounts operated by the office of a head of state, e.g. *Whitehouse* in the United States or *Elysee* in France, by the office of the head of government, e.g. *Number10gov* in the United Kingdom or *Kantei* in Japan, or by the general government office, e.g. *Gobiernodechile* in Chile or *Stenbockimaja* in Estonia.¹ Twitter accounts of current office holders, e.g. François Hollande or David Cameron, are excluded from this analysis.

9. The global penetration of the Twitter platform and its “Web 2.0” character offer several advantages for empirical analysis. It is a unified platform across countries, which makes harmonisation of data across countries relatively easy. Data can be quickly extracted and interpreted using publicly available tools, which reduces time lags of the statistics and it requires no additional data collection in or by countries. In fact, even micro-data, i.e. individual Twitter messages are relatively easy to extract and transfer to a database. The approach taken here is therefore part of a wider trend towards “big data” analytics where the growing volume, velocity and variety of data on the Internet is used to create new value, analytical in this case (cf. OECD, 2012c).

10. Unless indicated otherwise, analysis in this report is entirely based on use patterns that are publicly available via the Twitter service. Extraction of such data is facilitated by 3rd party services that use Twitter’s application programming interfaces (APIs), e.g. Twitonomy. Data from other sources contextualises the analysis wherever helpful.

¹ More than one account per country exists where the offices of the head of state and the head of government operate separate Twitter accounts.

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS: TWITTER USE BY GOVERNMENTS

11. The analysis must start out by pointing to the newness of governments using Twitter: only the United Kingdom started having a Twitter presence for the Prime Minister's Office as early as 2008; the rest of the countries observed here joined in 2009 and the majority even later. This will help to explain experimentalism, unintended results and sudden changes in the use of Twitter by governments as they occur.

Supply: government presence and activity on Twitter

12. In the OECD, 22 governments use Twitter as a communications channel for the office of the head of state, of the head of government or for the government as a whole (see Table 1). The 12 OECD countries without such an account are: Belgium, Denmark, Iceland, Italy, New Zealand, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Sweden and Switzerland. OECD accounts from selected partner countries are also included in this analysis: Brazil, India, Indonesia, Russian Federation, South Africa, and Ukraine.

Table 1. Government Twitter accounts

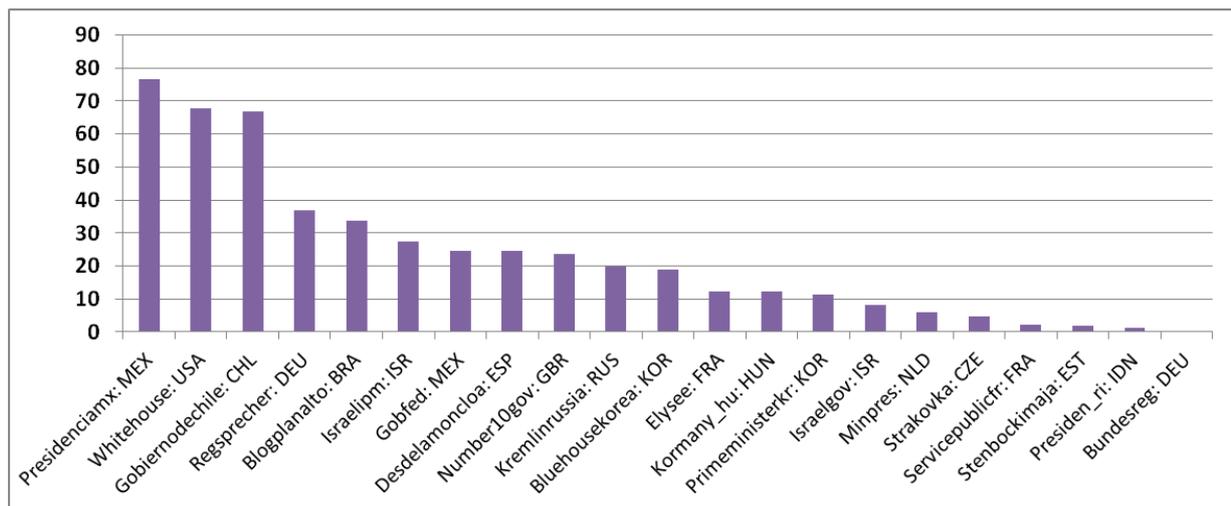
| Country | Institution or office | Twitter account name |
|-------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------|
| Austria | Head of government | teamkanzler |
| Brazil | Government | imprensaPR |
| Brazil | Head of state | blogplanalto |
| Chile | Government | gobiernodechile |
| Czech Republic | Government | strakovka |
| Estonia | Government | stenbockimaja |
| Finland (Finnish) | Government | valtioneuvosto |
| Finland (Swedish) | Government | statsradet |
| France | Head of state | Elysee |
| Germany | Government | bundesreg |
| Germany | Government | regsprecher |
| Greece | Head of government | primeministergr |
| Hungary | Government | kormany_hu |
| India | Head of government | PMOIndia |
| Indonesia | Head of state | PRESIDEN_RI |
| Ireland | Government | govdotie |
| Israel | Government | israelgov |
| Israel | Head of government | israelipm |
| Japan (Japanese) | Head of government | kantei |
| Japan (Japanese) | Head of government | kantei_saigai |
| Korea | Head of state | BluehouseKorea |
| Korea | Head of government | PrimeMinisterKR |
| Luxembourg | Head of state | courgrandducale |
| Mexico | Head of state | PresidenciaMX |
| Mexico | Government | GobFed |
| Netherlands | Head of government | minpres |
| Netherlands | Head of state | khtweets |
| Norway | Head of government | statsmin_kontor |
| Norway | Head of state | Kronprinsparet |
| Poland | Head of state | prezydentpl |

| | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| Poland | Head of government | PremierRP |
| Portugal | Government | govpt |
| Portugal | Head of state | presidencia |
| Russian Federation | Head of state | kremlinrussia |
| South Africa | Head of state | PresidencyZA |
| Spain | Government | desdelamoncloa |
| Turkey (English) | Head of state | trpresidency |
| Ukraine (Russian) | Government | Kabmin_UA_r |
| Ukraine (Ukrainian) | Government | Kabmin_UA |
| United Kingdom | Head of government | Number10gov |
| United States | Head of state | whitehouse |

13. The degree of government activity on Twitter varies largely. The office of the Mexican President (*Presidenciamx*), the United States President (*Whitehouse*) and Chile’s government (*Gobiernodechile*) are the most active, emitting between 67 and 77 weekly messages on average (Figure 1). On the opposite end are the accounts of Germany (*Bundesreg*, which emitted only four public messages in 2012), Indonesia (*Presiden_ri*) and Estonia (*Stenbockimaja*).

Figure 1. Government activity levels on Twitter

Average weekly Twitter messages or "tweets", January - June 2012

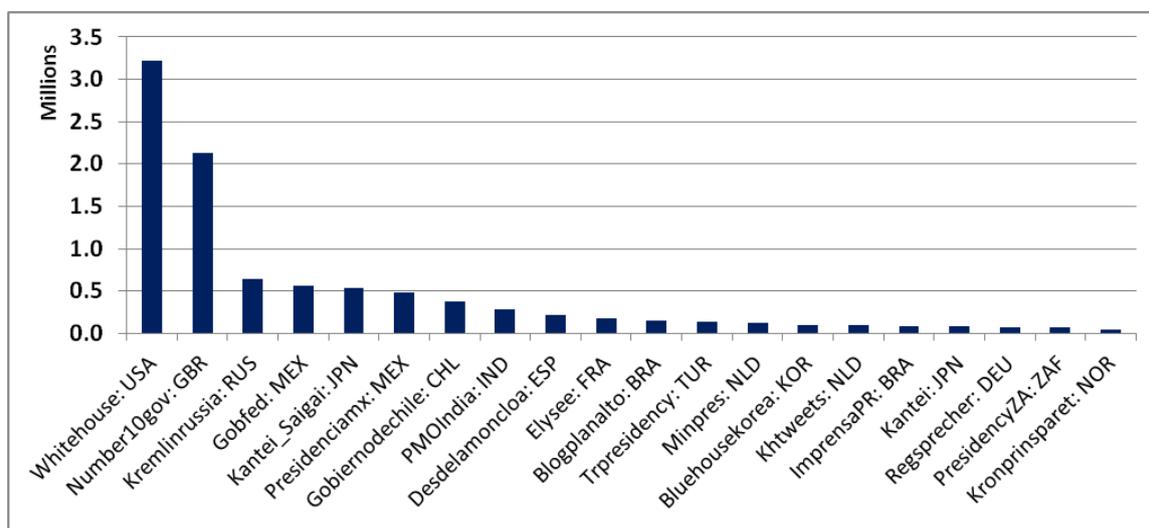


Demand: government popularity on Twitter

14. Judging by the numbers, government Twitter activity catches the attention of Internet users (Figure 2). The United States *Whitehouse* account counts on a community of over 3 million “followers”, i.e. Twitter users that subscribe to all the tweets published by the Presidency. The United Kingdom’s *Number10gov* account comes next with over 2 million followers; central government institutions in the Russian Federation, Mexico, Japan and Chile reach between 300.000 and 500.000 followers; governments in India, Spain, France, Brazil, Turkey and the Netherlands have over 100.000 followers.

