DIPLOMACY 2.0: THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN NATION BRANDING

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ABSTRACT

The importance of social media as a tool of public diplomacy has gained traction in U.S. foreign policy initiatives. The Obama administration's creation of "Diplomacy 2.0" has brought the use of Twitter and other social media sites to the front line of public diplomacy practices. This paper looks at why social media are an effective tool for two-way communication and how it can enhance U.S. public diplomacy initiatives. The author examines case studies of successful implementation of Twitter diplomacy and the use of Twitter for crisis management. Finally, the author concludes and discusses policy prescriptions, including Twitter implementation, relevant to the U.S. Department of State.

INTRODUCTION

President Obama's campaign use of Web 2.0 social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, is arguably the largest contributing factor to its success in 2008. Since Obama's use of Web 2.0 as a strategy to win the 2008 presidential election, social media has been used as a tool to cultivate relations between the government and the individual – essentially democratizing government communications.[1] With "21 million registered members and 1.6 billion page views each day," Obama was able to gain political support through a hybrid strategy, which took advantage of both Web 2.0 and social media tools.[2] With young voters (18 to 31 years) being the most predominant group on social media sites, the campaign leaders were able to add significant momentum to his campaign by igniting a movement within this demographic. As a result, social media has shown strategic value as a political tool.

Web 2.0's value as a tool in domestic politics is easily transferrable to foreign politics. The U.S. has become more involved abroad and has augmented its number of diplomatic missions throughout the world. The focus on diplomacy by the Obama administration is a first step toward improvement in the overall American brand. Engagement is an important part of diplomacy and using social media is one way to promote a positive image. Enhancing public diplomacy (PD) initiatives abroad requires a deeper look at the international arena and the current discourse around international communications. With the addition of new media, such as social media, PD strategies must evolve to incorporate the new tools dominating communication worldwide. Therefore, there

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1   Derrick L. Cogburn and Fatima K. Espinoza-Vasquez, "From Networked Nominee to Networked Nation: Examining the Impact of Web 2.0 and Social Media on Political Participation and Civic Engagement in the 2008 Obama Campaign." *Journal of Political Marketing* 10, no. ½ (2011): 191.
2   Ibid.

is a need for a more symmetrical approach to global communications by PD practitioners. This paper addresses the following questions: Why has social media become an important tool in influencing public opinion and how can social media sites, such as Twitter, be used as an effective strategy of public diplomacy?

Public diplomacy is a "term to describe the efforts by nations to win support and a favorable image among the general public of other countries, usually by way of news management and carefully planned initiatives designed to foster positive impressions."[3] The Internet has created an international space where communities around the world are more connected than ever. With this new level of interconnectivity, it is imperative that the U.S. government utilize the tools provided by new media to communicate with foreign publics. While the Internet has played a crucial part in the development of societies around the world, new media, most notably social media, has become a tool that PD practitioners can use to enhance U.S. foreign policy. In recent years, the number of people with access to the Internet has grown, subsequently spurring an increase in social media usage across the globe.[4]

Social media use can add to the policy-making process, as its tools can provide a platform for symmetrical communication.[5] Symmetrical communication is "allowing individuals to intensify social contacts while sharing content, engaging in discussion, but also controlling content via networks they participate in." [6] Using social media has enabled political entities to engage in branding and promoting a specific persona to their audiences. As a result, social media are effective for conveying any message to a given public, whether it is from a corporation, a public figure, or a government. The use of social media in politics has been an effective tool in garnering public support and thus provides strategic utility in the practice of public diplomacy. While social media can be used to clarify misconceptions, it is merely a medium to supply the message and cannot avert any negative backlash due to poor foreign policy decisions.

CREDIBILITY AND PUBLIC OPINION IN PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

In "Credibility Talk in Public Diplomacy," Mor states, "practices [of PD] will continue to be affected by the technological advances that lead the information revolution."[7] The innovation occurring in media has produced numerous social media tools worldwide. Rising numbers of additional users also contribute to social media's usefulness as a tool of public diplomacy. Mor states that winning credibility is an important issue in the competition to promote a country's brand abroad. "To stand above the competition, to draw attention, and to hold it – and ultimately, to persuade - one needs to have a reputation for providing trustworthy, accurate information."[8] Therefore, Mor raises the issue of how credibility can be earned and its importance in effectively reaching and grasping public opinion abroad.

According to the Public Relations Society of America, "public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics."[9] Since public diplomacy also uses strategic communication to improve perceptions of a country to foreign publics, these areas of communications are often related. Beata Ociepka argues that traditional forms of public diplomacy are related to propaganda and prevents PD initiatives from being seen as ethical.[10] Therefore, PD initiatives have suffered due to the negative perception that public relations and propaganda are always related. However, Ociepka suggests that the addition of social media to PD strategies has added to the engagement potential for PD initiatives. With

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3   Edward Comor and Hamilton Bean, "America's 'Engagement' Delusion: Critiquing a Public Diplomacy Consensus." *International Communication Gazette* 74, no. 3 (2012): 204.

4   Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein, "Users of the world, unite! The Challenges and Opportunities of Social Media." *Business Horizons* 53 no. 1 (2010).

