

The Impacts of Social Media on Government and Democracy: An Examination of Municipal Usage in Nova Scotia, Canada

Karan Riarh and Jeffrey Roy

1 Introduction

In an era of openness and virtualization, this chapter explores social media usage by local governments and candidates for elected office in the Canadian province of Nova Scotia. Our examination draws from a wider set of findings in Canada and elsewhere that suggest an emerging set of contradictory forces with respect to social media (SM) usage by governments for both political and administrative purposes: whereas SM is said to be a driver of wider engagement and new participative capacities, much of its usage is often deployed for informing and communications instead (Roy 2013). These contradictions stem from the complexities of SM usage and its impacts on traditional democratic and administrative governance systems devised long before the mainstream arrival of the Internet (to say nothing of the more participative variant of online activity and platforms denoted as Web 2.0). The term “contradiction” implies some truth to both sides of these debates and underscores the importance of empirical examination, a key objective of this chapter. While social media may often be more visible politically and administratively at national levels, the counterargument and upside of examining local government is that this latter realm, featuring a wider range of smaller jurisdictions and organizational units, typically leads public sector reform in a bottom-up manner (*ibid.*).

Accordingly, we sought to review and assess SM trends (in terms of presence and usage) within the Nova Scotia municipal public sector from both administrative and electoral vantage points. During the fall of 2012, we cataloged the online presence of all local governments in the province with a social media presence, as well as the candidates for elected office in the largest urban centers (this chapter’s reporting in terms of electoral candidates is limited to the Mayoral contest of the

K. Riarh (✉) · J. Roy
School of Public Administration, Faculty of Management, Dalhousie University, B3H 3J5,
Halifax, NS, Canada
e-mail: karan.riarh@dal.ca

J. Roy
e-mail: roy@dal.ca

largest of these cities). Our methodology and findings are presented as follows: A literature review of social media's impacts on democratic governance, and the opportunities and challenges associated with Web 2.0 and like-minded calls for Gov 2.0 is the focus of the next section. The third section presents the main contours of our empirical review as well as select examples of social media usage by governments and candidates, and the fourth section concludes this chapter by way of overall lessons learned as well as limitations of our findings and possible avenues for future research.

2 Social Media and Governance: Opportunities and Challenges

Social media and Web 2.0 are driving the emergence of Gov 2.0-stylized experimentation in efforts to realize the open and collaborative value of “ubiquitous engagement” (Lee and Kwak 2011). This transformative potential is intertwined with a number of important trends confronting the public sector. These trends include the need for greater transparency and accountability of government, better access to public services, greater citizen engagement and improved adoption of emerging technologies (Huijboom et al. 2009). These trends are occurring against a backdrop of declining voter participation and engagement, and decreased satisfaction and trust in government (Tapscott et al. 2008).

Wikipedia defines Web 2.0 as going beyond static websites that characterized early versions of online platforms toward an interactive and collaborative experience through a social media dialogue as creators of user-generated content through a virtual community. A subset of Web 2.0, then, social media enables users to create their own public profiles and connect to others through various networks of friends, organizations and interests (Mossberger and Wu 2012). A stark contrast to the hierarchical parameters of structures of representational democracy, this nexus of virtualization and empowerment is thus characterized by the presence of networks, flexible connections, and transient audiences (OECD 2009). Currently, three of the more popular social media tools in the western world are Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, though numerous other platforms exist across countries and cultures.

Opportunities

There are three interlinked opportunities for the public sector in using Web 2.0, and in particular social media. First, there is opportunity for communication and information sharing. At minimum, Web 2.0 serves as a communication and information dissemination tool, and as another medium by which elected and government officials can interact with the public (Sandoval-Almazan and Gil-Garcia 2012; Morison 2010). More broadly, Web 2.0 has afforded organizations and movements outside

of government new means of producing and exchanging information (Mossberger and Wu 2012). Citizens and other organizations are then free to use and analyze that information for a variety of purposes (Morison 2010). Governments, moreover, can leverage new social media channels in order to disseminate information and messaging more widely and more efficiently.

Second, there is opportunity for enhanced public participation and engagement. Since Web 2.0 is based on a culture of sharing, collaborating, socializing, and openness, it creates a potential for government to establish a new participatory dimension online to generate greater civic engagement (Tapscott et al. 2008; Mossberger and Wu 2012). Dialogue between government and citizens is an important element to democratic discourse and Web 2.0 offers an opportunity for individuals to interact with government and other citizens in an alternative setting (Mossberger and Wu 2012). Web 2.0 can therefore enrich government interactions with external stakeholders and the public by providing access to built-in networks (Embaye et al. n.d.; OECD 2009).

