

Understanding government use of social media in Canada: opportunities and barriers

Maria Gintova

PhD Candidate
Ryerson University
maria.gintova@ryerson.ca

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Abstract

Open government is the most recent policy initiative aimed at making government more transparent and accessible. Governments around the world are exploring the ways of opening their data, improving provision of government information and services as well as engaging with the public through social media channels. Although the idea of making government more transparent and accessible is not new, the need to engage with the public on social media platforms for policy-making, program implementation and/or public service delivery has never existed before. The Government of Canada recognises this need through its open dialogue initiatives of the Canada's Action Plans on Open Government and individual departments and agencies social media strategies.

This paper examines interaction on Twitter between Immigration, Citizenship and Refugees Canada (IRCC) and IRCC Twitter users. IRCC views this channel as a way to answer questions that immigrants, students, workers, visitors to Canada and Canadian citizens might have about its programs and services. However, IRCC does not usually seek opinions nor engages on policy related issues.

As the analysis shows, IRCC does interact on Twitter mainly by answering questions as well as providing information about its programs and services. However, it is important to note that only about 30% of questions receive a response. Furthermore, the interaction between social media users themselves is very limited and they usually do not engage in discussions. The paper concludes with recommendations on how to improve interactions between government and the public on social media.

Key words: social media, open government, e-government, migrants

Introduction

Currently, policy makers in different countries and across different levels of government are initiating and implementing Open Government policies and strategies. Their efforts are primarily focused at ensuring increased transparency, people's access to government data and information and effective use of technology (Lathrop and Ruma 2010). Canada is no exception. As a member of the Open Government Partnership, Canada has developed an Open Government policy framework and is committed to implement its initiatives.

Both federal and provincial governments are implementing Open Government policies and initiatives across Canada. To date, the Government of Canada has implemented *Canada's Action Plan on Open Government (2012-2014)*, *Canada's Action Plan on Open Government 2.0 (2014-2016)* and recently developed its *Third Biennial Plan to the Open Government Partnership (2016-2018)*. All three plans are calling for creation of an "open dialogue" between the Government of Canada and the public. Furthermore, the plans specifically emphasize the need to use social media to engage with the public.

It is important to note, however, that many government agencies across Canada have been using social media for more than five years. Today, they are present on a variety of different social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and blogs to connect with Canadian citizens in order to engage them in public policy and public service delivery. However, these new platforms are not used to engage the public in two-way interactions and collaboration (Mergel 2012; Francoli 2014; McNutt 2014).

Government agencies across Canada are trying to advance the use of social media in different policy areas. One of these is immigration area where social media is becoming more important because of the Government of Canada interest in attracting highly skilled immigrants (Chase 2012). The case of immigration agencies' use of social media is also interesting because immigration agencies were not the first ones to start using it but at the same time do have social media accounts for a number of years. Thus, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) and some of provincial immigration agencies have been already using social media as a part of their communication strategies. These social media platforms are used to engage with people who can be located within and outside Canada.

Social media, however, is affecting the way migrants communicate as well. Now they can instantly get information of the Internet, share it and create their own content. This is supported by studies showing that social media is providing migrants with new ways of interaction and facilitating the migration process (Dekker and Engbersen 2012; Komito 2011). However, these new realities can create false expectations about the migration process (Ros 2010) as well as disseminate unrealistic or even false information (Dekker and Engbersen 2012).

This paper continues to build on the previous research of social media use by government agencies in Canada and examines how IRCC and migrants interact on IRCC Twitter account. Therefore, some findings of this study might be solely IRCC specific. However, as this study examines user perspectives and experiences, many findings offer valuable insights for any government agency that is using social media.

The paper is structured as follows. First, it provides a literature review and identifies research gaps. Second, it discussed the methodology as well and data collection procedures and approach to data analysis. These are followed by the discussion of the key findings, recommendations for government agencies and conclusion.

Literature review

Government use of social media

Most of the research on the social media use in government is developed within e-government literature. Therefore, it continues to be mostly focused on the effective and efficient use of this new technology by government agencies, officials and on the new forms of public engagement in the business of government. Overall, social media use is viewed as a technological innovation and a platform for transformation of communication and interaction between government and the public. As many scholars started talking about the rise of Government 2.0 (Anttiroiko 2010; Dixon 2010; Dutil et al. 2010; McNutt 2014; Roy 2013), the use of social media in government is quickly becoming an important area for research and practice around the world (Linders 2012; Criado et al. 2013).