5   Beata Ociepka, "The Impact of New Technologies on International Communication: The Case of Public Diplomacy." *Information Sciences* (2012): 59.

6   Ibid., 25

7   Ben D. Mor, "Credibility Talk In Public Diplomacy." *Review of International Studies* 38.2 (2012): 394.

8   Ibid.

9   "What is Public Relations? PR Definition: PRSA Official Statement." Public Relations Resources & PR Tools for Communications Professionals: Public Relations Society of America (PRSA). http://www.prsa.org/AboutPRSA/PublicRelationsDefined#.UkQ1htLUkrU (accessed September 26, 2013)

10   Ociepka, "The Impact of New Technologies on International Communication," 26

the use of symmetrical communication between foreign publics and foreign officials, PD is moving away from its perceived propaganda natures and is seen as legitimate and ethical.

Mor further discusses the importance of consistency among advocacy, foreign policy, and military action in furthering reputation and public diplomacy. He states, "Consistency is a strong determinant of credibility and if a state's advocacy is perceived as incompatible with its foreign policy or military action, its reputation and public diplomacy suffer."[11] The damage of the policies pursued by the Bush administration, which lacked a focus on PD, negatively impacted public opinion of the U.S.in the Middle East and still poses a problem for Public Diplomacy 2.0 initiatives today.[12] However, it is possible to use social media to correct negative perceptions, if these perceptions do not match the current foreign policy objectives.

State actors at the international level "strive for effective communication," which creates credibility within the international community.[13] According to Mor, "Persuasion is indeed one outcome but so is the emergence of a normative structure that provides the building materials for strategies of credibility construction."[14] Mor views diplomacy as a form of advocacy instead of propaganda. PD as advocacy implies that the state is actively raising awareness for its foreign policy initiatives among foreign publics and encourages participation. To support the U.S. brand as an advocate for democracy, the Obama administration's initiatives have pushed for engagement and free-flowing discussions domestically and abroad. While past practices of diplomacy, particularly PD, were defined by the use of propaganda in support of war, PD has evolved to support diplomacy values of negotiation.[15] Humphrey Taylor states:[16]

> It is understood that traditional diplomacy involves give-and-take, that compromises are often necessary, and that two-thirds of a loaf (or even half) is better than no loaf. Likewise, our public diplomacy should involve both give-and-take. It should help improve communications but it should also influence what the United States government does, and what our leaders say or do not say.

Here, Taylor notes that the use of two-way communication in PD goes a long way toward proving its credibility. Taylor argues that if PD is used in a way to engage conversation, then it is just as ethical as the traditional definitions of diplomacy.[17] Credibility is awarded when the U.S. not only takes information, but gives it back as well.

THE CURRENT DEBATE

Since the events of September 11, 2001, a consensus in Washington developed, which urged the U.S. to use public diplomacy to strategically advance its interests, particularly in the Muslim world. However, the Bush administration ignored this advice, which resulted in a lower level of confidence in U.S. foreign policy worldwide.[18] Hayden states that the unpopularity of the Bush administration and the expectations for Obama's foreign policy initiatives led to the popularity Obama enjoyed at the start of his presidency.[19] "Obama's symbolic value as a popular global figure was anticipated even before the inauguration."[20] Many foreign publics believed Obama's election meant a shift in U.S. foreign policy toward accountability and reparations.[21] As a result, the expectations of appealing to a "global audience" created the need for "the U.S. president…to address a global constituency;"

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11   Mor, "Credibility Talk," 394
12   Craig Hayden, " The 'Obama Effect': Refining the Instruments of Engagement through U.S. Public Diplomacy," *American Behavioral Scientist* 55, 6 (2011).
13   Mor, "Credibility Talk," 395
14   Ibid.
15   Humphrey Taylor, "The Not-So-Black Art of Public Diplomacy," *World Policy Journal* 24, no. 4 (2007).
16   Ibid., 4
17   Ibid.
18   Hayden, "The 'Obama Effect'," 788-789.
19   Ibid.
20   Ibid., 788
21   Ibid.

however, "a policy formula for such global leadership [was] not readily available."[22] "Obama sought 'broader engagement' with the Muslim world in areas including education, economic development, and science and technology."[23] Obama developed a policy of engagement, Public Diplomacy 2.0, which used social media to encourage conversation and debate between the U.S. and foreign publics.[24]

Chavez and Hoewe argue that utilization of social media is the best policy to improve public perception of the U.S. in Mexico, as well. The lack of information regarding the "interdependence" of the two countries and "the new instruments of cooperation, such as the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP) North America and communication technology" leaves a void for the public that is often filled with negative sentiments.[25] The SPP is a collaborative program, which calls for Mexico, the U.S., and Canada to work together to control cross-border terrorism and health threats. The purpose of this plan is the improvement of "collective welfare and socio-economic conditions." [26] The U.S. failed to publicize these benefits to the Mexican public, which resulted in "a missed opportunity of public diplomacy."[27] The media depiction of the U.S.- Mexican border gives both American and Mexican citizens an unfavorable perspective of the border, since television frequently shows negative points of view. According to Chavez and Hoewe, this media leads to negative perceptions, which can be corrected using social media.[28] They propose a shift from the use of PD for creating intergovernmental relations to an emphasis on people-to-people relations, which will support the greater foreign policy objectives of the U.S. government regarding Mexico.