A third opportunity is innovation. Since Web 2.0 affords flexibility, openness, and collaboration, the public sector can leverage such traits in taking positive advantage of the horizontal characteristic of Web 2.0 and its' users, to find innovative applications for information sharing and service delivery. The primary example of this is the idea of crowdsourcing where governments can turn to the online community as a collective to solicit solutions, services, or ideas to problems (Serrat 2010; Tapscott et al. 2008). Governments have access to expertise outside of their organizations and benefit from the free flow of information, interactivity, and collaboration that is the foundation of Web 2.0 (Bonsón et al. 2012).

These opportunities in turn provide several broader benefits to the public sector in terms of an expanded, more open and more participatory set of governance mechanisms for both policy-making and service delivery (Fyfe and Crookall 2010). Such improvements can lead to improved public trust in government (Sandoval-Almazan and Gil-Garcia 2012).

Challenges

With the opportunities and benefits, especially in terms of citizen engagement, also come several challenges. The biggest challenge is bridging the rigidity of government with the flexibility of Web 2.0. Government bureaucracy can be characterized as closed, vertical or hierarchical, and formal; Web 2.0 on the other hand is open, horizontal, and relatively informal (Huijboom et al. 2009). Web 2.0 effectively challenges the traditional structure and purpose of government by generating public value that was previously exclusively provided by government (Huijboom et al. 2009). Since Web 2.0 is inherently networked and collaborative, in order for government to leverage the advantages and opportunities, government too will need to change and adapt to meet the flexibility and openness of Web 2.0 (Huijboom et al. 2009). As a result, Web 2.0 has the potential to be very disruptive because of

how it challenges established institutions and the routines built around those institutions (Huijboom et al. 2009; Klang and Nolin 2011). Adopting Web 2.0 and adapting to this new model therefore requires leadership and executive support (Fyfe and Crookall 2010).

The rigidity of government also means that government is often tempted to use Web 2.0 in a technocratic manner and focus on aspects such as back end streamlining, administration and modernizing existing government functions instead of deeper innovations that allows the public to be more involved (Huijboom et al. 2009). Moreover, governments end up using tools such as social media more like traditional media focusing on messages, instead of understanding conversation and engagement (Weeks 2012). Governments continue to try to control the message and medium, and miss the fact that these tools do not actually belong to government but in fact belong to the users (Weeks 2012). Moreover, in using Web 2.0 in a traditional manner and trying to control the medium, government loses the essence of openness that is at the foundation of Web 2.0 (Klang and Nolin 2011). It can be a difficult concept to understand as it essentially amounts to a transfer of power from bureaucrats and politicians to citizens (Hand and Ching 2011). Using Web 2.0 to its' potential therefore requires a culture shift within government from one that values hierarchy and formality, and is characterized by silos, to one that values horizontalness and collaboration and is more networked driven (Huijboom et al. 2009; Serrat 2010).

A second major challenge is recognizing that Web 2.0 is a supplement to established tools and mechanisms, not a replacement (Association of Local Government Information Management Inc. 2009). Moreover, it is just that; a tool (Maier-Rabler and Huber 2011; OECD 2009). Implementing Web 2.0 technologies do not necessarily mean improved citizen engagement or communication or a better democratic discourse (Maier-Rabler and Huber 2011; OECD 2009). The principles that underpin Web 2.0 facilitate potential improvement but are largely a means to an end (OECD 2009). There still needs to be a discussion on the purpose and use of the tool, what goals government is trying to accomplish in using it, and how success is going to be measured (Fyfe and Crookall 2010).

Simply having a Web 2.0 presence does not mean an organization is taking advantage of the opportunities Web 2.0 allows nor does it mean engagement is meaningful. Not all Web 2.0 tools will fit all contexts, and deep-rooted issues of apathy, distrust, conflict, and lack of coordination cannot be solved by these tools (OECD 2009). Governments using Web 2.0 need to make concerted efforts to involve citizens through these tools by providing opportunities to make decisions and affect outcomes and not just use them as another message bot through which citizens continue to passively consume information (Hand and Ching 2011). How well this works will depend on practice and policy, and to what extent governments use the technology for participation as it was designed (Maier-Rabler and Huber 2011).

Other challenges to governments in implementing Web 2.0 tools include a lack of time and resources, potential information overload, and low participation. Governments may have good intentions for using and implementing these tools but may lack the time, expertise, and capacity to pursue or maintain it (Embaye et al. n.d.; OECD 2009). This can be a very significant problem because creating a Facebook

page or a Twitter account and then not maintaining and engaging users leaves a negative impression and only serves to further disenfranchise citizens from the democratic process (Embaye et al. n.d.).

