

“Twitter Diplomacy”

Engagement Through Social Media in 21st Century Statecraft

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1. Introduction

On May 19th, 2009, just a few months after President Obama's ascension to the White House, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton delivered remarks on diplomacy at a global press conference held at the Foreign Press Center in Washington, D.C.. This in and of itself was not remarkable or notable, as one expects the Secretary to speak publicly on her work. But a small, noticeable declaration was said, something that would foreshadow the new way Obama's State Department would pursue its foreign policy goals: "I don't need to tell any of you that today's world is interconnected. Now, we are using new tools and seeking new partners to broaden the reach of our diplomacy because we understand that 21st century statecraft cannot just be government-to-government; it must be government-to-people and people-to-people."¹ Even this statement in and of itself is not noteworthy, as it is simply a restatement of the beliefs that have grown out of Joseph Nye's theory of soft power and public diplomacy that had gradually become vogue in response to the Bush administration's hard military power; the nation's biggest stick was overextended, the carrots our diplomats offered were no longer quite as enticing, and with Obama's campaign of change had come the mandate to try something new.

But what form would the new "21st Century Statecraft" take? Although Secretary Clinton and Senior Advisor for Innovation Alec Ross made a number of speeches during the first year of the administration concerning their vision, we did not see a complete picture of their plan for diplomacy's future until the release of the first ever Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review. In this expansive document, the Obama State Department outlined its road map for the enactment and pursuit of policy goals the world over. The United States would conduct diplomacy by engaging our own civil society to work with foreign citizens. Our state agencies would increase development in poor nations not just through traditional sources of aid but through technological innovation in infrastructure. And

¹ Clinton

among all of these lofty goals, there was also a decision made to take greater advantage of a domestic technological innovation: social media.

Social media technologies (hereafter referred to as SMT's) are a revolution in human communication. On an individual level, they afford us instantaneous interaction with our colleagues, friends, and family, keeping us connected despite vast distances of time and space. But from the standpoint of the Quadrennial Defense Review, which underlines the State Department's commitment to “better using connection technologies and expanding, facilitating, and streamlining our public-private partnership process” while also expanding “people-to-people relationships,”² SMT's are about something more than just being in touch with acquaintances. They afford the opportunity to reach large numbers of people with ease, and bypass the hassle of formal press releases and announcements to deliver information directly to the public in an environment where they feel comfortable. Moreover, there is the tantalizing prospect of having one's efforts go “viral”- having the information you publish spread to virtually every corner of the internet in the time it used to take just to get an official statement put out. But this administration's interest in social media goes beyond just quickly and effectively broadcasting its policies to large numbers of people.

Rather, the interest of this government appears to lie in what officials have termed “two-way dialogue”. In the official records, the term is first used by Judith A. McHale, Under Secretary for Public Affairs and Public Diplomacy. “We are not so naïve as to believe that we can build meaningful relationships with people using nothing but social networking sites,” says McHale. But what social media can do is leverage Nye's concept of “soft power” to win hearts and minds through conversation and dialogue. In Paul Sharp's conception of diplomacy, the diplomat stands at the midpoint between two cultures as a medium through which the two sides may interact – but it is easier to connect when you diminish the distance between populations and foreign diplomats. Social media performs this

2 QDDR Executive Summary, vii

function admirably. When using other types of media to engage a target audience, public diplomacy is only capable of transmission from policy elites to the broader population. Radio, television, and print are unidirectional means of communication that prevent any type of dialogue or interaction. Social media, on the other hand, is predicated on direct engagement between parties and networks, which McHale states is its primary strength. “We are shifting the spirit of public diplomacy from one-way messaging to two-way engagement,” she says. “Anyone with a mobile phone or an internet connection has the ability to communicate with us.”³

As proof of concept, McHale notes incidents in which individuals in Haiti were able to use social media to communicate directly with international rescue workers in the wake of the earthquakes in January 2011. This is not just a function of the proliferation of technology – the text messaging infrastructure that made this connection possible was put into place by an expanded and transitioning diplomatic core. Jorge Heine suggests that this enlargement of personnel stems from a shift from a closed-door, “club” model of diplomacy to an expanded “network” model, wherein more individuals are tasked with performing the many and varied duties that used to be ascribed to single individuals. Such a transition makes diplomats more accessible as a whole, and more capable of two-way interaction with people on the ground through SMT.

McHale also recognizes that the challenge of social media for the State Department is representing itself successfully. In her words “No one wants to connect with a sterile diplomatic presence that does nothing more than serve up the same stale information in bite-sized bits. Legions of online followers or 'likes' mean very little if the interaction never moves beyond the virtual realm.”⁴ But with the newness of these avenues of approach, how does a foreign policy practitioner ensure that the interaction even occurs in the first place? At this stage, it is unclear if new, hitherto unheard from audiences are being reached by their efforts, and there is no concerted agreement on what form public

³ McHale

⁴ Ibid.

diplomacy in social media is most effective. We do not know if, in fact, the presence that diplomats are projecting is viewed as sterile, or if we can translate these digital gains into real, substantive progress. While theorists and thinkers such as Malcolm Gladwell propose competing ideas for the utility of the technology, and scholars such as Bruce Gregory offer questions and cautionary notes for social media usage, no real guideposts that mark the correct path of action. According to Drezner & Carpenter part of this problem results from the hesitance of many scholars to even interact with SMT, let alone research its impact. How do we measure the success or failure of these technologies in broadcasting policy, or even in establishing “two-way dialogue”, with so many unknowns?

As government usage of social media becomes more prevalent, it is critical that scholars, governments, and even civil society assess these questions, as well as our assumptions of what social media does and how it occurs. At the moment, due to the newness of the technology and a certain hesitance on the part of academia to embrace it, we are still only beginning to grasp the extent of the technology, and the limits that exist on its power. therefore, we are forced to ask how can policy practitioners effectively utilize social media, and what are the “best practices” for doing so. This paper contributes to moving forward towards this important goal.

It is the central thesis of this paper that at this time social media usage by policy practitioners, in its current state, does not adequately accomplish the goal of two-way dialogue set out by McHale, nor is it an effective usage of new resources as envisioned in the QDDR. In order to understand the limited program that has been achieved, we will begin with an examination of the literature surrounding current theories of diplomatic engagement methodology, as well as an examination of previous technological impacts on the profession and practice of international diplomacy. From there we will discuss the current research surrounding SMT itself, and how it might be of assistance in understanding the role SMT plays in the work of policy practitioners. This will illuminate the current gaps in our knowledge of how these technologies can be used for the practice of diplomacy.

With these gaps in mind, we will then move on to the central focus of this paper, which is a case study of six Twitter accounts used to further public diplomacy via SMT. Through an analysis of their habits and patterns of engagement with users, this paper will show that the current means and methods of utilization do not live up to the goals and visions of the State Department. From this data we may then be able to extract a working knowledge of the factors that contribute to what might be a standard for SMT success, and how U.S. diplomats might more effectively utilize SMT.

Without a good understanding of the potential pitfalls or traps that public diplomacy practitioners might fall into online, without knowledge of these “best practices,” it is likely that currently social media is a heavily underutilized tool in the diplomat's arsenal. And if the 21st Century Statecraft paradigm, or any subsequent similar program, is to succeed, we must understand the factors that promote its success.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Methods and Theories of Diplomacy

In order to understand the current fascination with social media, we must refer to Joseph Nye's theory of soft power. When he first wrote his seminal paper "Soft Power" for *Foreign Policy* in 1990, it was in a context of shifting diplomacy norms. The Cold War was over, the Berlin Wall had collapsed, and old theories of containment and stability through mutually assured destruction were much less relevant in a world that, while suddenly unipolar, was in the throes of a dramatic international realignment. To Nye, this new environment (and the as-yet-unforeseen rise of globalism) diminished the strength of military power as an instrument of foreign policy – the fungibility of strength in arms had diminished, and an advanced fighting force was becoming more expensive and difficult to maintain. At the same time, the author believed that "the factors of technology, education, and economic growth are becoming more significant in international power, while geography, population, and raw materials are becoming somewhat less important."⁵ As a result, it was necessary for Nye and others to reassess what it meant to have "power", if military force and material were no longer the greatest determinant of strength in the global system.

It is this that lead Nye to the idea that "proof of power lies not in resources but in the ability to change the behavior of states."⁶ According to this concept, military power still had its place as a coercive force, and enticement could be used to a degree. But it was also possible to bypass the usage of "sticks" or "carrots" completely by simply *making other states want what you want*, which is the core concept of soft power theory. In Nye's words:

"If a state can make its power seem legitimate in the eyes of others, it will encounter less resistance to its wishes. If its culture and ideology are attractive, others will more willingly follow. If it can establish international norms consistent with its society, it is less likely to have to change. If it can support institutions that make other states wish to

⁵ [Nye, p. 154](#)

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 155

channel or limit their activities in ways the dominant state prefers, it may be spared the costly exercise of coercive or hard power.”⁷

The author then goes on to note that the widespread appeal of American popular culture makes it an excellent source of soft power, as well as the fact that a large percentage of NGO's and international organizations are based in the United States.