Social media are useful in connecting a government to a foreign public. This source of media proved effective in influencing public opinion as a public relations tool in Obama's 2008 campaign.[29] Therefore, it is beneficial to use social media platforms to facilitate U.S. interests abroad.[30] It is impossible to accomplish any foreign policy objective requiring cooperation of civilians in a country when the local population is opposed to the foreign nation's presence. In the case of Mexico, social media can be an effective and strategic tool of PD initiatives because the country as a whole has adequate access to the Internet and some social media sites.[31] These sites can be used to distribute information internationally; however, it is important that the information is available in both Spanish and English, which allows for active participation by citizens and governments.[32] These efforts alone may give the U.S. a friendlier image in Mexico and clarify any misconceptions.

Some critics perceive such efforts as propaganda.[33] Yet, theorists like Ociepka, state that it is not propaganda because public diplomacy, as it is practiced today, engages its target audience in a dialogue. Comor and Bean argue that the use of social media in U.S. foreign policy is a form of propaganda, as it only promotes a positive image but does not highlight the full policy objectives of the U.S.[34] These differing opinions bring about a discussion of the ethics of public diplomacy. Comor and Bean suggest that promotion of an image by a government through social media is undemocratic because U.S. policymakers rarely consider public opinion when making foreign policy.[35] As a result, the authors conclude the use of social media is deceptive, and a more culturally sensitive approach should be made, where the U.S. learns about the local culture and uses that friendly image to foster a favorable public opinion. After an interview with Elliot Schrage, the vice president of public policy for Facebook, Comor and Bean maintain, "for the Obama administration, the goal is not to truly democratize

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22   Ibid., 787

23   Comor and Bean, "America's 'engagement' delusion," 204

24   Ibid.

25   Manuel Chavez and Jennifer Hoewe, "Reconstructing Public Diplomacy in the Context of Policy, Communication, and Technology: An Examination of U.S. - Mexico Border Relations," *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 25, no. ¾ (2010): 186.

26   Ibid.

27   Ibid.

28   Ibid.

29   Hayden, "The 'Obama Effect'"

30   Chavez and Hoewe, "Reconstructing Public Diplomacy"

31   Ibid.

32   Ibid.

33   Comar and Bean "America's 'engagement' delusion"

34   Ibid.

35   Ibid., 213

PD… instead, it is to use more engaging forms of public diplomacy to promote American perspectives, including liberal democratic values."[36] Schrage stated:[37]

> I'd say Facebook and sites like it do three things that are really important. First, we create an opportunity for people to see the world through the wisdom of their friends. The information they get is called not by some distant, remote editor, but by…the opinions and ideas of their friends. Point number two is, Facebook and sites like it create a real premium on authenticity. Who are you, and how do you express who you are in a way that I can understand it?… And third, they create a whole new level of accountability, because I get to see what you care about, what you're thinking about, and it's not just static, but you see it over time.

Here, Schrage points out how social media create a new level of accountability for their users, not just for the government but for the masses as well. Schrage refers to a new authenticity, which is created by communicating on social media sites. Comor and Bean interpret Schrage's statement as the U.S. purposefully creating a false authenticity, as if to create a false image. Yet, Schrage's statement does not refer to any form of propaganda or hiding the truth. Instead, his reference to the creation of "authenticity" refers to the similarity of social media communications and an authentic person-to-person dialogue. Since social media display all of their users' public information, people have the ability communicate as themselves and are held accountable for what they say as if it were a person-to-person conversation. Therefore, contrary to Comor and Bean's opinion, it cannot be assumed that a creation of authenticity refers to the use of propaganda or asymmetrical communication.

Comor and Bean disagree with the idea that the use of social media as a new public diplomacy tool is new, and they fail to mention any positive examples of this.[38] Their article hypothesizes what a negative reaction to the U.S. Department of State's use of social media would look like but fails to support this scenario with fact. It is necessary to see if the use of social media directly caused negative perceptions of the U.S. in the Muslim world, or if it is simply the foreign policy of the U.S. that has caused this image.

According to Ociepka, "Web 2.0 and live streaming, mobile phones and text messaging…eventually enforced enormous changes in the conduct, understanding and patterns of international communications."[39] Social media have changed the rules of international communication, where both the mass and "niche audiences" are being targeted.[40] In particular, Ociepka focuses on audiences that can be targeted to create social change in a country, using the case of North Africa. She states, "The success depends very much on the public sphere in the country," however, "the impact social media may have on social change gives them simultaneously more significance in international relations."[41] Furthermore, the exchange of dialogue that social media use fosters is a source of information for both the public and the foreign ministry.[42] There is no asymmetrical top-down flow of information in this case, as Comor and Bean suggest.