The proliferation of social media and other Web 2.0 tools also means that governments are competing with other individuals and entities to keep citizens interested (OECD 2009). There is so much information available on the internet and through these tools that individuals may feel a sense of overload (OECD 2009). This is compounded by the fact that these tools do not guarantee citizen participation nor does it necessarily represent the population. Like any other consultation mechanism, citizens can still be apathetic and uninvolved, and the citizens consulted through these mediums may only represent a certain segment of the population (ibid.). Actually transferring their ideas and opinions into initiatives can therefore be very difficult and bring up concerns about representativeness (Mota and Santinha 2012). The internet also allows for anonymity which can result in having disruptive participants who negatively impact trust and collaboration (Embaye et al. n.d.).

From Informing to Engaging

In reviewing the literature on Web 2.0, a spectrum of how governments use and focus social media in regards to citizen engagement emerges. This spectrum, influenced by Lee and Kwak (2011) and International Association for Public Participation ((IAP2), 2007), has three stages of engagement: one-way communication, two-way communication, and full engagement. Each of these stages, including examples from the public sector, are described below.

In the first stage, social media and other Web 2.0 tools are used to inform citizens. The platform functions as a one-way communication tool from government to citizens. This includes not only keeping the public informed but also basic data transparency where government information, processes, and policy is shared online (Lee and Kwak 2011; IAP2 2007). There could also be minimal engagement whereby the public sector sets up the online social media infrastructure in order to maintain the organization's brand and prepare for future use but may not currently use the platforms (Embaye et al. n.d.). In general, the public sector benefits from increased public awareness, increased accountability, and a shift to openness (Lee and Kwak 2011).

Governments and politicians can easily employ social media for the basic purpose of informing by using mainstream social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter as message mediums. The point is not to get input or a response from the public, but rather to simply send information out (Embaye et al. n.d.). Local governments may find this particularly useful as a means to send out reminders about tax bills, road closures, or maintenance issues (Embaye et al. n.d.). Transportation agencies have found this basic use to be particularly useful for communicating travel time information including delays, service interruptions, route changes, and more (Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) 2012). For politicians, social

media can serve as a minipress release function. Any announcements, priorities and platform, events and commentary on issues can simply be sent out as a status update on Facebook, as a tweet on Twitter, or as a video on YouTube (Clarke 2010). There is nothing about any social media site that forces individuals or agencies to be “social.” Social media can be just “media” (Weeks 2012).

In the second stage, Web 2.0 technologies go a step further and are used to interact with citizens as a two-way communication tool. Trying to limit communication to a one-way relationship as in the first level is difficult to do as the mediums demand this two-way relationship (i.e., demanding the “social” part of social media). This two-way communication stage is interactive and focuses on mainstream social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. The focus is on informal conversations, generating feedback, acknowledging concerns and crowdsourcing. Organizations benefit from having real-time, instant feedback from the public, and building a community-based conversation about the business of government (Lee and Kwak 2011; IAP2 2007). This stage requires active participation and regular monitoring, and organizations need to be responsive and timely (Embaye et al. n.d.).

Both governments and politicians can leverage Web 2.0 at this level. For government, this is a great way to generate informal channels of participation and build a foundation toward something more institutionalized. The mediums can also be used promotionally by using contests or getting users to participate in the events (Embaye et al. n.d.). For politicians, it is an additional means of connecting with constituents, campaigning, and generating support by interacting and being responsive over the social media network (Clarke 2010).

An example of this second stage is TransLink in Vancouver, Canada. TransLink is the regional transportation body in the Metro Vancouver region that provides public transit services. The organization has several social media applications but Twitter has emerged as a key part of TransLink’s customer service and information sharing strategy. Their use of Twitter started out as an experiment during the 2010 Olympic and Paralympics Winter Games as a means to communicate with the press but the organization found that they were also fielding questions from customers. Traffic on Twitter fizzled after the Olympics but employees in the organization saw a potential for using Twitter as a complement to their call center and built a business case that resulted in a 1 month pilot in November 2010 (the medium is now a permanent part of TransLink’s communication and customer service apparatus).