Social media fits in well with the notion of soft power. In our globalized society, social media has rapidly become a site of confluence for many societies and peoples – an international audience that awaits influence. The transmission of popular culture is one of the strongest features of the technology, as one only has to glance at Facebook, Twitter, or nearly any blog to see, and if we consider (as per Nye's estimation) the United States to have an especially strong popular culture, it seems logical to view social media as a prime outlet for the expression of our soft power.

We can also seek to understand the newfound importance of social media for diplomats by understanding what the work of foreign policy officials is at a fundamental level. This is what Paul Sharp, Professor and Head of Political Science at the University of Minnesota Duluth, seeks to describe in his work. Scholarship other than Sharp's approaches international relations through the lens of other political philosophies – in his reading of existing works, Sharp uses radical, rational, and realist as his three categories of existing tradition and thought. Radicals see diplomats and diplomacy as tools of the existing power structure that mindlessly enforce extant policy. Rationals think of diplomacy and its performers as reasonable negotiators, aiming to further their goals through cooperation. Realists sit somewhere between the first two, seeing the underlying reasoning behind the perpetuation of existing policies while also seeking to bring others into negotiations that might be turned in their favor.

But for Sharp, none of these explanations for how and why we conduct foreign policy are quite as useful as a diplomacy practitioner's point of view. This outlook, as Sharp defines it, has three distinct

⁷ Ibid, p. 167

parts: first, human beings exist in groups in “conditions of separateness,” where groups have little to no understanding of other groups or even knowledge of their existence. Second, when different groups meet and interact, they are forced to negotiate “relations of separateness”, wherein the different needs, desires, and cultural norms are reconciled. Diplomats are the conductors of these relations, and exist in the spaces between separate groups in order to facilitate interaction. As a result of this positioning, we arrive at a “diplomatic understanding” of international relations, wherein we see the need for these conductors and desire their ability to bring about some type of agreement or consensus on issues. For Sharp, diplomats in international relations are not merely the functionaries; they are a medium of understanding and dialogue between disparate groups.⁸

The utility of social media for purposes of diplomacy is especially understandable if we consider it to be another means of mediating our global “relations of separateness.” These mediations do not necessarily result in treaties and accords between individuals and societies, as they would between states, but it is hard to deny that social media helps its users attain some kind of common humanity or mutual understanding. Diplomats and foreign policy practitioners can take advantage of this by inserting themselves into the mix as a means of bringing greater understanding of foreign policy goals to the social media community.

But this interactivity with social media on the part of foreign policy officials is not enabled merely by a changing our understanding of what power is or seeking to regulate the globe's “relations of separateness.” It is not even due to the policy directives of the 21st Century Statecraft program. Jorge Heine, a former diplomat himself, has argued that the conduct and action of diplomacy has undergone a minor revolution in the past several decades that somewhat parallels the revolution in human communication of the internet age.⁹ Heine notes that in previous eras, inter-state business was conducted by a select group of rich, mostly white males who would meet over drinks in the salon to

⁸ Sharp, pp. 1-15

⁹ Heine

discuss the latest developments in their treaty negotiations. With a small number of actors and opaque discussions and negotiations, this “club” model of diplomacy was concerned mainly with the creation and maintenance of written treaties. For centuries, treaties have been the diplomat's bread and butter and their terms have been the primary basis on which states conducted their dealings with one another.

However, Heine argues that these days the game has changed. States are no longer as concerned with simple treaties; in today's globalized society, they seek bilateral exchange in finance, commerce, and culture. Not all agreements between states are necessarily codified as treaties, and with increased diplomatic responsibilities, the number of players in the international relations game has greatly increased. Instead of conducting themselves like an old boys' club, diplomats spread themselves across the world in a far-flung web with vast reach, relaying and exchanging information, passing it from one person to the next as recommendations are made and decisions debated. In network diplomacy it is no longer sufficient to simply be chummy with the Foreign Minister of a country in order to accomplish business; diplomats must cultivate a wide array of contacts in their network to achieve goals.

Though Heine's view of the transformation of diplomatic conduct from the club to the network model parallels humanity's transition to a more technologically networked global society, technology is not his focus. “It is important not to get stuck on the means of communications themselves”, he says, when discussing overall changes in diplomacy, when the content that these forms of communication provide is much more significant.¹⁰ As a corollary to the transition to network diplomacy, diplomats are expected to have a greater degree of interaction with the world and the communities they serve through public relations. However, before practitioners can even begin to engage in actions which would constitute public diplomacy, Heine states that diplomats need to develop the ability to communicate clearly. The author himself puts it best: “In today's world, unless you take your case effectively and convincingly to the many constituencies on which you depend, you will not carry whatever issue you

¹⁰ Ibid.

are battling for.”¹¹ Thus it is Heine's view that before we can discuss the efficacy of the means of new communication technologies, we must first discuss the potency of the delivery.

Despite these objections it is possible to see how Heine's theory of the change from “club” to “network” diplomacy has enabled the new usage of social media. In the “club” model of diplomacy, diplomats meet face to face and largely exclude the public from the practice of their craft. Social media would largely be irrelevant, as although individuals are given voice by the technology, it would be difficult for a single official to adequately utilize social media to leverage American soft power worldwide. Additionally, the hope for “two-way dialogue” would be nearly impossible, as the number of officials using social media would be woefully inadequate to address the accumulated masses. But the diffusion of diplomatic power from single officials to legions of bureaucrats has created a wider-reaching-yet-largely-unified network of individuals working towards policy goals. In the “network” model, these officials are capable of becoming a much larger, more diffuse force in the social media sphere. More diplomats online means more chances for individuals to connect and pursue dialogue, as well as more chances for the diplomats themselves to push the foreign policy goals of the administration on a number of different issues. The “network” model provides for greater diplomatic infiltration into the social media universe, and with it a greater chance of successful contact and interaction with foreign and domestic audiences.

2.2. Technological Mediums of Public Diplomacy

Despite Heine's point that much of the potency of public diplomacy lies with the practitioners themselves, it is impossible to ignore that the mediums in which it is practiced are having an impact as well. In any discussion of the impact of communication mediums on foreign policy, it is critical for us to first note the CNN Effect. In research by Piers Robinson, the term CNN effect originally arose as a

¹¹ Ibid

result of discussion concerning the U.S. military interventions in Iraq and Somalia. For one of the first times in history, a single, unified narrative was available the world over, and as foreign policy elites began to notice the channel's ubiquity, they began to publicly decry its perceived ability to push a nation towards military intervention. From this seed, Robinson's "myth" grew and it became widely believed that the news media, through its coverage and focusing of public outrage, is able to force military action.¹²

Robinson deflates this myth in his book by analyzing instances of military intervention and the media coverage that immediately preceded them. In the aforementioned cases of Iraq and Somalia, his analysis proves that there was little to no coverage of the humanitarian disasters that necessitated intervention. But he does not go so far as to say that the CNN Effect is nonexistent, and provides evidence of later cases of media influence to demonstrate as much. Rather, Robinson suggests that it functions by different, more subtle means than we understand.

First, he says that the underlying assumption of the myth, that public opinion reacts to negative coverage of individuals suffering and in turn generates pressure for diplomatic action, is not quite true. This would require that foreign policy elites pay constant attention to things like public opinion polling in order to find approval for their actions or policy goals. Robinson in fact states that these elites ignore polling in favor of analyzing general news reporting, forming an assumption of public opinion based on this information. therefore public opinion is not directly responsible for the CNN Effect. Rather it is the reaction of decision makers to the very reporting itself, and the perception it creates within their own elite communities, that drives the media-foreign policy interaction.¹³

Second, Robinson submits that the media is only able to induce action when policy goals are uncertain. In most of his case studies, Robinson argues that news reporting merely helped to

¹² Robinson, p. 7

¹³ Ibid, p. 129

manufacture widespread consent for action in accordance with previously stated policy goals. It was only in instances where the policy response was undecided that the CNN Effect created an impetus for action.¹⁴

More recent work done by David Faris serves as what might be termed the “social media update” to the CNN Effect. In his work Faris focuses not on policy elites as the avenue of change, but on the average, everyday user of any type of social media site. He states that, due to the speed of communication online and the lowered cost of collective action, it is possible for a simple piece of information to spread quickly from user to user and incite them to action in what Faris calls an “informational cascade.”¹⁵ As the information spreads, users become motivated to engage, which is facilitated by the ease of interaction online. One could see this as analogous to the reporting done in the CNN Effect: information spreads and becomes ubiquitous, creating a common narrative and understanding of events. This common understanding can then prompt a common response, whether it be a communal outpouring of grief, laughter, or rage at the establishment. Faris himself cites the April 6th movement in Egypt as an example in his case studies, but this theory is applicable to many forms of sudden collective action online, including the recent revolution in Egypt.