Figure 2. Absolute popularity of governments on Twitter

Number of “followers”, November 2012



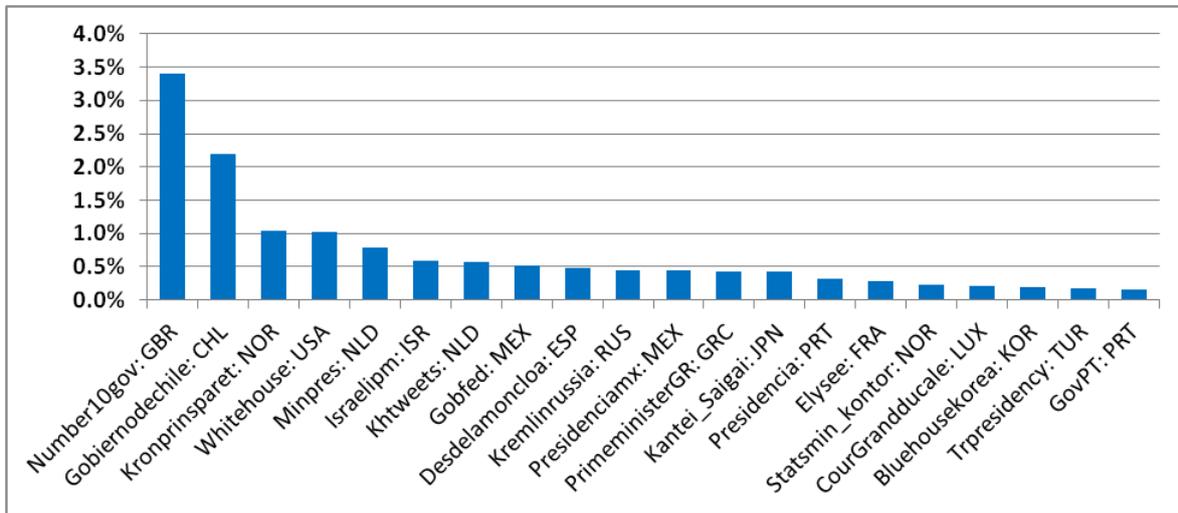
Note: Only the top 20 countries by number of followers are displayed.

15. To provide an order of magnitude for popularity, the most prominent Twitter users today have over 20 million Twitter followers. This covers mainly entertainment figures, notably Lady Gaga, Justin Bieber, Katy Perry and Rihanna. Interestingly, US President Barack Obama ranks among the top 10 most prominent Twitter users with a community of over 17 million “followers” (<http://twittercounter.com/pages/100>). The BBC network’s *BBCWorld* has 2.6 million followers. Compared to these numbers, some government Twitter users can clearly be said to strike a public chord.

16. To better compare popularity of governments on Twitter, the number of followers can be expressed as a share of national population. Figure 3 confirms that some government Twitter accounts already reach sizeable parts of the population. The United Kingdom’s *Number10gov* takes the lead amidst OECD countries with a reach of over 3% of the population. It is followed by Chile’s *Gobiernodechile*, which reaches over 2% of the population (cf. Box 1). Following on are central government institutions in Norway, the United States, the Netherlands, Israel, Mexico, Spain, the Russian Federation, Greece and Japan.