Twitter is not only used to provide transit service information and updates but it is also used to respond to questions, concerns, comments, and inquiries. TransLink quickly learned that users expect two-way conversations and has therefore learned to build relationships with their followers. “TransLink believes that social networking is not just a way for agencies to repackaging their traditional customer communications. Instead, agencies have to be prepared to respond to customers in the social space and to engage them in conversation” (Transit Cooperative Research Program 2012, p. 37). Moreover, this has given TransLink insight into what customers are thinking, how they view the service and what they think is being done wrong. This direct line to customers has not only benefited the organization in how they interact

with their customers but it has also provided insight into service delivery (ibid. 2012).

At the highest level, Web 2.0 technologies enhance collaboration and engagement. The public is more heavily involved in solving complex problems and issues, governments and agencies work together on joint projects and decision making, both the public and private sector is leveraged to create value-added services, and public engagement is integrated into the governance structure (Lee and Kwak 2011). Government looks to the public for advice and innovation, and partners with the public on decision making. Government could go as far as empowering the public to make the final decision by agreeing to do whatever the public decides (IAP2 2007).

There are not many examples of public sector organizations employing initiatives at this stage especially in terms of social media. However, public sector organizations are discovering the potential of Web 2.0 applications and experimenting with how they can be used to leverage greater civic engagement. In particular, some local governments in Canada are using Web 2.0 applications as a new means of participatory budgeting and then using social media as a means of communicating the opportunity. The City of Calgary employed an online budgeting tool in February 2011 as part of a budget planning engagement process known as “Our City, Our Budget, Our Future.” The budget tool allowed residents to view current departmental spending and see how changes would affect various city services. Citizens could also submit their priorities and ideas for the budget which were then incorporated into final budget deliberations by council. This input, from 24,000 people, resulted in property tax increases and additional funding for transit. The city also produced an easy to read budget report that laid out what the budget was going to do and how the public’s input from the engagement exercise was incorporated into the budgetary decisions of each policy area (Thomas 2012; City of Calgary n.d.). Toronto and Vancouver have also experimented with participatory budgeting using Web 2.0 (Thomas 2012).

3 Local Government Usage in Nova Scotia

Our research examined social media use in all 54 municipalities in Nova Scotia, as well as all candidates in the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) and Cape Breton Regional Municipality (CBRM) local elections in the autumn of 2012. This chapter summarizes some of the main trends from this province-wide review—while offering select case studies in order to illustrate the specific usage and approaches of both municipal organizations and candidates for elected office.

Social media was confined to Facebook and Twitter with exceptional usage of any other platforms noted. The following Facebook characteristics were noted: whether the account was a page or a profile, the number of “likes,” the frequency and type of posts, comments by the public, and interactions with other users. For Twitter, the following characteristics were noted: the number of “followers,” the

frequency and type of tweets, and the content of tweets. For both mediums, a qualitative assessment was made on the type of engagement (one-way communication, two-way communication, or full engagement) with particular attention paid to how present and active the user was, and whether the user was soliciting feedback, responding to inquiries, or simply sending out information. The websites of municipalities were visited to find links to their Facebook or Twitter pages.¹ If no links were readily found, a Google search was conducted. For the municipal election in HRM, the candidate list provided by the municipality was used. This list had full contact information including websites which were visited to find links to social media pages. If no website was listed or if social media links were not readily available, a Google search was conducted. For CBRM, there was also a list of candidates provided by the municipality. However, it did not have contact information so websites and social media pages were found via a Google search.

Overall, we found that nearly half of Nova Scotia municipalities use Facebook while only a quarter use Twitter. Of 27 municipalities with a population up to 5,000, 13 are using Facebook and nine are using Twitter. Of 11 municipalities with a population between 5,000 and 9,999, seven are using Facebook and only one is using Twitter. Of the 14 municipalities with a population between 10,000 and 49,999, two are using Facebook and two are using Twitter. Of the two largest municipalities (populations greater than 100,000), both are using Facebook and only one is using Twitter. There are a couple of instances where a Facebook or Twitter page exists for a municipality but it is unclear whether they are official pages as there is no link from the municipal website nor does the descriptor on the social media page give any indication. There are also several municipalities with poorly designed websites that made finding their social media information difficult and frustrating.

The majority of municipalities in Nova Scotia are engaged in one way communication on both social media platforms. Overall, the municipalities are focused on informing, are very minimalist in their maintenance of their pages and are simply maintaining an online profile. On Facebook, municipalities provided information about city services, recreation programs, events, cancellations, and weather conditions or warnings. Individuals from the community often posted with their own information about events in the community but there was little acknowledgment from the page owner whether it be a confirmation, a “I Like” or a “thank you for sharing.” One of the interesting aspects to Facebook usage are the several cases where the municipality did not have a main municipal Facebook page but the recreation department does. This makes sense given that Facebook is an easy platform within which to provide up-to-date information on recreation programs, when they are happening and if they have been cancelled, especially since Facebook allows users to create “events” and invite people to those events.