E-government literature emphasizes the benefits of social media use and calls for its government wide adoption. Therefore, government use of social media is considered a new norm and government agencies around the world are encouraged to explore how to make social media an important addition to existing communication channels (Mergel and Greeves 2012). However, Mergel (2013) argues that governments lack clear understanding of how social media can be used and how they can benefit from using it. Moreover, the push to adopt social media in government was initiated by elected politicians outside of government (Mergel 2013). In addition, the consequences of not using it are also quite vague. Researchers describe them as a missed opportunity to “democratize democracy” – collaborate with the public and include citizens in government decision-making by using the new technology that enables to instantly voice opinions and share experiences (Mergel and Greeves 2012: 23).

Lu et al. (2016) describe three levels of interaction between government and the public on government social media. First level is one-way interaction or use of social media solely to provide information. Governments are interested only in spreading their own information by using a new way to disseminate it. However, the content that is being shared is usually available on the official website and is just being retransmitted through a different communication channel (Mergel 2012). Second level involves two-way interaction between government and the public. Here, government agencies and the public are engaged in a dialogue and social media can be used as a new platform for public consultations to gather opinions and ideas. Finally, the highest level of interaction is collaboration among the government and the public through the co-development of policies and co-production of public services (Bertot et al. 2010). Therefore, the network developed on government social media becomes self-sustainable and contributes toward achieving common goals of making improvements to public policy and service delivery.

Research to date shows that governments are mostly using social media to publicize the content from their official websites but rarely focus on public engagement or networking (Landsbergen 2011; Mergel 2012; McNutt 2014). Thus, although there is a general agreement that government should use social media (McNutt 2014; Mergel 2012), there is lack of understanding why government should go beyond the retransmission of existing content.

This is applicable to Canada as well. Currently, the efforts within Open Government commitments remain focused on making government data publicly available (Francoli 2014). At the same time, the open dialogue commitments do not receive enough attention and remain incomplete (Treasury Board Secretariat 2017). Therefore, there is lack of initiative to implement the commitments of the action plan to ensure two-way interaction between government agencies and the public (Craft 2013).

Part of the problem is that there is no understanding of what the effective use of social media by government looks like. Scholars state that the main purpose of social media is public engagement and there are two major approaches to describe how public engagement on social media should look. The first approach focuses mostly on citizens' participation in public policy, e-consultations and e-engagement (e.g. Clarke 2012; Kavanaugh et al. 2012; McNutt 2010, 2014) and the second approach focuses primarily on public service delivery (e.g. Dutil et al. 2010; Mergel 2012, 2013; Linders 2012). Therefore, scholars who study government use of social media are mainly looking at government agencies as institutions, public servants as representatives of these institutions and formal connections between government and the public. Neither of these approaches emphasize the need to study the experiences of those who use government social media resources.

There are, however, a few studies that examine the intentions and expectations of the public from interactions on government social media. Researchers are trying to understand the relationship between the government use of social media and citizens' trust in government as well as attitudes toward government and government transparency in the United States (Nam 2012, Song and Lee 2015). Therefore, they do not specifically look into the intentions and experiences of those who use government social media resources. Lu et al. 2016 offer a different approach and study user experiences and expectations from interacting with the Chinese government on a microblogging platform. However, the findings of this study, are applicable mostly to the Chinese context. Therefore, user perspectives and experiences with government social media within Canadian context are currently understudied (Lu et al. 2016).

Social media and migration

Social media plays a significant role in migration process. It brought important changes in people's online experiences and interactions (Huang and Guney 2012). As recent studies show, many migrants use social media tools for different purposes: to obtain and exchange information, to stay in touch and to get introduced to useful connections (Komito 2011; Dekker and Engbersen 2012). Although the primary reason for the use of social media is maintaining connection with friends and family (Komito 2011; Dekker and Engbersen 2012), its role in creating and disseminating information should not be underestimated. As Dekker and Engbersen (2012) note, social media is being used to obtain and exchange information that is not available elsewhere and to share streetwise knowledge on migration. They view it as an advantage for migrants who can now resist restrictive immigration policies. Thus, by using social media potential migrants may get in touch with people in the destination country or even countries where they consider migrating. Therefore, Dekker and Engbersen (2012: 2) argue that "social media transform migrant networks and thereby facilitate migration." Thus, the use of social media by immigrants is largely predetermined by its perceived value: the information that can be obtained on social media platforms cannot be instantly obtained elsewhere.

