

Social media use by governments

Presence and activity on social media is no longer a matter of choice for most governments as these platforms are used by large parts of the population and both formal and informal interest groups. As of November 2014, the main offices of executive institutions (head of state, head of government, or government as a whole) operated a Twitter account in 28 out of 34 OECD countries and maintained a Facebook page in 21 out of 34 countries. In addition to central governments, many ministries, agencies, or individual programs have a social media presence, as do many regional and local levels of government.

The top executive offices in the United Kingdom (@Number10gov) and Chile (@GobiernodeChile) have managed to build a community of Twitter followers that equates to roughly 4% of the domestic population. Data on re-tweets, replies, favourites, etc. further illustrate that there is overall interest in at least some of governments' social media activities.

Nevertheless, the purpose and returns of social media use by government offices are not always clearly identified, which can lead to uncertainty on how to best leverage social media for strategic objectives and in day-to-day operations. In response, half of national governments in OECD countries have formulated a strategy or overarching plan. Most governments still view social media as an additional tool to broadcast traditional communication messages and only a few try to genuinely leverage social media for more advanced purposes such as opening up public policy processes or transforming public service delivery. The success of the Spanish national police (@Policia) in these areas has turned it into a global reference for law enforcement use of social media. Some governments experiment with using social media for internal purposes – e.g. Canada's Blueprint 2020 engagement exercise, which reached tens of thousands of civil servants through both public social media platforms and purely internal ones like GCpedia and GConnex.

Social media have the potential to make policy processes more inclusive and thereby increase trust between governments and citizens. But there is no "one size fits all" approach as context and demand factors must be considered to be effective. Research shows that social media use varies across countries, e.g. by levels of education attained in countries like Greece, Portugal, Turkey and the United Kingdom the social media use gap between people with and without high formal education is quite large. The choice of social media platform itself is also critical as usage of individual platforms varies by countries, demographic groups, etc.

It is therefore important to create effective measurement and benchmarking frameworks. Only a small minority of governments systematically monitor or measure the impacts of their social media activity. Some quantifiable information can be utilised to measure presence or popu-

larity of an institution on social media. But more qualitative information is needed to appraise penetration, perception and purpose-orientation of institutional social media use.

Methodology and definitions

The figure compares social media popularity of national offices of either head of state, head of government, or government as a whole. One country can have a number of central government accounts based on the system of government or to communicate in different languages. For each country only the account with most followers is displayed. The figure is based on Burson-Marsteller's Twiplomacy dataset from June 2014 and presents only OECD and selected partner countries. To facilitate comparison, the number of Twitter followers of each account are divided by the size of the domestic population. Though the number of followers may include foreign citizens, organizations, etc. this measure provides a baseline of the proportional reach of the account.

Based on the OECD survey on government use of social media, conducted in 2013. Responses were received from 26 member countries as well as Colombia. Italy and Mexico provided responses in 2015. More details in Mickoleit, A. (2014).

Based on the Eurostat survey on "ICT usage by individuals". To differentiate the take-up of social media, the survey uses different categories of educational attainment based on the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). "High formal education" refers to ISCED levels 5 or 6; "low or no formal education" refers to ISCED levels 0, 1 or 2. Countries are ordered by size of the difference between the two measures. More information: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/metadata/EN/isoc_bde15c_esms.htm.

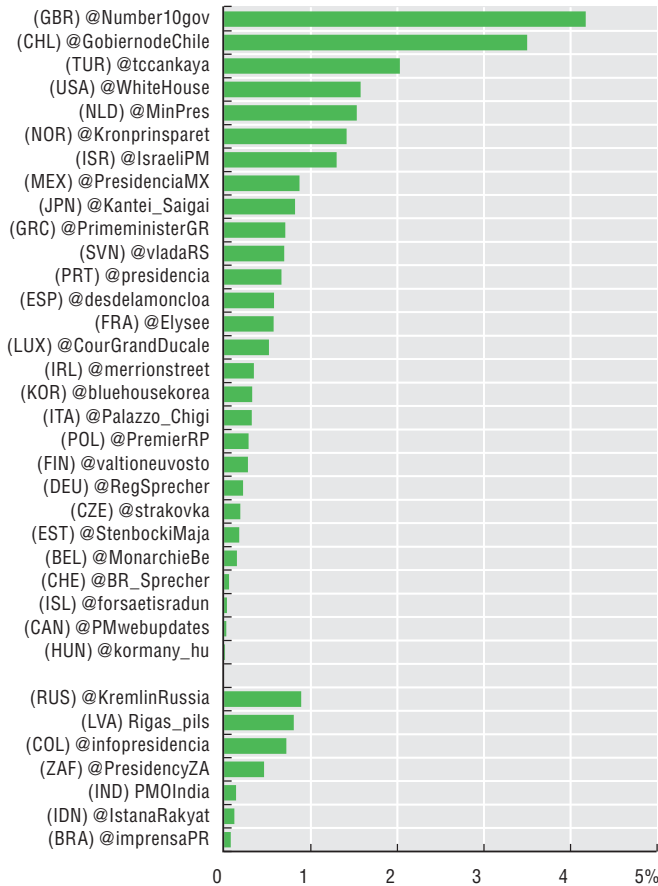
Further reading

Androsoff, R. and Mickoleit, A. (2015), "Measuring government impact in a social media world", *OECD Insights blog*, 18 February, <http://bit.ly/17gijos>.