¹ In our reporting below, we have tried to verify the ongoing existence of relevant social media pages as per the noted address, though some pages may have been altered since they no longer appear. As noted in our chapter, this is particularly prevalent with respect to candidates during and after the election period.

On Twitter, there is very little engagement, very little re-tweeting and few conversations. There are several cases where there is little understanding of the need to customize content to the medium. Twitter accounts are often synced with the Facebook page and so whatever is posted on Facebook is the same content that shows up on Twitter. Given that only a small number of municipalities have adopted Twitter, it was difficult to assess their usage. It is clear that this is still a new medium that Nova Scotia municipalities are learning to use.

Halifax Regional Municipality

HRM is the largest municipality in Nova Scotia with a population of nearly 400,000 (Nova Scotia Community Counts 2011). The city's social media presence is quite expansive and comprehensive with multiple Facebook and Twitter pages, each for a different purpose. The city also uses YouTube, blogs, and RSS feeds (Halifax Regional Municipality n.d.)

HRM's Facebook and Twitter pages are dedicated to a variety of departments and areas including transit, events, policy, planning, youth, and community. Some departments have a presence on both Facebook and Twitter while others use only one platform, and each department uses the social media platforms differently. For example, the city's public transit department, Metro Transit, is on Twitter only and like other transportation agencies, uses Twitter to communicate service information especially as it relates to traffic delays, schedule changes, detours, and service reminders. The department also responds to customer questions and concerns, with official complaints re-directed to the city's 311 service. It is important to note that Metro Transit is only online between 8:30 am and 4:30 pm (<https://twitter.com/hfxtransit>).

On the other hand, Plan HRM, which has a Facebook and Twitter presence, is a dedicated citizen portal for information and feedback on regional and community planning projects. Citizens are provided with links to documents, information about open houses and surveys, and an opportunity to give their input. While the page does not have a lot of "likes," it tries to generate an environment of discussion and conversation through posts and encourages users to share the information posted. Their Twitter page unfortunately is not as well utilized with the majority of tweets being made up of re-tweets of HRM's official Twitter page (<https://www.facebook.com/PlanHRM>; <https://twitter.com/planhrm>).

Another Facebook page, "Good Neighbors, Great Neighborhoods," takes the Plan HRM Facebook page a step further. The page is a place for residents of HRM to "connect online and exchange information which will help us [HRM] create—and celebrate—great neighborhoods where we live, work and play" (Good Neighbors, Great Neighborhoods n.d.). Once again, the intention is good with HRM trying to give residents an online environment where they can interact with one another and bring their ideas for HRM to the city's attention. The Facebook page also tries to promote discussion by sharing links and news about community development and

public consultation events. Unfortunately, the page suffers from a lack of engagement on the public's end with only 500 "likes" and very few, sporadic posts and comments by the public (<https://www.facebook.com/PlanHRM>).

HRM's use of social media places it firmly in the second stage of citizen engagement. The city is very much trying to engage in a conversation with residents and providing multiple platforms and opportunities to do so. The one area that HRM is lacking in is data transparency. HRM currently does not have an open data portal but is working toward establishing one. This should help enrich the city's interaction with residents as they have easier access to information and as the city builds a stronger online platform that allows for more collaborative opportunities for citizens.

After HRM, CBRM is the next largest municipality with a population of just over 100,000. However, it does not really have a social media presence. There is no general dedicated CBRM Facebook page or Twitter account. There is a Facebook page dedicated to raising awareness about physical activity opportunities in CBRM called "Active Living CBRM" and it does just that by posting information about hiking trails, sports events, healthy living, and more. The mayor is also on Twitter. However, that is as far as their social media presence goes and given the size of the municipality, this was a surprising finding.

Town of Berwick

The Town of Berwick is a small municipality located in the Annapolis Valley. With a population of just over 2,400 (Nova Scotia Community Counts 2011), the municipality boasts a Facebook following of over 2,100. Berwick's Facebook page is an active community with both the municipality and residents actively using the platform to provide news, event information and recreation information. Berwick posts updates almost daily, and responds regularly to questions and comments by residents. The page reads like an online version of a community hall where residents are discussing whatever is happening in the community, are raising questions and concerns about various issues, and are recognizing the work being done by residents and town workers. The page is also very personal with residents clearly knowing the individual behind the municipality's posts, often referring to the individual by first name (<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Town-of-Berwick/160216961715>).