Another body of research looks at the information needs of immigrants (i.e. Caidi et al. 2010, Caidi 2008, Shoham and Strauss 2008). According to these scholars, migrants are a distinct group of information seekers that has specific information needs. These include the need to understand how to get employment, access government and other social services and supports in the country where they are planning to settle (Caidi et al. 2010, Shoham and Strauss 2008). At the same time, migrants are interested in the information about ethnic communities from their country of origin (Shoham and Strauss 2008).

Therefore, the research on the migrant use of social media is mostly looking into the role social media plays in finding and disseminating information, migrants' integration through social

media, diaspora engagement and migrants' information seeking strategies and practices (McGregor and Siegel 2013). Social media is viewed as a new way to obtain information from fellow migrants who can share their experiences and advice. This research, however, does not specifically examine how migrants use government social media.

The goal of this study is to capture how government use social media as well as how users use government social media. It is important to understand barriers that government agencies across Canada face in order to engage in a meaningful conversation with the public. However, the analysis of these barriers should be complemented by the analysis of social media users' expectations and experiences. Therefore, this study is looking to fill the existing gap in the literature by focusing on user perspectives and exploring how they differ from the government approach to the use of social media.

Methodology

This study examines interactions between government and social media users on a government Twitter account. It continues to build on existing research that focuses on interaction on a specific social media platform – most commonly Twitter and other forms of micro-blogging (e.g. Clarke 2012; Panagiotopoulos et al. 2014; Lu et al. 2016). Specifically, it focuses on IRCC general English language Twitter.

It is important to note, however, that IRCC manages several social media accounts across different platforms, including general Twitter and Facebook accounts (in English and French) as well as YouTube, LinkedIn and Instagram accounts. The Department also maintains program specific Twitter and Facebook accounts (in English and French), which are exclusively devoted to the International Experience Canada program.¹ All interactions on IRCC social media are regulated by *Terms and Conditions* that is available for the public to review. The rules that are established by this document apply to all IRCC social media accounts.

IRCC general English-language Twitter account was selected for analysis for the following reasons: (1) it is listed on the main page of the IRCC website, (2) English is the official language of the vast majority of IRCC clients, (3) it targets a variety of audiences and (4) Twitter allows to better examine the existing networks (or lack of networks) as well as interactions between government and social media users. Furthermore, Twitter capabilities allow users to post text as well as include multimedia resources in their tweets.

IRCC Twitter account is set up the following way: it provides basic information about the Department, contains a link to the *Terms and Conditions* document and a handle for the French version of the account. However, IRCC only allows users to follow and tweet at IRCC. Thus, they cannot send a direct (private) message to IRCC, as this feature is not enabled on the account. Therefore, this study covers the vast majority of conversations on IRCC Twitter as users have to ask IRCC to follow them in order to be able to leave a direct message. However, conversations that unfold through direct messages are not captured in the data discussed below.

Data collection

IRCC social media posts were collected for a period of one year (September 2015 to August 2016). Data for each month were collected separately to make the collection process easier and data analysis more manageable. Data were further separated into two databases: one for IRCC tweets and one for users' tweets.

Captured tweets included those posted from and to account @CitImmCanada. These include original tweets originated from this account, user tweets @CitImmCanada, retweets (RT), mentions and all responses to users (@user tweets). Tweets were collected by Netlytic

¹ International Experience Canada provides youth with an opportunity to travel and work in Canada.

social network analyser program. Netlytic allows to automatically collect and analyse large volume of text and social network information (Social Media Lab, 2017).² The unit of analysis was a tweet as opposed to a complete message or response that could contain several tweets.

Between September 2015 and August 2016, 46,288 tweets were collected. IRCC tweets accounted for about 8% (N=3,799) and the reminder 92% of tweets (N=42,489) originated from users. An average number of IRCC tweets per month was 317, while users, on average, tweeted significantly more – 3,451 times per month.

It is important to note that the activity on IRCC Twitter was influenced by several important events. First, there was a change in government in November 2015. Liberal party led by Justin Trudeau came to power and promised drastic changes to immigration policies of previous Conservative government led by Stephen Harper. Although only two months of data were collected for the Harper government, it is worth noting that the number of tweets was significantly lower compared to the number of tweets under the newly elected Liberal government (Figure 1).