Furthermore, sites like Twitter have the potential to monitor and help track signs of a crisis.[43] Ociepka notes Zaharna's theory that the addition of social media to PD supports a relationship model, which stresses mutual benefit.[44] Ociepka suggests that a global communication model be used, since international communication as a whole only incorporates a communicator (the foreign policy makers) and receiver (the foreign public). The global communication model means there are "equal patterns of communication of states/governments and non-state actors."[45] Since the stakes have changed, Foreign Service officers must be able to move from the "hierarchical approach" of the past to a more interactive approach, where officers and the embassy must answer to the public

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36   Ibid., 211
37   Ibid.
38   Ibid.
39   Ociepka, "The Impact of New Technologies on International Communication," 25
40   Ibid.
41   Ibid.
42   Ibid.
43   Ibid., 26
44   Ibid., 27
45   Ibid.

as well.[46] In "Issue Theme: The Use of Social Media in U.S. Public Diplomacy," Zaharna and Ambassador Rugh state that traditional diplomacy is tied to physical communication. However, the evolution of media has changed the practice.[47] Social media tools allow for real-time responses to events and opinion, therefore, adding further strategic value to the use of social media.

Hayden introduces the idea of "21st century statecraft" in "Social Media at State: Power, Practice, and Conceptual Limits for US Public Diplomacy."[48] Hayden describes 21st century statecraft as "an 'agenda' that complements traditional foreign policy tools with newly innovated and adapted instruments that fully leverage the networks, technologies, and demographics of our networked world."[49] In policy, Senior Advisor Alec Ross believes that there is no separation between technological advancement and public diplomacy, when social media can be used to promote U.S. policy and find solutions to international problems.[50] "Ross argues that the U.S. can look to 'civil society to identify pressing problems, and then match these actors with technologists to develop solutions'."[51] Ross' statement shows that current PD initiatives are designed in a way that allows public opinion, here in the form of civil society, to influence policy decisions and recommendations made by foreign policy officials.

In addition, Hayden addresses the changing orientation of PD to include "publics," "stake holders" and "opinion leaders."[52] As a result, social media amplify the ability of public diplomacy to reach more audiences, who are "crucial" to traditional diplomacy objectives.[53] Hayden supports Comor and Bean's theory that social media use masks the true objectives of the U.S., and this disconnect makes the use of social media in public diplomacy unethical.[54] While some argue that U.S. foreign policies are unethical, they cannot discount the merit of social media's ability to reach publics virtually instantaneously, speeding up the process of communication and awareness promotion.

Social media are continually growing and provide a way for the world to communicate on a person-to-person level. Public relations practitioners have already displayed the effectiveness of social media in influencing public perceptions not only for companies but in politics as well. These social sites provide a forum where people can exchange information and knowledge, therefore providing a place where people can develop a better understanding of the world and their community.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

The use of social media to engage the U.S. population in political discourse has grown since 2008. In "Twitter Use by the U.S. Congress," Golbeck, Grimes, and Rogers state that the TweetCongress initiative was created to fix information sharing problems.[55] This "grass-roots web-based campaign" aims to promote transparency in government through congressional tweets.[56] By examining the content of posts by congressional members, they found that Congress members used their Twitter accounts to broadcast information that is usually sent to traditional media and talked about their daily routines and social events. There were also members who used it for "direct communication" with other members of congress. The study showed that 75 percent of U.S. Congress members used a Twitter account and there was a positive correlation found between states with larger population and members of Congress having Twitter accounts.[57]

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46   Ociepka, "The Impact of New Technologies on International Communication."

47   R.S. Zaharna and Amb. William A. Rugh, "Issue Theme: The Use of Social Media in U.S. Public Diplomacy," *Global Media Journal-Guest Editor's Note* 629 (2012): 1-8.

48   Craig Hayden, "Social Media at State: Power, Practice, and Conceptual Limits for US Public Diplomacy," *Global Media Journal RP1* (2012).

49   Ibid., 8

50   Ibid.

51   Ibid.

52   Ibid., 11

53   Ibid., 12

54   Hayden, "Social Media at State: Power, Practice, and Conceptual Limits for US Public Diplomacy."

55   Jennifer Golbeck, Justin M. Grimes and Anthony Rogers, "Twitter use by the U.S. Congress," *Journal of the American Society for Information Science & Technology* 61, no. 8 (2010): 1614.

56   Ibid.

57   Ibid., 1615

When analyzing the content of the tweets, the authors found that 53 percent of tweets were information-based, 27 percent were tweets about daily activities, and external communications only accounted for 7.4 percent of tweets in the original data set.[58] Therefore, it is not clear as to whether constituents are accessing congressional information through Twitter. Furthermore, Golbeck, Grimes, and Rogers note there is a distinction between outreach and transparency.[59] Since Congress members use Twitter as a platform to broadcast information to their constituents instead of exchanging opinion on policy, public opinion is not engaged in policy decisions. However, the current platform does provide for future civic engagement if the public would partake in the discussion.