Berwick's success with establishing such an open, personal, and welcoming online environment can partly be attributed to the fact it is a small town. Users who post and comment on the town's Facebook page, cannot be anonymous since everyone knows one another. This has resulted in improved civility, avoiding potential disruptive individuals as users are held accountable for what they post (Roy 2012). As a result, Berwick's use of Facebook falls closer to the third stage of engagement given the collaborative nature of the online discussions.

Berwick's success with Facebook is partially muted by the municipality's ineffective use of Twitter. Their Twitter account has a decent base with over 500

followers. However, the tweets are synced to the Facebook page's status updates. Therefore, the only tweets that show up are the status updates the town makes on Facebook. There has been no effort made to customize tweets so they fit Twitter's 140 character limit nor is there any engagement with followers. The municipality's Twitter account does not mention other users, it does not re-tweet other users or organizations, and it does not use hashtags (https://twitter.com/town_berwick). Berwick's use of Twitter therefore puts them within the first stage of one-way communication.

Town of Kentville

The town of Kentville, also located in the Annapolis Valley, is a small municipality with a population of just over 6,000 (Nova Scotia Community Counts 2011). Kentville has both a Facebook page and a Twitter account. The Facebook page is one of several examples of municipalities that have a dedicated Facebook page for their recreation department but do not have one general page for the municipality itself. This Facebook page is much like Berwick's Facebook page in that it has a good following (over 1,000 "likes") and an active presence. It is also very personal in the sense that users appear to know who is behind the municipality's posts. Kentville is responsive to other users' comments, and posts, and acknowledges contributions by other individuals who have information that is of relevance to recreation in the region. There is also a light-hearted air in a lot of the posts with the municipality willing to be funny and make jokes, particularly about the weather (<https://www.facebook.com/kentville.recreation>).

Their Twitter account, unlike Berwick's, is interactive. Kentville has over 500 followers on Twitter and while not nearly as active as on Facebook (tweets tend to be sporadic), the municipality does respond to questions. The platform is largely used to send out information about events in the community and information about public meetings. Kentville also uses the platform for promotional purposes such as contests in the community or awareness of the Facebook page. The account also shows signs of improvement over time as tweets are less rare than 1–2 years ago and as they also mention other users (<https://twitter.com/townofkentville>). Overall, Kentville's use of both Facebook and Twitter meets the characteristics of the two-way communication stage.

HRM Municipal Elections

Overall, HRM candidates used their social media sites to inform the public with a focus on the campaign trail. Posts and tweets about canvassing and public appearances were common as were links to newspaper articles and videos about a candidate and his or her platform. When voting commenced, candidates used their social media platform to remind individuals to vote, and provided information on

how to register, and where and how to vote. Very few candidates used Facebook or Twitter to share their platforms, perspectives, and issues. They did use the two mediums to provide links to their website where platforms were housed but often did not actively share or engage in debate through status updates or tweets where the public could comment and provide feedback. Some elements of platforms did come across when candidates responded to posts on their Facebook page or engaged in a conversation in Twitter, but there was little proactive encouragement.

There was also a prevalence of candidates who had a Facebook or Twitter account but hardly used it. This includes a couple of candidates in both jurisdictions that lacked any activity for up to 2 months before the election in October. Also notable is the number of Facebook and Twitter accounts belonging to candidates who were not elected that disappeared in the days immediately following the election. Conversely, there were also several individuals that did not win that decided to keep their social media accounts as a way to continue communicating with and engaging the public.

HRM had six candidates running for mayor and a total of 60 candidates running for the 16 councilor positions. Within the mayoral race, three candidates, Tom Martin, Fred Connors, and Mike Savage, used social media (both Facebook and Twitter) while the other three did not. Tom Martin was largely a one-way communicator using both platforms to inform voters about the campaign trail (<http://www.facebook.com/tommartinask4more>; <https://twitter.com/TomAskForMore>).

Fred Connors had a substantial social media presence making use of not only Facebook and Twitter, but also YouTube, Flickr (a photo-sharing platform) and Tumblr (a micro-blogging platform). Of the three mayoral candidates on social media, he was the most active and was very good about responding to individuals on Facebook and Twitter. The two-way conversation is something Fred Connors did very well and other users clearly appreciated his responses with several individuals thanking him for taking the time to respond to questions and being open to engage in a conversation. While his use of social media still puts him within the second stage of engagement, he was as close to the third stage of full engagement as one can get without it being an institutionalized process. Unfortunately, while his social media pages continue to exist, there has not been any activity since November 2012 (<https://www.facebook.com/fredforhalifax>; <http://twitter.com/fredforhrm>).