Second, one of the campaign promise of the Liberal party was to assist with resolving humanitarian crisis in Syria and to bring 25,000 refugees in Canada as the first order of business. Most of this campaign unfolded between December 2015 and February 2016, thus accounting for the spike in messages from both IRCC and users. As the Figure 1 shows, the number of IRCC tweets grew in December, January and February – during the Syrian refugees' campaign and decreased after this campaign was over. Similarly, users also left the highest number of tweets in December, January and February (Figure 1).

Finally, as a result of the re-allocation of government resources and more specifically IRCC resources, already long processing times for sponsorship applications for spouses of Canadian citizens and permanent residents residing in Canada and abroad continued to increase. This lack of commitment to family reunification and lack of action by IRCC before June 2016 has led to an influx of tweets by Canadian sponsors. They were challenging government priorities and demanding faster processing times.

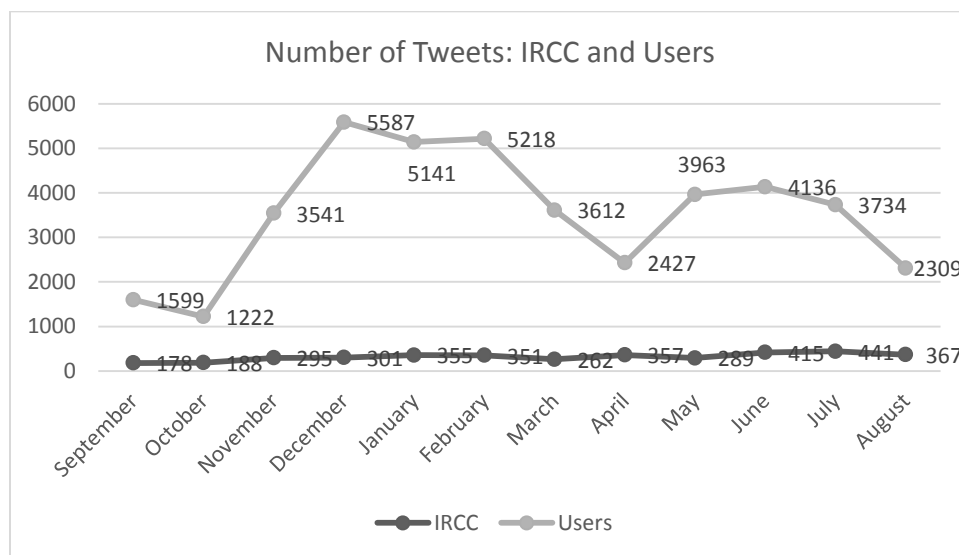


Figure 1. Activity on IRCC Twitter account

² Netlytic social network analyser is maintained by the Social Media Lab and Ted Rogers School of Management, Ryerson University.

Coding

Systematic sampling was used for coding of tweets on IRCC Twitter account (Krippendorff 2004). Given the volume of user tweets, a sample of every tenth tweet (N=1,740) was coded. This approach is widely used in studies that rely on qualitative content analysis of social media data (e.g. Segerberg and Bennett 2011; Clarke 2012). For IRCC tweets, a different approach was taken: every second tweet (N=1,893) was analysed and coded in order to more accurately capture the differences in use during specific promotional campaigns and “regular” time.

Tweets were analysed by one researcher who manually coded tweets for each month of collected data. Two types of coding was used for IRCC messages: (1) computer-assisted coding to determine if they contain a simple referral to the website or an original message and (2) manual coding to explore different types of messages (e.g. information, feedback) and messages’ topics/themes for the feedback and information messages (e.g. if they are about programs and services, processing times or technical issues).

Similar approach was used for coding of user tweets: they were manually coded to explore different types of messages (e.g. information, questions, opinions) and messages’ topics/themes for messages containing questions to IRCC and messages expressing opinions. In addition, the researcher manually verified which user tweets got response from IRCC. This information is crucial for understanding government priorities on social media, i.e. what questions are more likely to be answered and which ones remain unanswered. Manual coding was performed to ensure that general categories of tweets as well as more detailed information is captured. It is important to note that each tweet was assigned only one category for the type of message and only one category for topic/theme of the message.