Figure 3. Relative popularity of governments on Twitter

“Followers” as a share of domestic population, November 2012

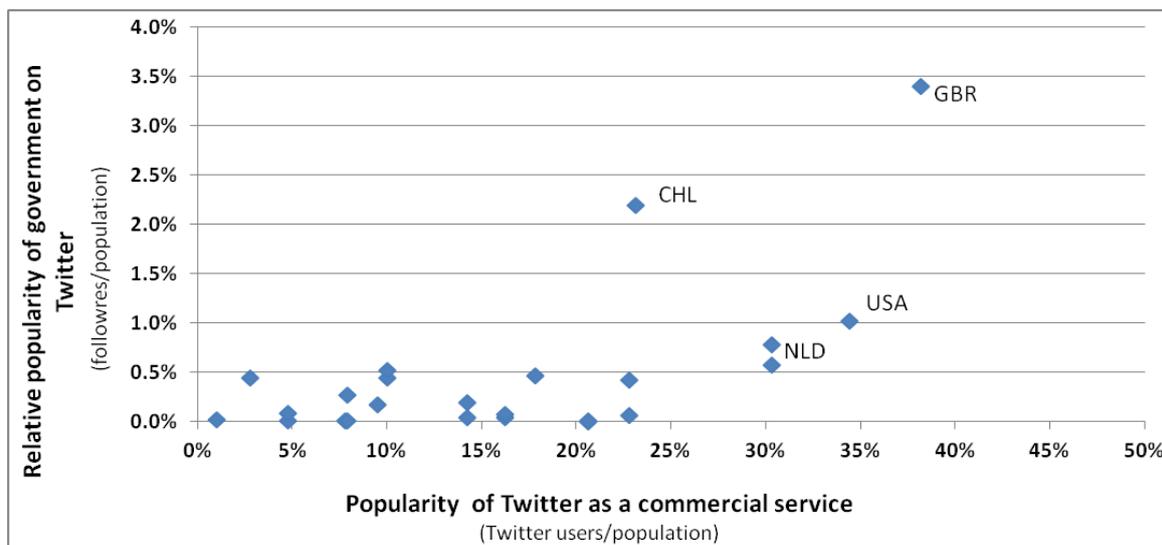


Note: Only the top 20 countries by number of followers are displayed.

17. Overall, however, there is much unexploited potential for governments to reach greater parts of the population via Twitter. Commercial sources indicate that up to 38% of the United Kingdom population actively use Twitter in their daily lives. This represents a share of the population that is ten times higher than that interacting with government via Twitter (Figure 4 below). The gap is similarly large in Chile and it is even larger in the United States and the Netherlands where governments reach only around 1% of the population via Twitter although up to 1/3 of the population are Twitter users. These gaps between a high share of citizens and organisations using Twitter as a commercial service and the relatively low use of it to communicate with government points to underexploited potential to “go where citizens are” when it comes to providing official information, promoting public services and gauging public opinion (cf. OECD, 2012b).

18. Increasing the reach of social media can also help bridge digital divides, in some cases potentially even “off-line” divides. Survey results for the United States published by the Pew Research Center suggest that individuals belonging to minority groups, i.e. African Americans and Hispanics, strongly appreciate the use of social media as a government communications channel (Smith, 2010). If this can be confirmed, it would mean social media can facilitate better access for populations that today face structural challenges to access government information and services.

Figure 4. Government Twitter popularity compared to popularity of Twitter as a commercial service



Source: OECD data collection; data on Twitter users per country provided by Semiocast.

19. It should be noted that there is only a weak correlation between the activity of government on Twitter and their popularity amidst online communities. It is true that two of the most popular central government institutions on Twitter, Chile’s *Gobiernodechile* and the United States *Whitehouse*, are also among the most active, publishing an average of around 70 messages per week. Two other cases, however, illustrate the limitations of assuming that greater supply of information via this channel automatically leads to greater popularity:

- The United Kingdom’s Prime Minister uses *Number10gov* to publish only 24 messages on average per week; it is nevertheless the most popular government on Twitter across the OECD.
- Mexico’s Presidency uses *Presidenciamx* to publish a high number of weekly messages on Twitter, over 70 on average; its popularity, however, stands at only 0.4% of the population.

Box 1. Chile’s social media strategy: hitting the right buttons

On Twitter, *Gobiernodechile* is the second most popular central government institution across the OECD. The almost 400,000 “followers” of *Gobiernodechile* represent over 2% of the population, only the United Kingdom has a greater relative popularity. Some facilitating factors are in place for this popularity to happen, notably a high share of Twitter users among the domestic population and a government that publishes a relatively high amount of content via this channel.