Mike Savage, who went on to win the mayoral race, had an interesting approach to his use of social media. He had two Twitter accounts behind his campaign, a personal one that he appeared to be using, and a campaign team one with the handle “@TeamSavage.” His Facebook page too was titled “ILikeMikeSavage.” These two accounts felt depersonalized given that the interaction was not necessarily directly with Mike Savage, but rather with his campaign team which in many ways defeats the purpose of social media and does not lend itself well to generating an authentic conversation with someone. Instead, those two accounts behaved like a traditional campaign media platform pushing out information about his campaign trail (<http://www.facebook.com/ILikeMikeSavage>; <https://twitter.com/TeamSavage>). On the other hand, Mike Savage’s personal Twitter account did have some two-way communication particularly through his use of “chatting”

with users (chatting is a popular communication vehicle on Twitter whereby users, often celebrity and public figures, will set aside a time within which they promise to respond to any questions directed to them over the platform).

4 Conclusion

Overall, our findings confirm that municipalities and local politicians in Nova Scotia use social media primarily as a one-way information sharing device, albeit with evidence of widening two-way experimentation. Social media platforms are still new for local governments in Nova Scotia with only half of the province's municipalities, and half the local politicians in HRM and CBRM trying to use the medium. At present, then, Nova Scotia municipalities' usage of social media fits dominantly within the first stage of citizen engagement (i.e., informing), the bottom rung of the typology outlined by Lee and Kwak (referenced above in the literature review).

Looking ahead, there appears to be a basis for a widening cleavage between HRM, the province's largest urban municipality, and the rest of the Province in terms of social media-driven democratic and administrative governance usage and experimentation. There are three reasons for the predominance of HRM in this regard: its urbanized and concentrated populations both offline and online, the considerable usage of social media by HRM municipal bodies prior to the elections in 2012, and the election of Mike Savage as Mayor (who campaigned on the themes of open government with social media and online transparency and dialogue predominant themes). Even prior to the election, HRM Council had approved its first ever open data policy, following the lead of many other governments around the world. On the other hand, smaller town examples such as Berwick and Kentville demonstrate that social media usage need not be limited to urban domains, and moreover that a more sparsely populated community with greater familiarity among its residents may also translate into a richer integration and alignment of offline and online channels of engagement (admittedly a point more suggested than proven by the data examined here, and one denoting a promising avenue for future research).

There are limitations to note in regards to the assessment of social media use in Nova Scotia at the local government level. The range of social media networks and styles makes it difficult to compare across municipalities and politicians. As well, some municipalities and politicians have not yet developed a significant following on Facebook or Twitter which makes their ability to engage the public difficult. We also have no way of knowing, for purposes of this chapter, if and how municipalities and candidates may be using the private functions of Facebook (private messages) and Twitter (direct messages) to engage with their audience.

Overall, then, there are clearly still some challenges that remain in getting governments and politicians in Nova Scotia to move up the chain of engagement. Implementation of open data initiatives, and more widespread adoption of social media and other Web 2.0 technologies could well become drivers of wider and deeper forms of engagement and dialogue. As Web 2.0 technologies continue to proliferate

and governments continue to adopt the technologies in pursuit of improved citizen engagement, a more open, online, and interactive public sector, both administratively and democratically, would seem both necessary and unavoidable, much as it is likely that tensions between informing and engaging shall shape this evolution for some time to come.