A combination of deductive and inductive methods was used to prepare a codebook for analysis of tweets. Deductive codes originated from the review of research literature (Segerberg and Bennett 2011; Clarke 2012), while inductive coding was based on the research questions – how government agencies use social media and how migrants use government social media. Further, deductive codes could be only applied to IRCC tweets as there is lack of research on user perspectives and experiences with government social media.

In order to develop inductive codes, I initially coded a sample of 100 IRCC tweets and 100 user tweets. Two coding books were created: one for the IRCC tweets and another one for user tweets (Appendix A).³ Spam messages that were posted as well as user retweets were excluded from the analysis. User retweets were excluded because a retweet does not contain as much thought as an original tweet and can create bias in the data (Godfrey et al. 2014). Retweets by IRCC, however, were not excluded because their analysis allows to see what kind of information the Department considers valuable to share.

Key findings

The analysis shows that IRCC uses Twitter for two main purposes: (1) to respond to questions and (2) to provide information. Users, on the other hand, use IRCC Twitter to (1) ask questions and (2) express their opinion. However, only 30% of user questions received an answer from IRCC. Furthermore, IRCC tends to respond to certain types of questions such as questions

³ Although some codes are similar for IRCC tweets and user tweets, the collected data cannot be compared because of different approaches to coding. For example, a user question could be coded as question about processing times but IRCC would respond to this with a suggestion to fill a webform. Thus, for IRCC response, this would be coded as a referral to the website. Nevertheless, comparison of user question categories and IRCC responses provide important insights on topics/themes of questions that are more likely to be answered.

about specific programs and services (with the exception of questions about refugee programs) and question regarding applications. The Department does not comment on people's opinions.

IRCC

As the analysis shows, IRCC does engage with the users on Twitter. Moreover, the Department mostly uses its Twitter account to respond to user questions (67% of IRCC tweets). This is followed by providing information about programs and services as well as events such as citizenship ceremonies and events for newcomers to Canada (25%). The Department hardly retweets anything from other accounts (5%) and the vast majority of these retweets are for messages from official government accounts. IRCC also tweets to thank users (3%), and all other messages account for 1% of the tweets (Figure 2).

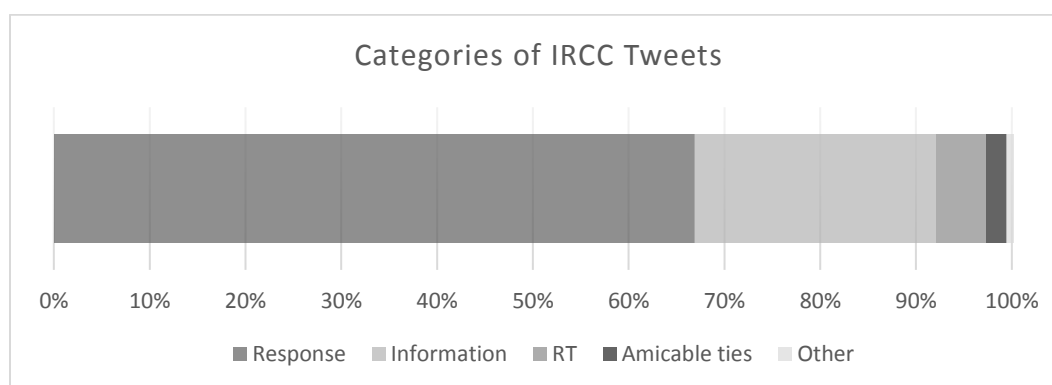


Figure 2. Categories of IRCC tweets

However, more than two thirds of IRCC responses contain a link to the information that is available on the website. Pure referrals to the website that provide no additional information but for the weblink (including suggestion to check frequently asked questions and or referring to web tools and forms) account for 22% of all responses. Therefore, only about a third of users do not have to further look for additional information after receiving a response.

Moreover, among all responses, there are more answers about specific programs and services (24%) and application related matters (17%). IRCC is answering less questions about processing times (14%) and technical issues (12%). It is also important to note that only less than 1% of the answers were about processing times for spousal sponsorships. Most of the responses (27%) contained a referral to the Department's frequently asked questions page (Help Centre), a specific webpage or a webform that has to be submitted to request case specific information. All other matters account for 6 % of tweets. Interestingly, only 1% of answers provided by the Department were about the refugee programs – the topic that was extensively promoted by the Department.