In "Squawking, Tweeting, cooing, and hooting: analyzing the communication patterns of government agencies on Twitter," Waters and Williams state that government agencies use Twitter for both asymmetrical communication and two-way communication, as noted in Table 1.[60]

358   R. D. Waters and J. M. Williams

Table 1   Frequency of government agencies' tweets by the four models of public relations

	Number and percentage of government agencies' tweets employing various public relations communication strategies($n = 1800$)
One-way models of public relations	
Press agentry	
Use of emoticons to express emotion	27 (1.5%)
Use of words that express emotion	263 (14.6%)
Public information	
Providing updates and announcements from the agency by using Twitter	69 (3.7%)
Providing information and reports from other organizations	252 (13.4%)
Two-way models of public relations	
Two-way asymmetry	
Asking for specific feedback	74 (4.1%)
Asking for participation in a survey or poll	117 (6.5%)
Asking to become involved with the agency by using Twitter	329 (18.3%)
Two-way symmetry	
Using publicly posted direct messages using Twitter's @-reply function for conversation	317 (17.6%)
Mentions of other Twitter users without attempting to engage in a conversation	372 (20.7%)
Using a conversation to resolve conflict	73 (4.1%)

While public relations communications has a record of one-way communication, Waters and Williams note that it is important to recognize the change in communications because of the addition of Web 2.0 media.[61] Therefore, the structure of social networks, such as Twitter allows for symmetrical communication in public relations. Furthermore, government agencies and politicians have recognized the growing usefulness of social media as a means of symmetrical communication and have applied it to the inner working of Capitol Hill and election campaigns.[62] The symmetrical orientation of discussions on Twitter can also be used in public diplomacy.

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58   Ibid.
59   Ibid., 1620
60   Richard D. Waters and Jensen M. Williams, "Squawking, tweeting, cooing, and hooting: analyzing the communication patterns of government agencies on Twitter," *Journal of Public Affairs* (14723891) 11, no. 4 (2011): 358.
61   Ibid.
62   Ibid., 353

CASE STUDIES

Crisis Management

The use of Twitter as a tool for real-time response in crises proves its usefulness as a strategy of PD. The aim of the U.S. Department of State and U.S. Aid for International Development (USAID) is:[63]

> Strengthen civilian capability to prevent and respond to crisis and conflict by: recognizing that civilians are the first line of defense abroad and making conflict prevention and response a core civilian mission, building conflict prevention and response capabilities by creating a new Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations at State and strengthening the Office of Transition Initiatives at USAID, integrating an effective capability to reform security and justice sectors in fragile states.

Crisis management abroad often involves the support of other foreign nations, especially with natural disasters, which can include endemics/pandemics, hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunamis, etc. As the world becomes more interconnected, the U.S. has stakes in the maintenance of civil order in a country due to the number of U.S. nationals living abroad.

The use of social media sites like Twitter creates a platform for discussion where information can be simultaneously exchanged among organizations, governments, and individuals. With social media as a "credible" platform for crisis management, governments or organizations are no longer the only source of information and individuals are often the first to communicate important updates. Social media platforms give organization and governments the resources to polish information shared in the media. According to Schultz, "crisis communication via Twitter leads to higher reputation than crisis communication via blogs, which in turn leads to higher reputation than crisis communication via traditional newspapers."[64] However, this is only true with direct communication, not secondary.[65] While social media can increase the spread of false information in a shorter amount of time, they also give organizations the ability to respond to and correct false information promptly. It is important for the U.S. government to explore the effects and value of using social media in crises, as Embassy press offices often deal with crisis management. Effectively using social media to manage crises abroad will increase favorable public opinion about U.S. involvement in other countries and legitimize U.S. foreign policy abroad, since civilians perpetuate the message in social networks.

The following case studies demonstrate how social media are useful when engaging foreign publics. Social media are often the only efficient line of communication in times of crisis, as in the case of Japan, or to boost morale for relief efforts, as in the case of Haiti.

Haiti

On January 12, 2010, a 7.0 magnitude earthquake hit the capital of Haiti, Port-Au Prince.[66] The disaster became a "highly visible trending topic" on Twitter, remaining a trend for weeks following the earthquake.[67] Dialogue for relief efforts was largely crafted by individuals rather than organizations.[68] This shows that the individual can be powerful, as the use of social networking sites enabled individuals without prior interest to create charities for the relief efforts.[69] Usage of social networking sites and hashtags allowed news of the earthquake and needed

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63   United States Department of State and USAID, "Leading Through Civilian Power". *The First Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review*. (QDDR) (2010).

64   Friederike Schultz, Sonja Utz and Anja Göritz, "Is the medium the message? Perceptions of and reactions to crisis communication via twitter, blogs and traditional media." *Public Relations Review* 37, no. 1 (2011): 22.

65   Ibid.

66   U.S. Geological Survey, National Earthquake Information Center: World Data Center for Seismology, Denver. "Magnitude 7.0 - HAITI REGION." Earthquake Hazards Program. N.p., n.d. Web. 23 Aug. 2013. <http://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/eqinthenews/2010/us2010rja6/>

67   Brian Smith, "Socially distributing public relations: Twitter, Haiti, and interactivity in social media," *Public Relations Review* 36, no. 4 (2010): 330.

68   Ibid.

69   Ibid.

relief to go viral.[70] Celebrity support and the news provided through Twitter added more publicity for celebrity action, which prompted others to act.[71] When individuals took the lead, they created a participatory culture, which pushed their networks to support relief efforts as well.[72]

Smith found that individual with little "stakes" or interests in a company or organization undertook and completed organizational "public relations responsibilities" as a result.[73] Organizations such as governments or other parties with interest in Haiti's recovery were not the main sources of information. "In this social model, public relations-related activities are initiated by an online public, facilitated by communication technology, and based on user interactivity."[74] Both the information and spread of the message were controlled and facilitated by individual Twitter account holders.