What is arguably a greater determinant of the popularity, though, is the clear and proactive strategy of the Chilean government towards social media. The strategy consists of several components that provide information and dedicated assistance to those parts of government that wish to use social media to engage their stakeholders:

- A government circular explicitly encouraged the use of social media across the Chilean government in 2010 (www.gob.cl/comunicacion-digital/instrucciones-sobre-lineamientos-comunicacionales-de-plataformas-digitales-y-sitios-electronicos-del),
- Social media are a key component in the government’s e-government strategy 2011-2014. The three pillars of the strategy are “open government”, “government close to its constituents”, and “efficient government”. The use of social media is firmly embedded in the strategy, giving this channel prominent support

(www.modernizacion.gob.cl/nuestra-agenda/plan-estrategico-de-gobierno-electronico.html).

- The government's digital guide (*Guía digital*) is an exhaustive source of strategic and technical assistance relating to the use of new technologies. Use and utility of social media constitute are part of the publicly available guide that also covers questions about the preconditions, capacity and skills necessary to make the best use of social media in government (www.guiadigital.gob.cl/plataformas-sociales).

Moreover the strategy benefits from public suggestions to make improvements. This means the documents cited here are not static, but received regular revisions. The e-government strategy, for example, is in version 9 at the time of writing; the digital guide in its current form is a "beta" version, i.e. under development. Social media play a key role in these improvements because they are used to invite comments by a great number of government practitioners and the wider public.

Beyond supply and demand: analysing interactions and content

20. To understand the impacts of government use of social media, it is worthy to take a closer look at the forms and content of exchanges with government via Twitter. New technologies and analytical tools can be used to facilitate the analysis of:

1. The degree to which government tweets invite interaction,
2. the degree to which interaction actually takes place, and
3. the semantic content of tweets.

21. Tweets are basically expressions of text, not unlike emails, SMS or hand-written text on post-its. But the novelty of Web 2.0 technologies is very much linked to the new forms that text can take on the Internet. Authors that have some technical expertise can "package" content in a way that makes it easier for others to react and interact. This can be done through links to documents or websites, by explicitly contributing to existing conversation topics or by starting new conversation threads. Governments can moreover directly target and interact with specific users. The technical tools Twitter offers to more effectively engage online communities are "hashtags", "replies", "mentions" and web links (see Box 2).

Box 2. "Packaging" Twitter content to invite interaction

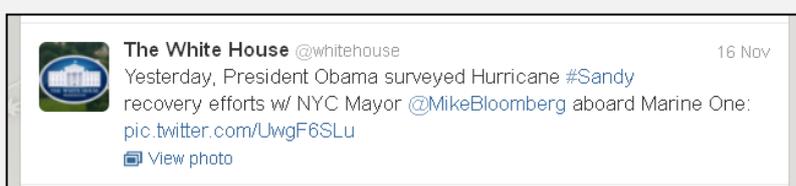
To invite and incite interaction, the author of a message on Twitter can chose to “package” his or her content in a way that makes it easier for other Twitter users to react and interact. Interactive tweets are those that use either of the following elements and are illustrated in the sample tweets pictured below:

Hashtags: mark a Tweet as part of a larger conversation, e.g. on #Sandy, #Kinderbetreuung or #VigilanteVerde;

Mentions address one or more specific Twitter users, e.g. New York city major @MikeBloomberg;

Replies: follow up to a specific Tweet by a user, e.g. a request for information;

Retweets: re-publish another Twitter user’s message, e.g. a message originally posted by @SEMARNAT_mx was picked up and re-published by Gobfed (Gobierno Federal).