Scholarly opinion on social media tend to fall into one of two broad camps, best typified in the highly public debate on the technology by Malcolm Gladwell and Clay Shirky. Throughout the course of a number of journal articles, both have made clear their strongly held and completely opposing theories on the relevance of social media to political process. Shirky, on the one hand, believes that social media technologies enhance the practice of democracy by enhancing Habermas' “public sphere”. In an essay in *Foreign Policy*, he writes: “As the communications landscape gets denser, more complex, and more participatory, the networked population is gaining greater access to information, more opportunities to engage in public speech, and an enhanced ability to undertake collective action.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 18

¹⁵ Faris, p. 37

In the political arena ... these increased freedoms can help loosely coordinated publics demand change.”¹⁶ He goes on to equate social media with the tools of previous revolutionary movements such as the Voice of the America and the printing presses and photocopiers of the samizdat. Though these tools do not by themselves instigate revolutions, it is Shirky's belief that they are critical enablers that are indispensable to a movement's organizational success.

Gladwell, on the other hand, argues that the believers in social media have been too quick to herald the technology as revolutionary.¹⁷ His objection is that activist movements are built on strong ties between individuals, and pull in their followers based on those ties. Social media, he argues, is based on weak ties, which are occasionally efficient in reaching large numbers of people to achieve a goal but only because very little is asked of participants. In real movements, where life and limb are risked to work towards a momentous end, the kinds of weak ties generated by social media won't hold and a movement will fail to coalesce. David Faris also identifies this disjoint between real world movements and social media activists, noting that many people are unable to make the leap from their online support to real world contribution. Faris's term for these people is most appropriate: “slacktivists”.

Bruce Gregory, Professorial Lecturer at the George Washington University School of Media and Public Affairs, is mindful of this debate in his work. Although his main focus is that the U.S. pattern of engagement in public diplomacy is episodic in nature and requires transformation (rather than adaptation) to succeed in the Obama administration's new age of “global public engagement,”¹⁸ he spends some time discussing this pattern in reference to SMT. His first point is that given his theory concerning the U.S. approach to public diplomacy we can likely assume that any kind of adoption of social media will be hampered by attempts to adapt existing norms to incorporate SMT. This is

16 Shirky, p. 1

17 Gladwell

18 Gregory, p. 352

especially relevant for diplomats when the existing norm is a strictly controlled process of releasing information, rather than the spontaneous type of conversation we expect to see on social media. And even if transformation occurred and a new model for SMT interaction was adopted, Gregory notes, we lack enough of an understanding of the implications to know exactly what that model should be.

His second set of questions and concerns is based in the fact that, by using SMTs, policy practitioners are venturing into new and alien territory: having their work be responsive to public demand instead of setting the agenda themselves. Because they are now more available online and more able to interact, diplomats can put out material that is a-political and constructive in nature to help build public trust and support for their work. This stands in contrast to the old model of putting out content as part of your own policies, and only having the public become interested in it after it has been introduced. Gregory argues that because this is such a new method of communicating with the public, old policy structures are incapable of handling it effectively and transformation will be required.

Gregory's clear implication is that SMT usage by diplomats and policy practitioners will be completely ineffective until transformative changes have been made to existing policies, but that no such changes will be made until there has been additional research and thought devoted to the prospect. However, Drezner and Carpenter theorize that any research on SMT in political science will be slow in coming due to the anxieties of professional academics toward the technology, which have their roots in the negative experiences of the pre-Web 2.0 generation. The authors outline a typical experience early in their paper:

A junior IR scholar goes to a job interview in 2006, and is asked about a phenomenon called "Facebook" over dinner. Enconced in a graduate school of public and international affairs, the job candidate is unfamiliar with the (then) undergraduate craze. Returning home, and wondering if she blew her interview when she replied "Facebook, what's that?" the assistant professor starts looking into the "Facebook" phenomenon, not sure what she is getting into. Before she knows it, she has created an

account – and some unanticipated, awkward interactions with students.¹⁹

Because of this type of interaction, many scholars and institutions have formed an overall negative impression of social media, and network effects have caused it to become widespread. Drezner and Carpenter also believe that many scholars fear that they will be held professionally accountable for anything published on social media – errant comments on blogs or theories published in idle moments could ruin reputations or careers. Although the authors jointly suggest that the benefits of social media outweigh such fears and potential costs, they nonetheless suggest that IR scholars are staying as far away as possible from the technology. It is their opinion that this has had the unfortunate effect of stifling not only usage, but exploration and research as well.²⁰

2.3. Real World Impacts

If scholars have been hesitant to embrace social media, then the U.S. Government might be best described as gung-ho. After officially asking Twitter to delay maintenance that would have taken the site offline during the 2009 Iranian presidential election protests in order to aid demonstrators, the State Department has only deepened its relationship with Twitter: in addition to maintaining its own official Twitter feed in english, State maintains accounts sending messages in Urdu, Spanish, Russian, Portugese, Hindi, French, Farsi, Chinese, and Arabic. Outside of Twitter, the State Department also has its own social networking site called ExchangesConnect, and has also established an official blog, “DipNote”. Officials at the Department, as well as other international organizations around the world, seem to have found their answer to how they take advantage of social media: public diplomacy.

Within the existing scholarship, there exists a base understanding of the root of diplomacy and

¹⁹ Drezner & Carpenter, pp. 255-256

²⁰ Although the evidence Drezner and Carpenter provide is compelling, it tends towards the anecdotal rather than the empirical. This author could not find empirical data that supports their claims – but neither is there any that disproves it. What is clear from a survey of existing research is that although interest in social media usage in academia has increased (as evidenced by an increasing number of works arguing for and against, including articles published in the Chronicle of Higher Education cited by the authors), acceptance of its potential has not been widespread.

international relations, with Paul Sharp describing it as the mediation of relations of separateness between different groups of people. But we know that the processes of diplomacy are changing. Jorge Heine sees the change from club to network style diplomacy as particularly important for understanding how Sharp's process of mediation has changed. Also important is the impact of the rapid spread of mass information, as seen with the CNN Effect – with enough people concerned about the same issue at the same time, media and the masses can now have a real impact on foreign policy. Robinson reminds us, however, that it is important not to overstate its possible effects. When it comes to social media in particular, there are different theories as to what effects it can actually have on the real world (never mind foreign policy). While Clay Shirky sees it as a tool of mobilization and revolution, Malcolm Gladwell believes that the weak ties it creates are not enough to support substantive change. Nonetheless, Faris believes that the communicative power of social media is capable of producing tidal waves of awareness that can lead to real-world results. But even as scholars in multitudes of fields become increasingly excited about the liberating potential of social media in the information age, Drezner and Carpenter note that IR scholars have distanced themselves from it, leading to a lack of information about social media's impact on the realm of diplomacy.

And yet, despite these gaps in our understanding of precisely what advantages social media confers, state agencies of diplomacy, the U.S. State Department chief among them, have taken the transformative potential of social media to heart. This creates a degree of uncertainty for scholars about how to best analyze their efforts; for the officials themselves, it leaves them with no clear path to social media success to follow. That is why it is critical that this paper contributes to the process of analysis to define what the “best practices” for the utilization of social media are – without this type of understanding, analysis of public diplomacy efforts will be mediocre at best, or incorrect at worst. If the government is attempting to use SMT, and yet the literature states the necessary research does not yet exist and is not forthcoming, it is imperative that we begin to address the questions of effective and

allowable usage immediately. Because we do not yet have the research that describes successful social media usage, which would be the baseline for any transformations of policy, we must turn our attention to a study of SMT's themselves.

3. Case Study Methodology: State Department Twitter Accounts

In order to begin building arguments for what constitutes an effective usage of SMT, we must first study social media interactivity between policy practitioners and the general public. In order to do that, we must also define what we mean by the words “effective,” “policy practitioners,” and “general public.”

3.1. What constitutes effective usage, and where do we study it?

If the goal of our study is to document effective SMT usage, we must first know what we mean when we say “effective.” We can begin by asking what it is that we want SMT to accomplish that other technologies do not. It can be assumed that the ultimate goal with social media usage is not only broadcasting, because it is easier to broadcast policy messages via other, better understood mediums. Clay Shirky believes the strength of social media lies in its ability to make connections between people, to form networks for action. Judith McHale believes that the promise of the medium lies in its capacity for two-way dialogue between elites and civil society. In both cases, the key factor is interactivity between groups, and communication passing back and forth between them. If interaction is the factor that makes social media an interesting and usable technology, then our study of SMT must focus specifically on exchanges between policy practitioners and the general public.