IRCC, however, provided quite a few informational tweets about refugees (28%) – the highest number among all informational tweets. These were followed by information regarding electronic travel authorization (eTA) – a newly introduced program for visitors who do not need a visa to come to Canada (14%) and information about events such as citizenship ceremonies, celebration of holidays and fairs (9%). Overall, IRCC mostly provides information about its programs and services (68% of all informational tweets). Some of this information is targeted to specific user groups such as newcomers to Canada, visitors and Canadian citizens.

It is important to note that IRCC is monitoring if users are posting any personal information such as case numbers, emails and phones and advises them to delete all tweets that

contain it. This is not, however, the case with any other forms of violations of terms and conditions of use, including coarse language, unproven accusations against certain individuals or organizations, tweets written in a language other than English or French – all these tweets continue to remain available to the public.

Users

IRCC Twitter users come from a variety of countries. The vast majority of IRCC Twitter users are located in Canada (53%). In other words, IRCC Twitter is mostly used by those who are somewhat familiar with Canadian immigration system as they already in Canada or by Canadian citizens. English-speaking developed countries such as UK, USA, Australia and New Zealand together account for 22% of users, while all other countries together account for remaining 25%. This finding should, however, be used with caution as Twitter does not require users to identify their location and/or provide a proper name for it. Thus, only 68% of users (N=364) whose profile was analysed, actually mentioned where they were from. Moreover, there is no way to verify if those who mentioned that they were in Canada were actually located in Canada.

Users are tweeting @CitImmCanada for a variety of reasons. Majority of user tweets (43%) are questions and/or other prompts for feedback from IRCC. This is followed by expressions of opinion on a specific immigration topic or a personal statement (21%), sharing of information (15%), responses to other users (15%), thanking and/or expressing gratitude to IRCC or other users (5%) as well as other matters (1%) (Figure 3). Thus, IRCC users are interested in getting responses to their questions and/or sharing their opinions rather than interacting with other users on IRCC Twitter account and providing information to them.

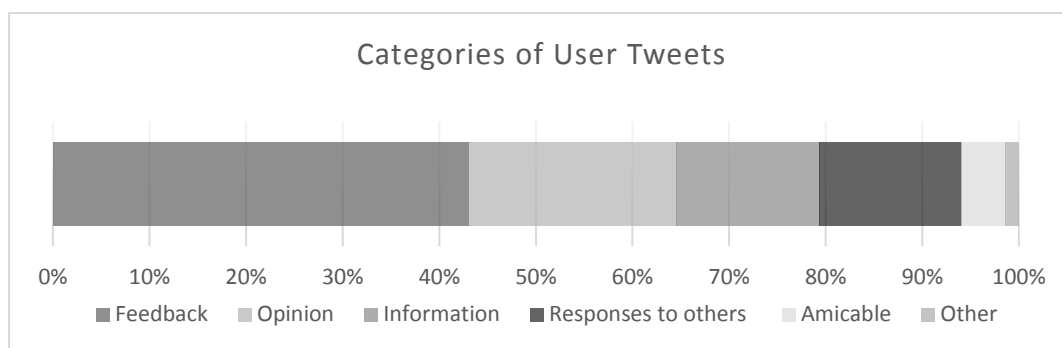


Figure 3. Categories of user tweets by types of messages

As the analysis shows, only 30% of user questions and other prompts for feedback receive response from IRCC. This number is significantly lower for other types of user posts: 6% of messages that express gratitude get a response and 2% of tweets containing information. The Department does not participate in the conversations between users and does not respond to tweets that express an opinion. Moreover, IRCC does not react to the use of inappropriate language and/or at tweets that insult others.

Further, the most popular topic/theme for user questions is technical issues (24%), followed by programs and services (23%), processing times (19%), questions about applications (15%), spousal sponsorship (9%) and other matters (10%) (Table 1). It is also important to note that users ask most of questions about the following programs and services: refugees (4%) and

eTA (3%). There were, however, no question asked about programs and services available for newcomers.

Based on the results of the analysis, it is clear that not all user questions are treated similarly: the Department is more likely to answer questions on certain topics. Thus, users are more likely to receive a response if they ask about an application related matter as well programs and services with the exception of refugee programs.