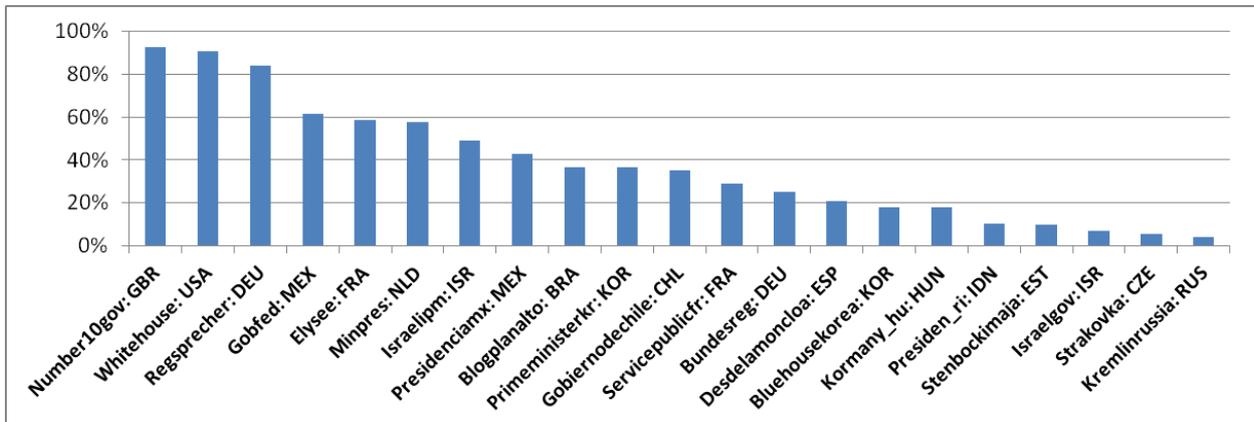


The use of web links constitutes a relatively weak indicator of interactivity because it cannot be determined whether the target of a link is rather static, e.g. download of a document, or interactive, e.g. link to a blog post that is open for public comments. They are therefore not included in the definition of interactive tweets here.

22. Looking at government use of options to actively engage the public helps understand whether an institution pursues more of a “push strategy”, i.e. using Twitter to broadcast messages, or rather a “pull” or even “networking” strategy, i.e. using Twitter to actively engage stakeholders via this channel (for more details on public sector social media strategies, see Mergel, 2010). It seems that governments using Twitter today can be situated across the entire range of the push vs. pull dichotomy. Figure 5, below, shows that the share of tweets using some form of interactive element ranges from 90% at the governments of the United Kingdom, United States and Germany (*Regsprecher*) to well below 10% in the cases of Israel (*Israelgov*), Czech Republic (*Strakovka*), and the Russian Federation (*Kremlinrussia*).

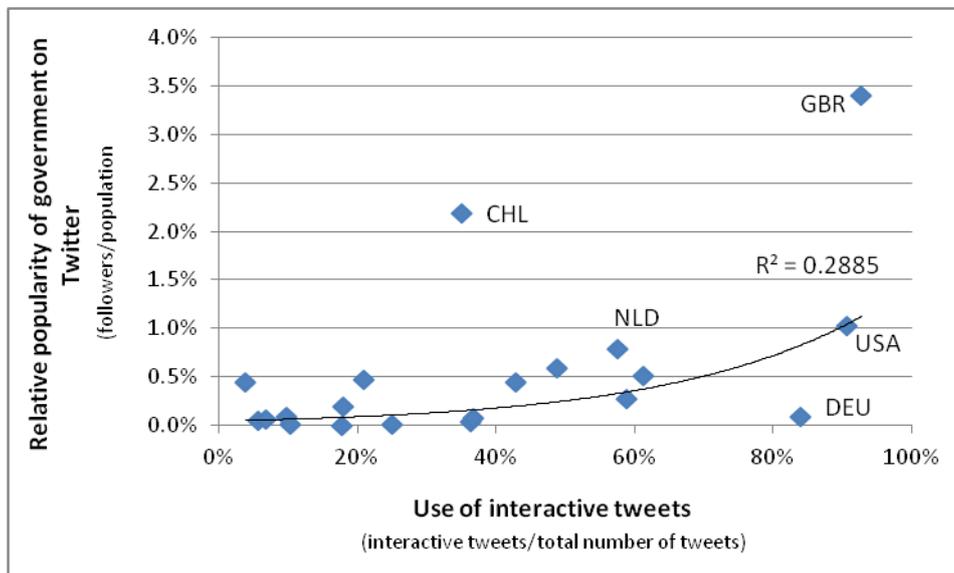
Figure 5. Use of interactive tweets by government

Share of interactive tweets in total number of tweets, January – June 2012



23. The question is then whether the use of technical tools to pursue “push” or “networking” strategies on Twitter pay off. It is certainly hard to establish causalities, but governments that use more interactive elements in their Twitter messages tend to also have a higher reach within the population (Figure 6; the correlation factor R^2 reaches 0.42 when the two outliers, Chile and Germany, are excluded). This is in a way logical, given that higher reach typically implies being more attentive to questions and comments submitted via Twitter, i.e. it naturally favours the use of “replies” and “mentions” in the body of individual Twitter messages.