The means for us to study this interaction will be afforded to us by the SMT's themselves. Because of the highly public nature of these sites, any exchange occurring between diplomatic officials and the general public should be digitally documented and available for us to analyze. But different forms of SMT carry different challenges for our attempt at analysis. The most problematic type to study is Text Messaging. Although there is evidence of engagement through texting in the literature, there is no reasonable or logical way to pour over the texts of any number of diplomats and/or citizens without raising a host of privacy concerns. Thus, text messaging was discounted early as an avenue of study.

Among the popular types of social media, this leaves us with four choices: blogs, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. Each presents unique difficulties and opportunities for data collection.

The blog is perhaps the most well-established form of SMT, the format having had its inception in the mid-90's. As a long-form discursive space, the blog is a suitable format for nuanced opinions and analysis of events – this would seem to make it an excellent tool for practitioners in the exchanging of information and dialogue with users. Two-way interaction exists on blogs in the form of comment threads, which give users the ability to post any type of reaction or statement in response to a blog post. There are even some excellent practitioner blogs that would be of interest to the study, such as DipNote, the official State Department Blog. However, comment threads are able to be moderated by blog owners, who often have the ability to preview any submitted comments before they are posted to the main site. If the interactions can be edited by policy practitioners, we cannot be sure that any data collected would adequately represent the potential of SMT for two-way dialogue. We must also consider that because of the self-moderating nature of the blog, many users will post reactions to their own blogs, which then may or may not draw a response from still other blogs, official or civilian - it is therefore possible that much of the response and interaction that occurred would be spread across the multitudes of blog aggregating sites and privately-hosted blogs. This would make it difficult to create an accurate picture of interaction. This decentralization of content discounts blogs as a good source of data on SMT interaction.

The next prominent SMT that recommends itself for analysis is Facebook. The primary business of the site is helping to maintain individuals' networks of friends by allowing users to create lists of contacts who are then permitted to view content the user has posted to the site and interact with them. But the site is also capable of supporting accounts created to represent large groups or organizations, such as the State Department, which can then have their own networks of friends and followers. Said followers are capable of commenting on content published by the organization's account, and will be

updated by Facebook when and if any new content is made available. One would assume this creates a ripe atmosphere for interaction.

However, at present the State Department does not control an organizational account – it appears on the site only as an “Interest” page, which users may link to but not converse with. Although some diplomatic officials, including Ambassador Susan Rice, and a number of embassies control their own Facebook accounts, most government agencies themselves appear to be without a formal presence on the site. This is also true for government officials working under those agencies – as a result, there appears to be an incomplete engagement on Facebook on the part of the State Department. Although it would be possible to make some study of interactivity on other Facebook accounts, omitting the foremost apparatus of public diplomacy for the United States from the data would leave us with an incomplete account. Another technology would be preferable to Facebook for our purposes in this study.

This brings us to the possibility of using YouTube as the technology of study. YouTube's contribution to public diplomacy through social media has to do with imagery and distribution. Through the site, officials can publish content that can be repeatably viewed by any interested party – this includes statements, remarks, lectures, and even direct responses to questions received online. In addition to being an easily spread version of your message, YouTube videos put a face to a policy in order to create a better connection with the audience and hopefully a greater willingness to engage in matters of public diplomacy. Similar to blogs, each YouTube video has a comment thread where people can post their opinions on the content, which could be a good source for data on interactivity.

But YouTube comment threads are neither well-known for being intellectually interactive, nor are many of the videos published by the State Department commented upon. Commenting on the site is something like an internet blood sport: contributors are often quick, brutal, or vulgar in ways unrelated to the original content posted. This may mean that serious attempts at interaction would be better

represented in a different SMT format. There is also no evidence that commenters are particularly interested in many official YouTube postings – in a random survey of the official State Department YouTube account, most videos had less than 50 views and had received no comments at all. A significant study of interactivity in SMT could not be made on YouTube.

This leaves us with only remaining option, which is the technology that was finally selected as the medium for this study: Twitter. This technology was not selected as a last result, but rather because it provides us with a good means of measuring interaction between policy makers and the general public. In an initial survey of the site, it was possible to identify hundreds of active government accounts, either belonging to entire government departments or to individual officials. On Twitter, users create accounts in order to publish 140 character messages, referred to as tweets. These messages become part of that user's Twitter feed, which is the digital record of all their tweets over time. For our purposes, this means that in instances of interaction there is no ability for editing the conversation granted to policy makers, and thus the data we gather will be more representative of interactivity. What's more, interactivity among users is easily tracked due to the “mentions” feature.

In Twitter terminology, “mentions” are a specific technical feature of the site wherein users can link to other users' profiles by typing the profile name preceded by the @ symbol. This link will appear in the individual user's “feed”, which is the collection of all posts attributable to that account, and the account that is “mentioned” will also be notified – they even have the option of posting any tweets that mention them to their own feed. This means that in instances of interaction between policy practitioners and the general public, both parties can draw the attention of other users to their statements, which facilitates two-way dialogue in a format that is often crowded with many volumes of other tweets. For the purposes of our study, mentions are also searchable through Twitter's user interface, as the entire posting history of all the accounts on the site is logged and indexed for up to a week at a time. By searching for “mentions” of an official government account, it will be possible to

see how many individuals are attempting to interact with diplomacy officials at any time. By scanning official accounts for “mentions” of other Twitter users, we can see how often policy practitioners reply to the general public through a medium that both the officials and the general public expect to be interactive. For the purposes of beginning a measurement of policy-maker/general public interactivity, Twitter and its “mentions” feature provides an ideal source for our data.

3.2. Who is the “general public”?

Now that we have decided that we will be studying interactivity, and the medium in which we will be studying it, it is important for us to answer the question “interactivity between who?” The terms used thus far, policy-maker and general public, are incomplete descriptions of whose communications this study will focus on. Both are entirely too vague, and require further definition in order for this study to have any value. Without a precise meaning, extraneous variables may become included in the data and distort it.

“The general public” is a term meant to connotate the core audience of public diplomacy efforts. This is an audience that is different for every instance of public diplomacy, as any successful diplomatic effort requires a precise knowledge of the culture and norms of the individuals to whom the message is directed, as well as some concept of how to effectively approach them. But there are some common exclusionary factors for all public diplomacy; or rather, there are always parties whom we know public diplomacy is *not* trying to reach. These parties are the practitioners and diplomats themselves, as well as the members of foreign governments and agencies with which there are already established channels of communication in the international system.

3.3 Definition of Policy Practitioners and the role of Non-State Actors

In order for us to measure interactivity, we must define who is the general public, and in order

to measure the boundaries of who is included in the general public, we must be prepared to exclude policy practitioners. For the purposes of this study, we will define policy practitioners as individuals or organizations that identify themselves as official representatives of sitting governments or government agencies. As we are focusing on American policies of public diplomacy, this means that the interactions studied will only be between accounts officially affiliated with U.S government agencies. Any account that cannot be verified as belonging to a specific government official or agency who is publishing with government authority will therefore be included as a member of the general public.

The consequence of this is that undeclared policy practitioners may become included as part of the data on the general public. However, this makes sense for two important reasons. First, policy practitioners who are not operating as official government agents cannot claim to be practicing public diplomacy in the classical sense, and are in fact practicing citizen diplomacy, a related topic but outside the bounds of this study. Second, diplomats as individuals can be a target audience for public diplomacy as much as any other citizen. If we accept that the modern practice of public diplomacy has its roots in Joseph Nye's theory of soft power, we can establish that its purpose is to influence individuals in order to achieve more favorable outcomes for a state or nation. If this is the case, then diplomats-as-individuals, who are already a target for policy lobbying efforts in their official capacity, are also a target audience for public diplomacy efforts in their private lives as well. Policy arguments may not work on diplomats-as-practitioners, but soft power public diplomacy could still affect diplomats-as-individuals and achieve favorable outcomes. This means that policy practitioners who are choosing to engage in two-way dialogue, not as a government agent but as a private citizen, can be (reasonably) included in our data total for the general public.

As-yet-unmentioned in this discussion of actors in interactivity in SMT are Non-State Actors (NSA's), who are also represented on Twitter as members of the global civil society. The importance of NSA's for the international system is debated elsewhere, and cannot become the subject of this paper –

however, they must somehow be either categorized or excluded for the purposes of data collection. It is possible to interpret NSA-general public and NSA-policy practitioner interaction as another form of interactivity altogether, but for this study, we have already defined our area of interest as being between policy-practitioners and the general public exclusively; this precludes the establishment of additional categories. The data would also be adversely prejudiced by the exclusion of all NSA's, as they perform important roles in the international system and in civil society. Because the policy practitioner category has already been defined as only members of official, sitting governments and agencies, this pushes NSA's into the general public category. While one could argue that NSA's should be considered as policy practitioners since they have their own policy aims which they can attempt to accomplish through public diplomacy, most fall under the heading of civil society organizations – alliances of private individuals, working together for a common cause. If we assume that most NSA's are staffed by members of the public, then it is also reasonable to assume they would be a target for U.S. attempts at public diplomacy. This makes them viable members of an interactive general public.