Burson-Marsteller (2014), "Twiplomacy Study 2014", <http://twiplomacy.com>.

Mickoleit, A. (2014), "Social Media Use by Governments: A Policy Primer to Discuss Trends, Identify Policy Opportunities and Guide Decision Makers", *OECD Working Papers on Public Governance*, No. 26, OECD, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5jxrcmghmk0s-en>.

10.1. Central government Twitter followers (most followed offices of either government, head of government or head of state in OECD and partner countries), 2014



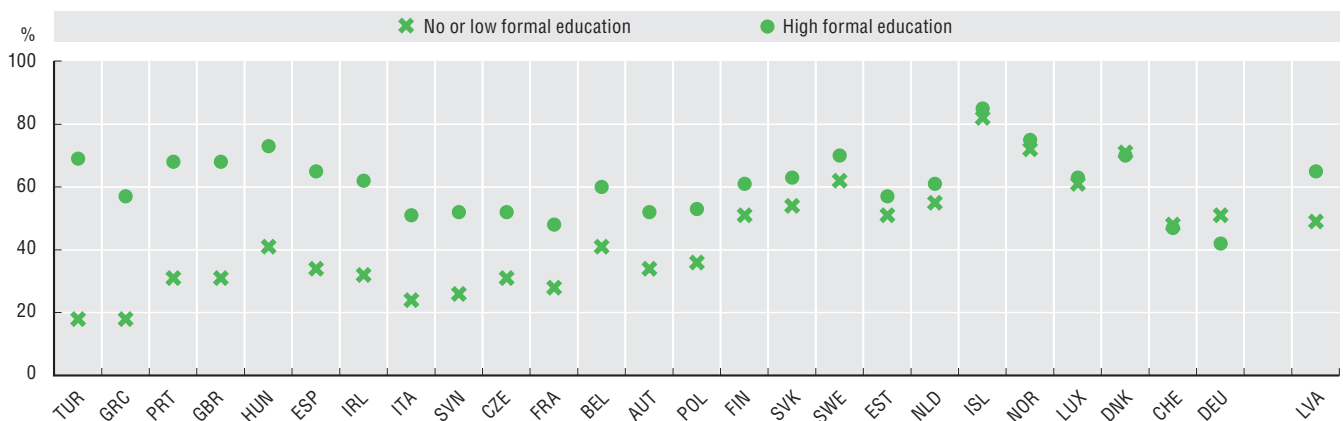
Source: Burson-Marsteller's Twiplomacy database (2014); and OECD calculations based on World Bank population data for 2013.
 StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933249115>

10.2. Central government social media strategies, internal use and measurement, 2013

	Has a strategy or objectives?	Uses social media internally?	Uses metrics or indicators?
Australia	+	+	+
Austria	+	+	-
Belgium	+	○	○
Canada	+	+	+
Chile	+	-	+
Czech Republic	-	-	-
Denmark	-	-	-
Estonia	-	+	-
Finland	+	+	-
France	+	○	+
Iceland	-	-	-
Ireland	+	-	-
Italy	+	+	○
Japan	-	-	-
Korea	+	+	-
Mexico	+	+	+
Netherlands	+	+	○
New Zealand	-	+	○
Norway	-	-	-
Poland	-	+	○
Portugal	-	○	-
Slovenia	-	+	-
Spain	-	-	-
Sweden	-	-	-
Switzerland	-	-	-
Turkey	+	-	-
OECD Total	13 (50%)	12 (46%)	5 (19%)
Colombia	+	+	+

Note: "+" means "Yes", "-" means "No", "○" means "Don't know". Italy and Mexico information is for 2015.
 Source: Mickoleit, A. (2014), "Social Media Use by Governments: A Policy Primer to Discuss Trends, Identify Policy Opportunities and Guide Decision Makers", OECD Working Papers on Public Governance, No. 26, OECD, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5jxrcmghmk0s-en>.
 StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933249126>

10.3. Share of social media users within population groups with different educational attainment levels, 2014



Source: Author's calculations based on Eurostat survey "ICT usage by individuals" (2014).

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933249139>



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