Figure 6. Government use of interactive tweets compared to their popularity on Twitter



24. However, two notable exceptions to the trend underline that the use of technical means alone is no guarantor for greater social media popularity of governments. Chile’s *Gobiernodechile* is second among OECD countries in relative popularity, but not even half of the tweets it publishes utilise any technical form of interactivity. In contrast, Germany’s federal government account *Regsprecher* puts strong effort on using interactive tools to engage users – over 80% of broadcast messages contain an element to incite interaction. Still, *Regsprecher* only reaches a marginal part of the population, 0.1%. An important factor to consider is that Twitter is not as popular in Germany as in other OECD countries: only about 5% of

Germans are reported to be Twitter users, compared to, for example, 10% in Mexico, 15% in Korea, and over 30% in the Netherlands, the United States and the United Kingdom. The Chilean and German cases therefore illustrate the importance of understanding context factors as well as the communications strategies chosen by governments when trying to explain popularity levels on global social media platforms. Most importantly, though, they also raise the question of what intuitively should be a core determinant of popularity: the quality of content.

25. So if “packaging” matters to some degree for popularity, what about the actual content of the messages? Tools such as *Tagcrowd* facilitate semantic analysis by indicating the frequency of words (or groups of words) as they occur in government tweets. Below, so-called “tag clouds” are provided for some central government institutions (Figures 7-10). The larger and bolder a word appears in the tag cloud, the more often it is used across the selected sample of tweets.

Figure 7. United Kingdom (*Number10gov*), semantic analysis of 614 tweets



Figure 8. Chile (*Gobiernodechile*), semantic analysis of 1,738 tweets



Figure 9. United States (*Whitehouse*), semantic analysis of 1,709 tweets

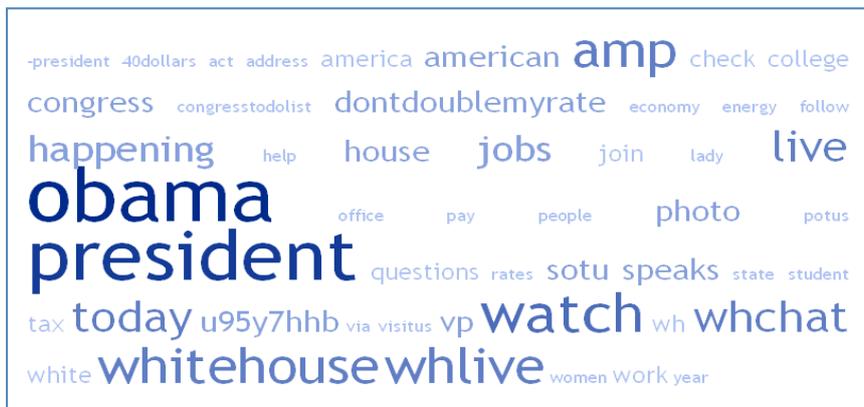


Figure 10. Netherlands (*Minpres*), semantic analysis of 158 tweets



26. A preliminary analysis of the semantic content of government Twitter use suggests that Twitter is frequently used as an additional public relations channel, i.e. it is used as a complement to traditional press releases. There is clear prominence of titles and names of national political leaders; and frequent occurrence of words that relate to public relations, e.g. “live”, “watch”, “persconferentie”. This indicates strong emphasis by central government institutions to use Twitter to announce events, speeches, political visits and initiatives involving the head of state or government.

27. At the same time there are indications that Twitter is used to interact on concrete policy issues and issues of public interest. Issues that feature prominently in individual Twitter conversations with government include: “dementia”, “dementiachallenge”, “parliament”, “business” in the United Kingdom; “hacienda”, “reconstruccion” in Chile; “college”, “congress”, “dontdoublemyrate”, “jobs” in the United States; “economische”, “europese” in the Netherlands.

28. Finally, interactivity is also being encouraged through the use of keywords: “questions”, “chat”, “invitamos”, “infografía”, “entrega”. This clearly complements the use of some of the format-oriented opportunities to encourage interaction on Twitter.