3.4 Account Selection

With the categories of interest identified and key terms defined, the next step for the case study was to select specific accounts to act as sources for data collection. As the focus of this study is on interactivity between the public and policy-practitioners of the United States in general, as opposed to a specific branch, it was necessary to select a variety of accounts. The greater the variety of accounts studied, the more representative the study is; with this in mind, six accounts were selected. These were chosen from amongst three broad categories of official accounts on Twitter:

♣ **Agency Accounts:** those accounts that belong to departments, sections, and policy initiatives.

Examples would include the U.S. State Department, USAID, the USAF Band, etc.

- ⤴ **Embassy Accounts:** those accounts that belong to individual embassies. Examples include the US Embassy to Haiti and many others.
- ⤴ **Individual Practitioner Accounts:** those accounts that belong to single diplomats and government or agency members. Examples include Ambassador to the EU William Kennard, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, other government officials.

Although one could make the argument that Embassy accounts could fit under the broad heading of “Agency Accounts”, this would ignore the fact that the goal of an Embassy on Twitter is fundamentally different than that of an agency or program that's based in the United States. Embassies are devoted to engaging with specific populations, and therefore must adapt to addressing an audience with a different language and culture. This results in an output altogether distinct from those of agency accounts, and leads to their separation into two categories.

The first “agency account” selected was the official Twitter account of the U.S. State Department (@StateDept) itself. As the representative account for the base of U.S. diplomacy, @StateDept tweets on a variety of matters of state diplomacy, often republishing relevant information from its sub-agencies in furtherance of the broadcasting of specific messages. While the selection of this account is justifiable on the basis of its ownership alone, at the time of its selection it was noted to be an active account with a full feed and strong content output. It is also the most read account of any of those surveyed – when first selected, more than 230,000 people were “following” the accounts activity, which means that many people had the account's content delivered straight to their own Twitter feed. That number is greater than the readership of several of the other accounts selected, and by the time of this writing, it had grown to more than 260,000. With such a wide readership, @StateDept was a logical candidate.

The second agency account selected was chosen for its unique focus and purpose in the

government establishment. ExchangesConnect (@ConnectStateGov) is the social media venture of the State Department, a website designed as a Facebook for policy practitioners, scholars, and other IR-interested parties such as members of the public or civil-society organizations. Although technically a venture of the State Department, and therefore perhaps not a wholly separate endeavor from the @StateDept account, it would be of interest to this study if ExchangeConnect's nature as a social media venture resulted in a different pattern of user-ship and interactivity than @StateDept. Alternate forms of usage for each of the two accounts would echo Heine's arguments about the transition from “club” to “network” models of diplomacy, and the different patterns of engagement that would result from it. It could also be indicative of generational or expertise gaps between the persons behind the accounts. In either case, @ExchangesConnect merits inclusion as an account focused on a different method of interaction and public diplomacy than @StateDept, while still remaining under control of State Department officials.

Two starkly different embassy accounts were also selected in order to see greater variety in the way interactive exchanges might take place. During the selection of this category of Twitter account, various factors had to be considered: these include the level of technology infrastructure in a country, the history of a nation's relations with the United States, and the importance of any given state to U.S. goals abroad. Based on a consideration of these factors, the first account selected was that of the Embassy to Cairo (@USEmbassyCairo). Readers might note the date and context of this study and assume this choice is related to Egypt's revolution which occurred one year prior to the completion of this paper. This was a factor, but not the only one. It is widely agreed that social media has played some role in Egypt's politics since even before the revolution, as one of the only alternative methods of publishing radical and uncensored news items and criticisms under Mubarak's regime was to create a blog. What took place on Facebook and Twitter surrounding the Tahrir Square protests only underlined the fact that some portion of Egyptians are politically engaged, and use SMT in the furtherance of their

goals. This meant that there is an audience for diplomacy via social media in Egypt, and that policy efforts using the technology could have impact. Thus, the research and documentation of it is made all the more important. Egypt's current state of upheaval and transition also played a role, as this could change the importance, content, and tone of any SMT interaction between policy-practitioners and the Egyptian public. The final factor that played into Egypt's selection for this study is the history of relations between the country and the United States. Although for years the U.S. supported the Mubarak regime and provided Egypt with aid, after his ouster this close relationship could become a source of tension between diplomats and the Egyptian people. Thus, there is a greater overall need for official to push public diplomacy goals by any means they possess in order to salvage the relationship between the U.S. and a key state in Middle Eastern politics.

The second account selected was the U.S. Embassy in London (@USAinUK). This choice was made not only based on the same criteria as those that went into Egypt's selection, but also for the contrast in the audience an account must face. They are similar in that the penetration of SMT is high in the United Kingdom as well as in Egypt, but beyond this factor of capacity for audience reception the two could not be more dissimilar. The U.S. and the U.K. have historically enjoyed a “special relationship” between the two countries – they share a conjoined history, possess similar languages and cultural values, and are allied in most if not all of their foreign policy goals. There is less of a need for base level exercises of soft power, as the British already tend to want what Americans want, and vice-versa – this changes the expectations for and possibly the form of public diplomacy in the U.K., which could change the account's approach to “two-way dialogue”. @USAinUK will provide a picture of SMT interaction with an affable, receptive public, whereas @USEmbassyCairo affords us the opportunity to study a more strained, less certain relationship. Comparison and contrast of the two should result in valuable insight.

For the category of individual practitioner accounts, it was important to consider an additional

factor: fame. Certain positions in international relations naturally lend themselves to greater recognition around the world, such as Secretary of State or Secretary General of the United Nations. When an official with a high level of global recognition creates an account on social media, their name will naturally draw attention – on Twitter, this could translate into a larger number of followers, and therefore more people reading the content published. Were we to select two high profile accounts for this study, and user engagement was prompted as much by star power as actual efforts at diplomacy on the part of the account holders, the resulting data would not be representative of interactivity between the general public and policy-practitioners. Likewise, were we to exclude all high profile accounts and from the study, we could receive a skewed picture of engagement as the fame of an individual diplomat is something that practitioners can and should leverage to their advantage in accomplishing public diplomacy. therefore it seemed best to select a high profile account and a low profile account to acquire a more complete and accurate engagement picture.

From among high profile policy-practitioners this study chose to focus on the Twitter account of the U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Susan Rice (@AmbassadorRice). With over 127,000 followers on Twitter, she is perhaps one of the most read diplomatic personalities using the site; in fact, the only account surveyed with more followers was @StateDept (which is also perhaps the only account with greater name recognition). The position she is placed in on Twitter is of special note. As one of the foremost faces of U.S. diplomacy in international relations, Rice's feed shows equal parts frustration with and love of the United Nations – this creates a more human reaction to the affairs of state, which users could conceivably be more willing to connect with than a faceless, emotionless Twitter feed. Before the study even began, it was also assumed that there would be enormous reaction to many of Rice's messages or actions, as she is also one of the principle lightning rods for criticism of U.S. foreign policy.

To contrast with the high profile Ambassador Rice, the Twitter account of the Assistant

Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs, Ann Stock (@AnnatState), was also selected. Stock's position generates much less media attention than Rice's – the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, while critical to the mission of the State Department and U.S. diplomacy as a whole, tends not to deal with as many controversial issues, leading to less time in the media and a lower profile overall. This leads to lower overall awareness of their efforts than those of the United Nations, and thus an audience that is less engaged and conversant with the important work that the Assistant Secretary performs. That said, Stock's account is no less interested in matters of public diplomacy, as her bureau is responsible for a number of programs abroad that encourage engagement between the officials and civil societies of the U.S. and other nations. Therefore, the selection of @AnnatState gives us a contrast to the high profile @AmbassadorRice in terms of audience size and interest, two factors which could conceivably affect the performance of public diplomacy through SMT.

3.5. Categories of Data

Previously we have defined the goal of this study as some kind of measurement of activity between policy-practitioners and the general public, and that on Twitter we can track this interactivity in the form of “mentions”. But there are other categories and types of data available on Twitter that provide context and relevance, and are also within the scope of this study's interest. For the purposes of this study, the following categories of data were tracked and collected: Unique Tweets, Retweets, Mentions by Citizens, and Mentions by Practitioners.