References

- Association of Local Government Information Management Inc. (2009). A Roadmap to E-democracy in New Zealand local government. ALGIM E-Democracy Research Paper: <http://www.algim.org.nz/Documents/Whitepapers/ALGIM%20Edemocracy%20Whitepaper%20FINAL.pdf>.
- Bonsón, E., Torres, L., Royo, S., & Flores, F. (2012). Local e-government 2.0: Social media and corporate transparency in municipalities. *Government Information Quarterly*, 29(2), 123–132. doi:10.1016/j.giq.2011.10.001.
- City of Calgary. (n.d). Business plans and budgets 2012-2014: Overview & citizen summary. <http://www.calgary.ca/CA/fs/Pages/Plans-Budgets-and-Financial-Reports/Business-Plans-and-Budgets-2012-2014/Business-Plans-and-Budgets-2012-2014-Overview.aspx>.
- Clarke, A. (2010). Social Media: 4. Political uses and implications for representative democracy. Library of Parliament. <http://www.parl.gc.ca/Content/LOP/ResearchPublications/2010-10-e.htm>.
- Embaye, H., Navratil, P., Ng, D., & Yang, S. (n.d.). Social Media Primer for Municipal Governments. <http://www.lgma.ca/assets/Misc/Social-Media-Primer-Research-Paper.pdf>.
- Fyfe, T., & Crookall, P. (2010). *Social Media and Public Sector Policy Dilemmas*. Toronto: Institute of Public Administration of Canada: Toronto. <http://ipac.ca/documents/correction-June10.pdf>.
- Good Neighbours, Great Neighbourhoods. (n.d). In Facebook [Fan Page]. <https://www.facebook.com/PlanHRM>. Accessed 2 March 2013.
- Halifax Regional Municipality. (n.d). Social media. <http://www.halifax.ca/socialmedia/>.
- Hand, L., & Ching, B. (2011). “You have one friend request”: An exploration of power and citizen engagement in local governments’ use of social media. *Administrative Theory & Praxis*, 33(3), 362–382. doi:10.2753/ATP1084-1806330303.
- Huijboom, N., van den Broek, T., Frissen, V., Kool, L., Kotterink, B., Nielsen, M., & Millard, J. (2009). *Public Services 2.0: The Impact of Social Computing on Public Services*. Brussels: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities <http://ftp.jrc.es/EURdoc/JRC54203.pdf>.
- International Association for Public Participation. (2007). IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation. <http://www.iap2.org/associations/4748/files/spectrum.pdf>.
- Klang, M., & Nolin, J. (2011). Disciplining social media: An analysis of social media policies in 26 Swedish municipalities. *First Monday*, 16(8) pp. 1–24.
- Lee, G., & Kwak, Y. (2011). An open government implementation model: Moving to increased public engagement. IBM center for the business of government. <http://www.businessofgovernment.org/sites/default/files/An%20Open%20Government%20Implementation%20Model.pdf>.
- Maier-Rabler, U., & Huber, S. (2011). “Open”: The changing relation between citizens, public administration, and political authority. *eJournal of eDemocracy & Open Government*, 3(2), 182–191.
- Morison, J. (2010). Gov 2.0: Towards a user generated state? *The Modern Law Review*, 73(4), 551–577. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2230.2010.00808.x.
- Mossberger, K., & Wu, Y. (2012). *Civic engagement and local e-government: Social networking comes of age*. Institute for Policy & Civic Engagement, University of Illinois at Chicago: <http://www.uic.edu/cuppa/ipce/interior/CELLocalEGovSMFullReport2012.pdf>.

- Mota, J., & Santinha, G. (2012, July 16). Social media and civic engagement: Discussing the case of Aveiro, Portugal. *European Journal of ePractice*. <http://www.epractice.eu/en/document/5377051>.
- Nova Scotia Community Counts. (2011). Population by 5 year age groups. <http://www.gov.ns.ca/finance/communitycounts/topicview.asp?tnum=51&gval=mun&s=Demographics&yval=2011&vval=&vval1=Total&vval2=Number&vval3=>.
- OECD. (2009). *Focus on citizens: Public engagement for better policy and services*. OECD Publishing.
- Roy, J. (2012, May 7). The rise of municipal government 2.0. *Canadian Government Executive*, 17(3). <http://www.cangovexec.net/category/item/227.html>.
- Roy, J. (2013). *From machinery to mobility: Government and democracy in a participative age*. New York: Springer.
- Sandoval-Almazan, R., & Gil-Garcia, J. (2012). Are government internet portals evolving towards more interaction, participation, and collaboration? Revisiting the rhetoric of e-government among municipalities. *Government Information Quarterly*, 29(1), S72–S81. doi:10.1016/j.giq.2011.09.004.
- Serrat, O. (2010). *Social media and the public sector. Knowledge solutions*. International Publications, Cornell University ILR School: Ithaca, NY <http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1191&context=intl>.
- Tapscott, D., Williams, A., & Herman, D. (2008). *Government 2.0: Transforming government and governance for the twenty-first century*. nGenera Corporation.
- Thomas, R. (2012, February 3). Participatory budgeting in Canadian municipalities?. <http://www.renthomas.ca/urban-planning/participatory-budgeting-in-canadian-municipalities>.
- Transit Cooperative Research Program. (2012). TCRP synthesis 99: Uses of social media in public transportation. http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/tcrp/tcrp_syn_99.pdf.
- Weeks, W. (2012, December). Spotlight on Social Media. Municipal World, Union, Ontario: www.municipalworld.com <http://elevenpr.squarespace.com/storage/Spotlight%20on%20Social%20Media%20-%20Municipal%20World%20Magazine.pdf>.