Table 1. Comparison of Twitter user questions and questions that were answered by IRCC by topic/theme

Topic/Theme Category	Percent of user questions	Percent of user questions answered by IRCC
Technical Issues	24%	20%
Application	15%	23%
Processing times	19%	17%
Spousal sponsorship	9%	0%
Refugees	4%	2%
eTA	3%	7%
Other programs and services (i.e. visiting, studying, working, citizenship, etc.)	16%	22%
Other	10%	9%

It is also important to note that no responses were provided for questions about processing times for spousal sponsorship although they account for 9% of all questions asked by users. Users who were asking about questions regarding refugees also received fewer answers compared to the number of answers for other programs and services. Moreover, users are less likely to get an answer about technical issues.

Questions about eTA, on the other hand, received more answers despite the fact that there were fewer questions asked regarding this program compared to spousal sponsorship and refugees. Interestingly, IRCC was promoting both refugees and eTA programs but eTA was clearly a less controversial issue compared to refugees. This can explain why eTA related questions received more answers than questions about refugees.

Nevertheless, spousal sponsorship (23%) and refugees (21%) are the two most popular topic/themes for users to express their opinion on. Together they account for almost half of all opinions expressed on IRCC Twitter account. Other tweets are making comments regarding processing times (11%), other immigration programs and services (10%), politics and government (4%), personal matters (2%) as well immigrants and newcomers (2%). All other tweets combined account for 27% of tweets that express opinions. None of these tweets got a comment from IRCC.

Discussion

The results of this study show that IRCC engages with users on its Twitter account but in a limited way. IRCC provides answers to some questions that users have but does not engage in conversations on policy or any controversial issues, thus, limiting the use of social media to a customer service function. The Department also avoids replying to any tweets that critique the way the services are delivered. The only exception to this was a special campaign - public consultation on the future of immigration in Canada held between July 5 and August 5, 2016.

Therefore, IRCC views social media as a new way to provide customer service to its clients, thus, expanding the number of options people can use to communicate with the Department.

Providing responses to people's questions is the primary reason for IRCC interactions on Twitter. However, the response rate is quite low with only 30% of questions getting an answer. Moreover, the vast majority of provided answers contain a link to the Department website, so users need to look further for required information.

In addition, the Department is more likely to answer questions on certain topics. Thus, although questions about technical issues was the most popular topic for users, these users were less likely to receive a response compared to those who asked application related questions. Moreover, practically all questions regarding processing times for spousal sponsorship applications remained unanswered.

Thus, some users are at a disadvantage when using IRCC Twitter as they do not receive a response. This can happen for two main reasons: IRCC does not have enough resources to monitor and respond to all questions and/or the Department deliberately picks the questions it answers. Nevertheless, IRCC *Terms and Conditions* of social media use do not reflect the fact that only certain questions will be answered. Therefore, users' expectations might not be met simply because they will anticipate an answer but their question will not get a response due to IRCC internal reasons. Therefore, they will be forced to look for information elsewhere.

Providing information is another important reason for IRCC use of Twitter. The Department mostly tweets about its programs and services and targets specific audiences, including Canadians, potential immigrants and visitors to Canada. Therefore, the function of broadcasting information that is already available on the website remains quite important. Social media, however, allows to reach out to audiences that do not check the website (i.e. Canadians living abroad and those who historically could travel to Canada without a visa). At the same time, as the user analysis shows, most of IRCC Twitter users are located in Canada. Therefore, the Department needs to consider this when planning promotional campaigns.

The analysis of user tweets show that users are only interested in interaction with IRCC and this is the primary reason for them to use IRCC Twitter account. Further, they are not interested in interacting between themselves, although they sometimes engage in a discussion that can transform into an argument. In addition, users rarely try to answer questions that other user have. When these discussions occur, IRCC does not participate in them nor warns the participants if inappropriate language and/or insults are used.

Users are also tweet @CitImmCanada to express their opinions about IRCC programs and services. Spousal sponsorship and refugees were the two most popular topics/themes for users to express their opinions on. One of the reasons for this can be lack of response from IRCC to questions regarding these topics. It is also important to note that none of the tweets that was simply a statement of one's opinion got a comment from IRCC.

Recommendations for government agencies and conclusion

Based on the results of the study, several practical recommendations for government agencies are offered. First, as users look for responses to their questions from IRCC, adequate resources should be allocated to ensure that the feedback is provided. This is especially important considering that those who are located outside Canada have limited options to get a quick response from the Department.