The first category of data collected will be the tweets made by the account under study, referred to as “unique tweets”. These are posts made under the control of the account's owners, and data in this category will represent the totality of original content contributed by a specific account. This is important not only because it gives us some idea of how often the account is used, but also because “mentions” of other accounts will occur within unique tweets. If we were to ignore this category, we

could find ourselves in the unenviable position of knowing how many times an account “mentions” users of the general public, but not knowing if the “mentions” occurred in the space of a hundred tweets or just two or three. The number of unique tweets made adds additional context for the data to be collected on “mentions” and will help increase our understanding of the Twitter usage patterns of the policy elite.

Retweets, the second category of data to be gathered, is not just an arbitrary name for a category of data points, but is instead a technical term used on Twitter itself. If Twitter users happen across a particular tweet they think is important, insightful, or otherwise worthwhile, they are given the option of publishing it to their own feed. They do so through use of the “Retweet” button which is located under every tweet, and retweeting a particular posting will not only share it with whosoever is reading the account's feed, but the posting will link back to the original author. To explain, consider two of the accounts selected for study, @AmbassadorRice and @StateDept. While browsing the site, @AmbassadorRice sees a tweet from @StateDept about the United Nations – this seems like something that followers of @AmbassadorRice would be interested in seeing. Instead of copying and pasting the text, @AmbassadorRice can simply click the “Retweet” button underneath the tweet, and the tweet from @StateDept will appear in @AmbassadorRice's feed. While retweets can have different meanings when used by personal accounts, in an official context they might be best understood as the rebroadcasting and amplification of policy messages. Just as in real world diplomacy, the messages of digital diplomacy are more likely to be heard if you repeat them more often and in more places. We can also view retweets through the lens of Faris' “informational cascade” theory: a tweet goes out from one account, is retweeted by 2-3 others, and then is hopefully in turn retweeted by still other accounts until interest in the message dies out or it becomes widespread.

The importance of retweets for this study is three-fold. First and foremost, retweeting represents a different type of interactivity, other than mentions, that could conceivably occur on Twitter. While it

is unlikely that official accounts will retweet messages from the general public (as their content is strictly controlled) and that merely repeating a message does not amount to “two-way dialogue”, it is nonetheless possible that it may play a role in the efforts of policy practitioners to interact with other users. Second, while a retweet is only a reproduction of the content from another account it still becomes a part of the output for an account; ignoring retweets could create an inaccurate picture of the overall activity of an account if what they're doing is mostly retweeting. Finally, it is conceivable that there is some perceived effectiveness of the retweet as a tool of digital diplomacy, and that policy-practitioners on Twitter are attempting to use it as such. If there is a great deal of rebroadcasting and amplification of certain messages, this may indicate that practitioners are conscious of the potential for an “informational cascade”, and would represent a significant pattern of usage. For these reasons, retweets will be included in the data collection process.

The final two categories of data are the “mentions” themselves, and will be split into two types: “mentions by citizens” and “mentions by practitioners.” The terms are meant to denote the source from which the “mention” originates. In the case of “mentions by citizens,” the data collected will be the number of times members of the general public published tweets specifically naming the accounts of policy practitioners, while the inverse is true for “mentions by practitioners.” It is in these two categories that this study aims to find some quantitative measure of the level of interaction between these two groups.

The means of collection for all of these categories were provided by Twitter itself. So long as an account is listed publicly by its user, anyone can see months of tweets from them by bringing up the account page and scrolling down. Tweets are always listed by date published, and times are given down to the hour if the tweet was made within the past day. Because of this, data collection from individual accounts could be done at any point, even months later. However, Twitter does not index older tweets in its search engine, and anything older than 5 days won't appear if searched for. This prevented the

case study from focusing on particularly important points in time for the usage of Twitter for public diplomacy, and also dictated that any and all data on account mentions had to be gathered within a 5-day period.

If the reader has ever done any searching on Twitter, they will no doubt see the sense in such a time limit, as they will know that the amount of data can be truly massive. In Table 1, for instance, it is possible to see that the number of account mentions for most popular account, @StateDept, were consistently above 200 but only once managing to surpass 500. This posed a challenge for accurate collection. Although it was a simple task to ascertain the number of tweets in a given day through use of Twitter's search function and a quick page search for the specific date in question, tweets from other governmental agencies and actors would oftentimes be intermingled among those of citizens. Because the aim of this study was to measure communication between policy elites and average citizens and **not** communication within the policy elite community, it was necessary to subtract some number of tweets from a day's total. To do so, the entire log of tweets was manually searched, the number of official government-sponsored accounts was tallied, and the resulting figure was subtracted from the total. Although double-checked for accuracy, the large volume of data, the possibility of officials using personal accounts, and the inability to cross check the data at later dates, introduces the possibility of a small margin of error in the exact total of mentions by citizens.

4. Data & Analysis

The data for this study was collected from February 8th - 21st, 2012. During this time period, the focus in international relations was Syria and the escalating violence perpetrated by Bashar al Assad against his people. Just prior to the start of data collection, a U.N. resolution calling for action in Syria was vetoed by China and Russia in the United Nations Security Council. On the 8th, the death toll was at least 100, and there were reports of tanks in the city of Homs. The next day, these tanks and other artillery began actively shelling the city, which continued for the duration of the study. Also noteworthy was the death of Anthony Shadid, a New York Times reporter, in the country, a fatality which generated a significant amount of sympathy on Twitter once it was reported by several of the accounts in the study.

4.1. @StateDept

Date	Retweets	Unique Tweets	Mentions by Account	Mentions by Citizens
02/08/12	28	27	0	283
02/09/12	16	14	0	380
02/10/12	16	16	2	423
02/11/12	0	3	0	246
02/12/12	0	5	2	274
02/13/12	23	29	0	391
02/14/12	41	37	0	354
02/15/12	39	24	0	423
02/16/12	47	35	0	534
02/17/12	39	37	0	443
02/18/12	6	26	1	299
02/19/12	9	14	0	212
02/20/12	11	43	0	267
02/21/12	29	46	0	396
Totals	311	300	6	5083

Table 1. @StateDept Data

During the data collection period, @StateDept was easily the most active account. As seen in Table 1, it had the most of unique tweets of any account surveyed at 300, the most retweets at 311, and the highest number of “mentions” by citizens at a whopping total of 5083. This last figure is a full 3,255 “mentions” higher than its closest competitor. Conversely, it was also one of the least engaged with the general public, with only 6 mentions by practitioners. Although meeting our quantitative standards as mentions by a practitioner, as none were directed towards other official government agents, the accounts @StateDept tweeted at were not those controlled by individuals. Rather, they were mainly large international organizations, such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which only met the definition of “citizen” due to the aforementioned criteria. These mentions were also not responses, as many citizen mentions for other accounts were; they were announcements of policy initiatives or partnerships. Although these mentions of international organizations were certainly made in the interests of public diplomacy, they are not, strictly speaking, evidentiary of any type of “two-way dialogue” being established.

The overwhelming number of mentions by citizens can be correlated with the large number of followers (230,000 at time of study) that the account possessed. To put these numbers in context, let us hypothetically assume that each of the 5,083 mentions received was made by a unique user, with no overlap or repeats. If this were the case and each of these individuals attempted to interact with the @StateDept account in some way, these users would constitute a mere 2.2% of the accounts' overall readership. If we assume that some portion of users are likely to have made multiple mentions and therefore created multiple data points, we then realize that the percentage of @StateDept's followers attempting to interact is probably even lower. When viewed from this perspective, the many thousand of citizen mentions seems less overwhelming compared to the mentions received by other accounts.

The number of followers possessed by the account does not, however, mitigate the low number of mentions by a practitioner. It is possible that the volume of messages tweeted at the account is

simply overwhelming for the individual(s) responsible for updating the account and posting to it, as 400 mentions in a single day may be too large a volume to work through if it is not the full time job of an official. More likely, however, is a policy of non-interaction on the part of @StateDept. While this may seem contrary to the goals of enhanced interaction through technology and two-way dialogue, it may also be a policy based in pragmatism. @StateDept, similar to @AmbassadorRice, serves as a lightning rod for the public's frustrations with U.S. foreign policy – both are easily remembered and searched for by individuals with an axe to grind. If approached with hostility, the better approach for an official social media presence may be to disengage, and even if this is not good practice, it may be the response coded into State Department policy. If this logic is followed, any interaction at all can become a liability, as selectively interacting with users to avoid detractors could further inflame opponents and result in still more hostility. If this is the case, an official policy of disengagement makes sense even though it works at cross-purposes with the furtherance of dialogue and understanding.