Going viral is also an important concept for organizations utilizing public opinion to create a brand. It is important that correct information and the right image are portrayed. Creating messages on Twitter that can captivate the desired audience's attention and effectively articulate the desired perception will likely reach the largest audience possible. The process through which the message must travel to reach the largest audience possible is called going viral. In creating a message with this potential, the PD officers in the U.S. Department of State would be able to communicate successfully a positive American image that could potentially reach millions in 140 characters or less. In the case of Haiti, simple messages such as "Help Haiti Now" and "Get the pigs out of the yard," made by concerned Twitter users, created a viral interaction between users and allowed the overall message of aiding Haiti to reach a wider audience than traditional media.[75]

Twitter use by organizations during crises also creates a sense of legitimacy for individual users.[76] Smith states, "Twitter users personalize issues and communicate personal relevance, granting organizational legitimacy through conversational human voice and communicated commitment."[77] While individual sense of legitimacy is not measurable by reviewing tweets, Smith argues that the "retweeting of others' posts demonstrates basic credibility and lends measurable legitimacy to the opinions communicated."[78] In addition, Smith introduces the idea of "social stake," where individuals risk their online reputation by associating themselves with organizations in which they have no vested interest besides a commonality of beliefs.[79] "By communicating about an organization's or individual actions, Twitter users associated their online profile with a particular stance on the Haiti relief efforts."[80] As a result, it was the simple honesty and transparency of organizations aiding in the relief effort that attracted the attention of individuals on social media, who then spread the organization's message at risk to themselves and at no risk to the organization. Therefore, by using social media, and maintaining accurate information and a high level of trust between the organization and the individual, users created a positive image or brand for the organization.

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70   Ibid.
71   Ibid.
72   Ibid.
73   Ibid.
74   Ibid.
75   Ibid.
76   Ibid.
77   Ibid.
78   Ibid.
79   Ibid.
80   Ibid.

Japan

On March 11, 2011, an earthquake hit northern Japan and caused a triple disaster - the meltdown at Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station, the earthquake, and subsequent tsunami in Tohoku.[81] Japan failed to predict the gravity of earthquake and resulting tsunami, which resulted in even greater disaster.[82] The lack of safeguards at the power station caused a major nuclear meltdown, which had negative effects for the surrounding area.[83] According to Funabashi and Kitazawa:[84]

> This lack of preparation was caused, in part, by a public myth of (absolute safety) that nuclear power proponents had nurtured over decades and was aggravated by dysfunction within and between government agencies and Tepco… The investigation also found that the tsunami that began the nuclear disaster could and should have been anticipated and that ambiguity about the roles of public and private institutions in such a crisis was a factor in the poor response at Fukushima.

While Funabashi and Kitazawa note that the situation caused by the earthquake was a preventable and regrettable disaster, Lara Pierpoint argues that social media exaggerated the events of March 11, 2011. Pierpoint states, "The now-ubiquitous presence of the Internet and social media like Twitter, Facebook, and blogs enabled misinformation about the nuclear disaster at Fukushima to spread at the speed of electricity."[85] She argues that the information on the Internet "misinformed" the public and created unnecessary paranoia.[86] She also notes that bloggers overdramatized the information available and treated the nuclear disaster as a greater problem than it actually was.[87] However, Pierpoint cannot discount the value of Twitter as an aid in the crises. She states, "The Internet has allowed unprecedented access for unconventional, but credible experts to speak on the disaster and be heard."[88] Pierpoint does not mention the benefit Twitter had for relief efforts.

According to Abbasi, Kumar, Filho, and Liu, social media accounts, particularly Twitter, were efficient means of communication during the disaster.[89] The "popularity" and "efficiency" of social media "creates a pool of timely reports about the disaster, injuries, and help requests."[90] Therefore, social media sites in the case of Japan offered an alternate and accessible source of "information about the disaster, victims, and their needs" for first air rescue team respondents, family members, and other organizations providing relief.[91] Yet the authors state that the sheer number of social media sites creates a problem for filtering out the most pertinent information.[92] Therefore, it is important for organizations dealing with crisis management to do prior research on their ideal networks.