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

29. This section draws preliminary conclusions from the empirical analysis of government use of social media and in particular Twitter. These conclusions point to some policy implications about how to raise the uptake and impact of this channel for interactions between governments and society:

- There is growing use of Twitter as part of government social media portfolios. The portfolios are sometimes part of a larger social media strategy defined by the centre of government. But very often, they are part of experimental activities rather than geared towards specific government objectives.
- Government institutions on Twitter are relatively popular in some countries. This obviously includes governments that have early on led developments in this area, notably in the United States and the United Kingdom. But there are also some unexpected countries when it comes to the relative popularity of their government institutions on Twitter, e.g. Chile, Norway and the Netherlands.
- Popularity only to some degree depends on the quantity and form of information shared by governments via Twitter. Certainly, embedding Twitter use within the framework of a sound e-government strategy seems to be an important factor, as well as the technical skills of individuals that maintain this channel at government. But other factors also play a major role in determining the impact of this channel on government communications with the public, namely the popularity of Twitter as a commercial tool within the target group or the relevance of the actual content shared via Twitter with the public.
- Overall there is still a large gap between potential and actual popularity of central government institutions on Twitter. The great gaps shown by data in this paper point to much potential to “go where citizens are”. This is in line with OECD E-Leaders’ conclusions that governments should consider moving away from the idea of attracting citizens to their “workflows”; rather governments should identify effective ways to enter existing citizen “workflows”. The Twitter service definitely holds potential to enter citizen “workflows” simply because of its immense popularity among individuals and the media, but also among businesses, associations and organisations. There is also potential to reach populations that face structural challenges in accessing government information or services.
- The content published by government institutions via Twitter is still largely public relations material, e.g. information on events, speeches, visits. But discussions of concrete policy issues are also present and can, due to the nature of the Internet, be relatively frank and open in some instances.
- Based on this preliminary empirical analysis, and coupled with anecdotal evidence from countries, the following avenues appear to emerge for governments that want to increase the reach and impact of their social media activity on Twitter:
 - Monitor and actively engage in existing and emerging discussions of public policy issues on Twitter. This means analysing trends of discussions on social media channels and joining conversations that appear to be of great public interest.

- Enhance the social media presence by becoming more interactive, e.g. using technical tools offered by this social media channels to attract greater attention of general public.
- Adapt content to the interest of the general public. In some cases, Twitter accounts seem to be heavily focused on “repackaging” press releases about public initiatives of political leaders. This does generate interaction, mostly with journalists and policy communities. But to reach a wider public, a solution could lie in issuing more statements about topics rather than personalities.
- Provide information about public services, especially digital ones. This can be a way to channel public service users towards more efficient channels of public service delivery. E-government strategies could for example consider using government’s popularity on social media channels to advertise digital public services.
- Develop strategies. In doing so, governments can ensure that open-ended experimentation flourishes alongside a more results-oriented use of social media. Establishing government-wide objectives and guidelines for social media use can help to channel dispersed efforts towards a common direction.

30. Finally, governments can probably do more to understand the opportunities and challenges in using social media as a vector for open government. Twitter and other social media channels have the advantages of allowing brief, direct and relatively explicit exchange of viewpoints. On the other hand, the specific nature of Twitter bears also the risk of being overly simplistic, in some cases even demagogic and short-sighted in holding discussions. A fruitful approach to using Twitter as a vector for open government could be to use it to spark debates, but not to hold them via this channel. This means that Twitter messages could be used to lead people and organisations towards blogs, forums or official government resources that then allow a more in-depth discussion about complex policy issues.

OPEN QUESTIONS AND NEXT STEPS

31. Possible future work can include:

- Cover more countries in the analysis of supply and demand. Global comparisons are limited only by the fact that Twitter is more relevant as a commercial service in certain countries than in others. Consequently, not all governments have the same incentive to use this social media channel. This needs to be factored in when comparing countries, as indicated in this paper.
- Improve the analysis of interactions and content to identify context-specific enabling and hindering factors. Some links between interaction, content and reach have been highlighted here and the analysis can be taken further.
- Understand the impact of social media, e.g. on the perception of government or the use of public services. It could, for example, be interesting to explore whether there are links between a government's popularity on Twitter and the popularity of its online services.

32. Other options can be explored in future work, but require more resources to do so:

- Conduct similar research and analysis for other social media channels, notably Facebook and blogs.
- Analyse and compare social media activity of other government institutions, e.g. tax administrations, line ministries, regulatory authorities, law enforcement agencies.
- Expand the analysis to sub-national levels of government, i.e. Twitter use by regional and municipal governments.
- Expand the analysis beyond the executive arm of government to understand Twitter use by legislative and judicial institutions.

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