Second, government agencies should be able to monitor user activity on social media, including violations of terms and conditions of its use. Presence of inappropriate language and insults can lead to people's reluctance to disclose a point of view or engage in a conversation.

Furthermore, it shows that the Department does not pay much attention for the need to observe the established rules.

Third, the Department should define what issues are going to be addressed on social media in its publicly available documents such as *Terms and Conditions* document. Thus, users will be aware that certain questions will not get a response and their expectations will be formed accordingly.

Fourth, government agencies should understand if they are reaching out to target audiences they expect to engage on social media. This can be done by analysing user profiles and/or conducting short surveys. If a crucial user group is missing, government agencies can strategize how to engage with these users.

Finally, as the analysis shows, users are not interested in engaging in conversations between themselves on IRCC. Furthermore, if they occasionally comment or provide response to other people questions, IRCC does not participate in these conversations. However, IRCC input can be helpful to correct misunderstandings, stimulate discussions or to present an official government position. It will also make conversations on the platform more engaging. Therefore, it might help to start a shift toward collaboration between government agencies and the public on social media (Lu et al. 2016).

As the case of IRCC shows, government agencies in Canada are exploring the new possibilities and opportunities to engage with the public that were not possible without social media. However, there is a need to further understand and promote the value added that social media brings to government communication strategies. Nevertheless, the rules of engagement and interaction on social media should be clearly defined.

It is quite important to note that the public seems to be interested in engaging on government social media. However, social media users are primarily interested in communicating with government and obtaining information they are looking for from government agencies. Thus, the role of government as a sole provider of reliable and accurate information regarding its programs and services should not be underestimated. Moreover, if users are lacking this information from government, they are forced to look for it elsewhere and/or make decisions in the absence of necessary information.

Further research is needed to identify people's experiences and expectations from the use of government social media. This will help to inform government agencies' social media strategies and approaches to engagement as well as identify challenges that need to be addressed in order to create meaningful dialogue. Findings from this study can be used to inform future research and existing government practices of social media use.

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Appendix A. Coding Books

IRCC Tweets

Type Category	Topic/theme	Description	Sample Tweet
Information	Programs and services: eTA	Provides information about program, service or event	Getting an Electronic Travel Authorization (eTA) will be a simple and brief online process: http://t.co/Ji5uJTzAjk #eTACanada
Responses	Help Centre	Contains @username/ and provides information/response	@MSluytman Hi. Our Help Centre has an answer for you: http://t.co/jnTGXBxd0Y
RT	N/A	Contains RT/ "shared" message	RT @Safety_Canada: Bringing #SyrianRefugees to Canada is a great undertaking and we can do it w/ the help of our partners from all levels oâ€¦
Amicable ties	N/A	Expression of gratitude such as such as thanking somebody and/or congratulating on something.	@Noshheer Thanks for sharing these great photos. Congratulations to the new Canadian citizens!
Other	N/A	All other tweets that could not be categorized	Who is the first African-Canadian woman to be elected to the House of Commons? #BHM

User Tweets

Type Category	Topic/theme	Description	Sample Tweet
Question	Programs and services: visiting	Question addressed to IRCC or other users	@CitImmCanada I need to ask if I have a visitor Visa, can I still visit Canada although it will expire in 15th of December?
Opinion	Technical issues	Expresses a view or judgement (positive or negative) about IRCC, Canada, immigration programs and services,	Day 8 @CitImmCanada still hasn't fixed system issues on their site. What a time to be alive.

		experiences etc. that is not necessarily based on fact or knowledge	
Information	N/A	Shares information with IRCC and/or other users (may contain a link to a website, video, news article, etc.)	Travel Canada https://t.co/19JFSc1D2k - top stories by @CitImmCanada, @CanHCZA, @chavespazlegal
Response to other users	N/A	Responds to the tweet by other user to engage in a discussion	@EvilLilGoat @CitImmCanada I am waiting on Citizenship since 2011, now 4 yrs passed, way past posted deadlines. ECAS old by 3 yrs too! #cdnimm
Amicable ties	N/A	Expression of gratitude such as such as thanking somebody and/or congratulating on something. Messages can be addressed to IRCC or other users.	@CitImmCanada thank you. The instructions really helped.
Other	N/A	Other categories, not covered by those provided above	N/A