Abassi, Kumar, Filho, and Liu also point out that American Ambassador John Roos was contacted through Twitter to aid Japanese efforts during the crisis.[93] The tweets were "Kameda hospital in Chiba needs to transfer 80 patients from Kyoritsu hospital in Iwaki city, just outside of 30km (sic) range." "Some of them are seriously ill and they need air transport. If US military can help, pls contact (name withheld) at Kameda."[94] As a result

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81   Yoichi Funabashi and Kay Kitazawa, "Fukushima in review: A complex disaster, a disastrous response." *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 68, no. 2 (2012): 9.
82   Ibid.
83   Ibid.
84   Ibid.
85   Lara Pierpoint, "Fukushima, Facebook and Feeds: Informing the Public in a Digital Era," *Electricity Journal* 24, no. 6 (2011): 53.
86   Ibid., 54
87   Ibid.
88   Ibid.
89   Mohammad-Ali Abbasi, Shamantha Kumar, Jose Augusto Andrade Filho, and Huan Liu, "Lessons Learned in Using Social Media for Disaster Relief - ASU Crisis Response Game." *Social Computing, Behavioral - Cultural Modeling and Prediction Lecture Notes in Computer Science*, no. 7227 (2012): 282.
90   Ibid.
91   Ibid.
92   Ibid.
93   Ibid., 283
94   Steven Sternberg, "The World to the Rescue," *USA Today*, April 12, 2011.

of these tweets, Ambassador Roos was able to grasp the situation and contact the U.S. defense attaché, who then contacted the military for transport of the patients.[95] When considering an increase of followers on Twitter as a measure of an increase in popularity and an overall positive image, Ambassador Roos' approval rating increased dramatically after the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo assisted in relief efforts. For one year following the events of March 11, Ambassador Roos' followers increased by about 1,000 followers per day, resulting in his current follower level of 57,180. [96] The number of people following him as of December 2012 increased over three years with an average of 23 followers added each day.[97] Therefore, it can be assumed that the events of March 11 and the orientation of the ambassador's tweets to include updates about the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami substantially increased his followers.

INFLUENCING PUBLIC OPINION

Venezuela

In "Practicing Successful Twitter Public Diplomacy: A model and case study of U.S. efforts in Venezuela," Yepsen designs her research to create a model where the U.S. Embassy in Venezuela could successfully attempt Twitter diplomacy.[98] According to Yepsen, an embassy needs to limit the topics it covers, using Twitter to centralize discussion and "identify the ideal network."[99] By using web sites such as TwitterHolic and RetweetRank, Yepsen identified users in Venezuela who have more followers and the potential to influence a substantial amount of people based on a high volume of retweets.[100] Yepsen identified six Venezuelan users who appeared at the top of 1,000 most followed users: @chavezcandanga (President Hugo Chavez), @ElUniversal (a newspaper), @la_patilla (an "information and investigation" web site), @globovision (a television news channel), @Noticias24 (a news web site), and @LuisChataing (an actor and television personality).[101] These Twitter users were determined as an ideal target because the large amount of followers would ensure exposure if U.S. Embassy content was retweeted.[102]

Next, Yepsen expanded the list of six to "all users who were replied to or retweeted at least 10 times by one of the leaders."[103] By setting a threshold of 30 percent for "diversified interests and relationship maintenance tweets," Yepsen was able to set a "satisfactory limit to ensure content would be worth the public diplomat's time while still allowing for opinion leaders with other topical interests to be included."[104] After analyzing the six original leaders, @LuisChataing was eliminated based on the 30 percent threshold requirement.[105] Of the100 leaders selected, only 30 leaders met the threshold and were selected to be part of the study.[106] To strengthen the level of potential influence of the sample, Yepsen included retweet strength as a criterion and increased the number of individual networks and account holders to 47, including the U.S. Embassy in Venezuela.[107] These 47 networks were ranked based on their networking capabilities (number of networks that can be made) and their follower strength.[108] Yepsen narrowed the list based on rank to the top 30 Twitter users including the U.S. Embassy.[109]

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95   Ibid.
96   "John V. Roos Twitter Stats & Rankings (AmbassadorRoos) | Twitaholic.com." Top Twitter User Rankings & Stats | Twitaholic.com, http://twitaholic.com/AmbassadorRoos/.
97   Ibid.
98   Erika A. Yepsen, "Practicing Successful Twitter Public Diplomacy: A model and a case study of U.S. efforts in Venezuela," *CPD Perspectives on Public Diplomacy* Paper 6 (2012).
99   Ibid., 20
100   Ibid., 22
101   Ibid.
102   Ibid.
103   Ibid.
104   Ibid.
105   Ibid.
106   Ibid., 23
107   Ibid.
108   Ibid.
109   Ibid.

Table 1

Percent overlap between Top 30 most used words as compared to the network as a whole

Account	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Average
@AlbertoRavell most connected network member	12/30 40%	12/30 40%	9/30 30%	12/30 40%	37.5%
@NelsonBocaranda 16th most connected network member	14/30 47%	15/30 50%	12/30 40%	9/30 30%	41.7%
@RCTVenlinea least connected network member	9/30 30%	12/30 40%	11/30 37%	11/30 37%	35.8%
@Usembassyve Embassy account, not a network member	2/30 7%	2/30 7%	3/30 10%	4/30 13%	9.2%

(Yepsen 2012)

Table 2

Percent overlap between Top 30 most frequently used words as compared to network leader

Account	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Average
@NelsonBocaranda 16th most connected network member	6/30 20%	8/30 27%	8/30 27%	6/30 20%	23.3%
@RCTVenlinea least connected network member	10/30 33%	7/30 23%	4/30 13%	7/30 23%	23.3%
@Usembassyve Embassy account, not a network member	1/30 3%	1/30 3%	1/30 3%	0/30 0%	2.3%
@NelsonBocaranda as compared to @RCTVenlinea	5/30 17%	6/30 20%	5/30 17%	5/30 17%	17.5%