4.2. @AmbassadorRice

This outcome is similar to that in the data for the @AmbassadorRice account (Table 2), which had the second highest number of mentions by citizens (1828), but the lowest count of unique tweets (a mere 29 in 2 weeks, or an average of two a day). Despite its several thousand mentions in the public sphere of Twitter its only output was mere six mentions towards the general public – and again, these mentions were of international organizations as opposed to individuals. The day-to-day usage of the account was somewhat sporadic as well, which, when coupled with the low overall output, could suggest that Ambassador Susan Rice's office has not completely embraced the medium. This could be for any number of reasons: reluctance, a lack of familiarity, or even just a lack of time or staff to devote to the medium. Without additional information it is difficult to know whether these or other factors played a role in the account's lower output, and therefore it is difficult to qualify what exactly the

shortfall might be.

Data for @AmbassadorRice appears strikingly similar to data from @StateDept (Table 1) in two fashions. First, both accounts only posted six mentions directed towards other accounts, and during my collection process I noted that none of these were directed at citizens. Second, while not creating an enormous output in terms of mentions of other accounts, both @StateDept and @AmbassadorRice attracted more attention from citizens than any other account. However, the two data sets display a large difference in the number of unique tweets and retweets made: while @StateDept posted a total of 611 tweets (counting both unique tweets and retweets), @AmbassadorRice made only 34. The massive difference in the number of tweets made suggests that there is not necessarily a direct relationship between the amount of content published by the account and the amount of interactivity sought by individuals. If it is not the content which draws individuals into interaction, we must look to other factors.

The fact that these two accounts were the two most tweeted at by the general public, despite the differences in output, could be a result of higher overall following (@StateDept had 230,000 followers at the time of study, whereas @AmbassadorRice had 170,000, and between them they had the highest numbers of followers of all accounts studied). It might also be due to the “fame factor” mentioned earlier, which is also a potential reason behind the higher number of followers. If this is the case, it suggests that individuals do not necessarily seek to engage with just any official online, but are more likely to attempt to engage with a figure who is familiar with them. This is certainly a factor which could potentially be leveraged by foreign policy practitioners attempting to engage with the general public through social media – simply appoint an official to start Twittering whose name is well known among those that you want to engage, and you have an instant following. Conversely, it may also imply that for efforts at social media diplomacy to be effective, the account holder should be in some way publicized.

But this fame factor may also be problematic for practitioners in search of two-way exchange. As noted earlier for @StateDept, @AmbassadorRice also served as a focal point for individuals seeking to criticize U.S. foreign policy – although these are the people whose hearts and minds a diplomat most needs to change, there may be a limited capacity for this to happen. The problem is the matter of volume. If over 130 tweets a day are being directed at a practitioner's account (as is the case for @AmbassadorRice), the ability of the practitioner to respond may be limited by time constraints – the State Department expects its officials to do some work beyond simple tweeting. In such a case, there may not be time for any kind of substantive address of policy concerns, and there certainly won't be a chance to respond to every tweet made. Fame, the large numbers of followers that come with, and the amount of interactivity said followers have with an account all appear to work against the two-way dialogue paradigm.

Date	Retweets	Unique Tweets	Mentions by Account	Mentions by Citizens
02/08/12	0	0	0	162
02/09/12	0	2	2	133
02/10/12	1	1	1	114
02/11/12	0	0	0	73
02/12/12	0	0	0	44
02/13/12	0	5	0	107
02/14/12	0	6	0	112
02/15/12	1	5	0	95
02/16/12	2	4	0	294
02/17/12	0	3	0	212
02/18/12	0	0	0	58
02/19/12	0	1	1	101
02/20/12	0	0	0	40
02/21/12	0	3	0	122
Totals	5	29	6	1828

Table 2. @AmbassadorRice Data

4.3. @AnnatState

No other account garnered anywhere near as much attention as the two previously mentioned by a margin of several thousand responses, the other accounts studied displayed a much higher degree of interactivity with individuals, and a greater commitment to the goal of two-way dialogue. The account with the second fewest tweets directed towards citizens, @AnnatState, was much better at citizen engagement even with only 9 tweets. This can be said because of a Twitter Q&A hosted by the account, wherein Ann Stock actively solicited questions from citizen users and then responded to them in her Twitter feed. This occurred on the 10th of February, which corresponds with a spike in the data for that date on Table 3. There is a similar spike in account activity that occurred on the 17th – this was due to the announcement of the launch of a new initiative in support of women's sports abroad, and drew even more attention than the Q&A. On both days, we can see evidence of higher interactivity in the way of a greater number of both mentions by the account and mentions by citizens. In the case of @AnnatState, there appears to be verifiable evidence of interactivity.

The @AnnatState account stands at the opposite end of the spectrum from the two previous accounts, @StateDept and @AmbassadorRice. The Assistant Secretary is not often mentioned in news media, and her account is not widely followed (at the time of this writing, her followers only number slightly more than 6,000). Much of her work goes unseen by the American people, and one might expect lower engagement as a result. Yet despite being uninteractive with individuals for the majority of the period of study, @AnnatState was able to post two successful instances of engagement where the account drew in the general public and responded to their questions and concerns. And it was the content of what was posted that made it possible. The general public responded to a very direct attempt at two-way dialogue through the Q&A session, and to the announcement of a substantial policy initiative. This would imply that a careful consideration of what content is published is able to increase

engagement and provide opportunities for interaction between the general public and policy elites.

It is nevertheless impossible to ignore the low overall output of the account. This is all the more tragic for the fact that in at least two instances there is evidence that successful engagement occurred, but then was not sustained for the rest of the period of study. @AnnatState clearly possesses the means and the ability to create two-way dialogue, but appears to under-utilize it. This is evidence in support of this paper's thesis: officials are underutilizing SMT.

Date	Retweets	Unique Tweets	Mentions by Account	Mentions by Citizens
02/08/12	0	0	0	3
02/09/12	0	0	0	0
02/10/12	0	6	2	9
02/11/12	0	0	0	3
02/12/12	0	0	0	1
02/13/12	0	1	1	2
02/14/12	0	2	0	12
02/15/12	0	3	0	4
02/16/12	0	0	0	5
02/17/12	4	14	4	16
02/18/12	0	0	0	4
02/19/12	0	0	0	0
02/20/12	0	0	0	3
02/21/12	1	2	0	11
Totals	4	32	7	70

Table 3. @AnnatState Data

4.4 @USAinUK

The other as-yet-unmentioned accounts in the study also found ways to encourage participation and engage the general public, but each in its own way. Earlier it was mentioned that @USAinUK was

selected as one of two embassies to study because the United States' relationship with Great Britain is arguably one of the closest in international politics, as well as for the greater technological penetration in the country that enables social media participation. This seems to have been reflected in the data not in terms of the volume of engagement (which, as Table 4 shows, was in the middle of the pack relative to the other accounts studied, with 25 tweets directed at citizens and 111 citizens “mentioning” the account), but instead in terms of the tone of the content.

Date	Retweets	Unique Tweets	Mentions by Account	Mentions by Citizens
02/08/12	0	13	4	6
02/09/12	1	10	3	15
02/10/12	0	7	2	16
02/11/12	0	1	0	0
02/12/12	0	3	1	4
02/13/12	0	7	3	4
02/14/12	0	4	0	6
02/15/12	0	10	2	5
02/16/12	0	11	0	7
02/17/12	0	12	1	11
02/18/12	0	5	0	8
02/19/12	0	4	0	1
02/20/12	0	4	0	2
02/21/12	1	9	2	9
Totals	2	109	25	111

Table 4. @USAinUK Data

Although this was not a specific part of the study, it was impossible to ignore the comparatively different tone struck by the account during the course of data collection when seen with the output of the other accounts. Cultural diplomacy seemed to be the name of the game, with many tweets focusing

on American cultural trivia, or on events of popular interest in the States. This is arguably due to the aforementioned closeness of the relationship between the two countries. When two states tend to stand shoulder to shoulder and agree on most issues, the goal of public diplomacy is no longer to persuade and engage but to maintain close relations between the countries. Cultural diplomacy makes sense in this context, as when two countries have strong societal similarities and the same basic cultural background, issues of policy will naturally follow.

It could also be argued that the difference in tone can be accounted for by @USAinUK's audience, as compared to that of other accounts. Many of those engaging with or tweeting at the account seemed to be Americans abroad in the United Kingdom. Oftentimes it was just with basic questions, such as when several people tweeted in to ask if officials at the Embassy knew any good place to watch the Superbowl. If the audience for the account is mainly American citizens, it would make sense that the account would not be focused on advertising U.S. foreign policy goals or interests. This assumption, however, is based on incomplete data: the countries of origin for the owners of public Twitter accounts cannot be absolutely determined, which is why it was not considered as a data point in the study from the outset. Nonetheless, it still seems reasonable to assume that Brits are not tweeting at the Embassy account to try and find an American football match.