(Yepsen 2012)

Both Table 1 and Table 2 examine the overlap of commonly used words in tweets between the top 30 users. While the U.S. Embassy's tweets had few commonly used words in its tweets (word overlap), there was a significant amount of overlap between the "opinion leaders."[110] Furthermore, Yepsen found that use of word overlap did not accurately point out who was the most influential or give a definitive measure as to how productive engaging in

110   Ibid., 28

this network would be for the U.S. Embassy. After further research, Yepsen discovered that the U.S. Embassy has restrictions placed on political content posted on Twitter. Therefore, the U.S. Embassy focuses more on cultural aspects when tweeting and deletes "partisan tweets."[111] Yepsen determined that an ideal network does exist if the U.S. Embassy wanted to get involved in discussions about U.S.-Venezuelan foreign policy issues.

While Yepsen's quantitative approach identifies a network in which the U.S. can enter to engage in U.S.-Venezuelan policy discussions, she does little qualitative analysis of the potential efficacy of U.S. engagement with these account holders. A qualitative analysis is also necessary to determine the potential effect that engaging in conversation with these users will have on the overall positive public opinion of the U.S. Instead of simply looking at volume of retweets and overall number of followers, Yepsen must also look at what is being retweeted and determine if these networks have the capability to make a message go viral. There is a connection between word overlap and potential to influence, and Yepsen's results do show that those with larger amounts of followers are more diverse in topics discussed. Therefore, the influence these users have over their network regarding U.S.-Venezuelan issues may not be substantial enough. Yepsen's findings demonstrate potential for U.S. discourse on foreign policy to enter social networks in Venezuela; the level of efficacy this engagement may have is still undeterminable.

CONCLUSION

Social media sites, particularly Twitter, are important tools in enhancing PD practices. PD as a practice has developed a negative reputation, much like public relations, because of the traditional asymmetrical, top-down flow of information, which has dominated the practice.[112] While analyzing tweets by Congress, it is apparent that Twitter provides a platform where not only is asymmetrical information possible, but symmetrical information is possible too. Traditional forms of media provide a top-down flow of information, as those in power within the organization have the greatest potential to have their perspectives and information published in the paper and broadcast on the news. However, as evidenced in the case of the Haitian earthquake in 2010, social media allow civilians to have the power to control and distribute information.[113] Furthermore, the use of social media in times of crisis by a U.S. embassy can garner public support for a U.S. presence, as it did in Japan. Foreign civilians need to know the U.S. has a vested interest in their well-being. As a result, broadcasting accurate information in times of crisis and listening to the concerns of people abroad will create a level of trust. When trust is created and people feel connected to the U.S. message, people who are active on Twitter will be more willing to risk their reputations within their network to broadcast that message.[114]

Using Twitter to spread information and create a reputation always involves a risk. There is a risk that other users will spread false information about the U.S. and potentially ruin its reputation in the host country. Twitter provides a platform for the U.S. embassy to actively correct misconceptions that social media sites make more visible. Therefore, it is important for the U.S. embassy to follow the leaders in the discussions of U.S. foreign policy in the host country, as suggested by Yepsen in the case on Venezuela. By identifying an ideal network, the U.S. embassy can better track the discussion as well as influence the discussion about U.S. domestic politics and foreign policy in the host country. In cases where the U.S. embassy has restrictions on content published on social networking sites, it is still important that the embassy tracks its ideal network; this will provide valuable information as to what the general population may think or to what information they are exposed. Promoting cultural exchange is important when dealing with message limitations, such as what the U.S. embassy in Venezuela practices. However, it is important that the U.S. government track perceptions of the U.S. to see if its strategy is changing overall perspectives in the country.

The act of creating a brand to promote a positive image abroad cannot automatically be associated with a state propagandizing its image abroad. Branding is important for individuals, businesses, and even governments. The term branding here refers to the perceptions publics have or associate with one's name. The U.S. promotes

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111   Ibid.
112   Taylor, "The Not-So-Black Art of Public Diplomacy"
113   Smith, "Socially distributing public relations"
114   Ibid.

the values of liberal democracy throughout the world and works to be recognized as a model of democracy. Therefore, it only makes sense for U.S. PD strategies to include the promotion of the U.S. initiatives, since it aligns with their foreign policy objectives.

Furthermore, U.S. embassies should enhance efforts to increase symmetrical communication by engaging the public in countries that host embassies. While the political relationship between the U.S. and the host country may not always allow the U.S. to engage in a country's political discourse, the U.S. can engage the foreign public by asking their opinions when tweeting. The embassy or diplomatic mission should encourage discussion whether the topic is cultural or political relations. This way, any popular misconceptions will be brought to the embassy's attention, reducing the need to watch numerous accounts at the same time.

It is the job of a Department of State public diplomacy officer to influence public opinion abroad and create a positive brand, which will allow U.S. relations with the host country to run more smoothly. Popular opinion in the host country, especially in the case of democracies, can influence government decisions on major policy decisions that are of interest to the U.S. Therefore, it is imperative that PD officers track Twitter and other relative forms of social media to engage the public and promote a positive U.S. brand.

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