4.5. @USEmbassyCairo

@USEmbassyCairo was much more successful and active than @USAinUK by nearly every measure. Table 5 shows the number of unique tweets rendered by the account is only slightly higher than its sister embassy (119 to 109), and the number of “mentions” directed towards private citizens is drastically higher with 112 for @USEmbassyCairo as opposed to the mere 25 output by @USAinUK. This makes for a ratio of 1 tweet for every 1.79 “mentions” of the account by private citizens, which is

the second closest account in the study to an idealized 1:1 ratio. At 201 “mentions” directed towards the account by individuals, it received the third most mentions by the general public of all accounts in the study. All of these signs point to a high level of engagement and a successful utilization of social media technology.

This level of interactivity will be unlikely to surprise those who followed the events of the Egyptian Revolution. During and preceding the Arab Spring the country was a hotbed of dissent which took many forms, with social media at the forefront. Egyptian bloggers played a significant role in documenting the ongoing abuses of the Mubarak regime and reporting them when other news outlets would not.²¹ Additionally, Facebook is reputed to have played some type of role in helping to catalyze the events at Tahrir Square through the “We Are All Khaled Said” account, which paid homage to the titular Said, a casualty of a vicious assault by Mubarak thugs. It is empirically verifiable that the account was a hotspot for Egyptian activists and supporters, domestic and foreign, on Facebook during the Tahrir Square protests. The mere fact that it is considered *possible* that a social media technology touched off the protests that ousted a dictator speaks to the generally expected relevance of social media to the country's current political situation.

Although a full year removed from its revolution at the height of the Arab Spring, the country is still in the middle of frightening social upheaval as the country struggles with the vision for and form of Egyptian government. Some of the content in the @USEmbassyCairo account's tweets related to standard public diplomacy efforts, such as a singing competition hosted for Arab women, but there was also significant interaction on the subject of protests in the country as well as the involvement of the United States in supplying the Egyptian military (the latter of which has been accused of attempting to install a military dictatorship as the country's new government). This created an undercurrent of tension in communications between citizens and the account, with individuals accusing the U.S. of supplying

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munitions such as tear gas to help quell protests and the @USEmbassyCairo account attempting to adopt a conciliatory tone to mollify the aggrieved citizens. Not only does this underline the clear need for public diplomacy efforts of this type in Egypt, but it also serves as an excellent example of the “two-way dialogue” that the State Department promotes. Before the advent of social media, there would have been no way for private citizens to approach government officials with a question as substantial as “Are you supplying arms to the Egyptian military so that they can squelch the riots?” The onus would have been on more official, accepted channels to ask the question, such as the press or another official. Neither of these would have resulted in a quick, guaranteed, decisive answer within hours after the protests, as interactions on the @USEmbassyCairo's twitter feed did.

Date	Retweets	Unique Tweets	Mentions by Account	Mentions by Citizens
02/08/12	2	19	24	20
02/09/12	0	2	2	9
02/10/12	1	1	1	12
02/11/12	0	0	0	6
02/12/12	0	18	16	36
02/13/12	0	13	7	11
02/14/12	0	24	17	28
02/15/12	0	10	10	8
02/16/12	0	9	8	12
02/17/12	0	1	0	12
02/18/12	0	0	0	5
02/19/12	0	0	0	7
02/20/12	0	0	0	5
02/21/12	0	10	9	13
Totals	6	119	112	201

Table 5. @USEmbassyCairo Data

Responses of U.S. officials to foreign citizens' complaints has historically been an area where public diplomacy policies have both tried to focus and yet have had difficulty confronting: the normal solution might be a speech by a prominent figure, a declaration of support, or perhaps some kind of policy initiative. But all of these are detached, removed responses that come days, weeks, or months after the complaint has been issued; it is an unfortunate failing of a large bureaucracy that nothing is ever done quickly. The social media format bypasses the delays of time and red tape to connect private individuals directly with the officials who know the answers, should said officials be willing to address the question. This creates a much more human interaction between governments and the governed, one carried out on human terms rather than those dictated by the constraints of rulership. This redefinition of the tone of communication is an important part of improving global perceptions of the United States so that it is not merely seen as an aggressive imperialist superpower but as a well-meaning nation of individuals in pursuit of a good common to all of humanity across the globe.

4.6. @ConnectStateGov

Similarly, @ConnectStateGov also posted an impressive amount of interaction with citizens and the general public. This is partially due to its unique positioning: @ConnectStateGov is the Twitter account of the State Department's ExchangesConnect service, which is billed as Facebook for the diplomatically minded. As an organization whose focus is already on social media, a high level of interactivity with the general public was anticipated and subsequently proven, with 96 mentions of citizen accounts and 114 mentions of the account by citizens (see Table 5). While both numbers fall in the approximate middle-of-the-pack relative to the other accounts surveyed, the ratio between the two is the closest to 1:1 of any account profiled. Although a ratio is not an absolute indicator of engagement, it is nonetheless a fact that for nearly every tweet directed at them, @ConnectStateGov said something to a non-governmental account . This demonstrates a high degree of interactivity if

nothing else.

This larger number is exceptional in the context of the study because of the content of the account. This is not an account that is devoted to dealing with important issues within a country, such as @USEmbassyCairo, or broadcasting US policy, such as @AmbassadorRice and @StateDept. It is also virtually unknown as an account or broader service – it has no name recognition except among a small subset of the foreign policy community. Thus, for an account that does not focus on substantive issues of policy, these numbers are notable within the context of the study because the account does not merely rely on politically charged content or association to draw interest. If we can learn something about how to engage users in social media, it can undoubtedly be learned here.

Date	Retweets	Unique Tweets	Mentions by Account	Mentions by Citizens
02/08/12	2	11	12	6
02/09/12	0	13	7	9
02/10/12	0	13	15	11
02/11/12	0	3	3	0
02/12/12	0	4	3	3
02/13/12	0	13	8	17
02/14/12	0	14	2	18
02/15/12	3	7	4	10
02/16/12	6	7	3	9
02/17/12	3	10	2	7
02/18/12	1	3	3	1
02/19/12	0	5	4	4
02/20/12	0	1	0	4
02/21/12	1	11	6	9
Totals	16	135	96	114

Table 6. @ConnectStateGov Data

How did @ConnectStateGov, as a relatively unknown entity and account, garner as much interest and participation as the account for an Embassy in a country of upheaval? The answer may lie in its consistent pattern of interactivity. Unlike every other account studied, @ConnectStateGov consistently attempted to reach out to individuals for every day of data collection except the 20th. It can also be seen in Table 6 that on 9 out of the 14 days of the study, there were at least half as many mentions made by the account as there were tweets. On the 10th, the number of mentions even exceeded the total number of tweets made. Combined with the nearly 1:1 ratio of mentions by the account versus mentions by the general public, these facts demonstrate a strategy of engagement that includes constant efforts at outreach and interaction.

5. Conclusion

After an analysis of data gathered, it is clear that while engagement exists and occurs irregularly, there is room for improvement. The efforts made to use the platform by different accounts varied widely – some would tweet a dozen times a day, while others would go days without posting new content. Efforts at interactivity also run the gamut, from accounts that would make mentions of multiple users in even a single tweet to accounts that almost completely ignored the existence of the general public these officials ostensibly serve. The result is a confused picture that betrays the confusion and uncertainty in the diplomatic community on how to engage through social media. Without a set of “best practices” for practitioners to follow and rally around, there seems little hope of achieving consistent, coherent, and meaningful official-to-public relationships through Twitter. If this is the case on Twitter, where two-way dialogue seems most likely to occur, then attempts by policy-practitioners to use social media for public engagement may be generally ill-fated. This appears to bear out the initial hypothesis that SMT is an under-utilized tool in a diplomat's arsenal.

As a result of the study, however, we have data to analyze and compare different approaches to SMT engagement, and through our analysis we have gleaned some idea of the pitfalls that practitioners face. Though the data is not broad enough to be scientifically conclusive and more research is warranted, there are nonetheless notable trends.

First, it is absolutely clear that opportunities for dialogue do, in fact, exist in social media, and some policy-practitioners are pursuing them and creating interaction in the process. Despite different levels of content contribution and interactivity on the part of the account holders, no account was ignored by the general public. In every case, individuals were “mentioning” officially held accounts many times a day, and in a two week period only @AnnatState garnered fewer than 100 mentions by

citizens (although the 70 mentions the account did garner did not fall that short of the mark). People are interested in the two-way dialogue paradigm espoused by McHale or the kind of individual-level connections sought by the QDDR. This is good news for officials – there is an audience that is indeed listening and attempting to interact.

The same cannot be said for all officials, but it can be said for some. The accounts @ConnectStateGov and @USEmbassyCairo are the best examples of officials who are both listening to the general public and attempting to interact with them, as they possessed the highest number of mentions made of all the accounts in the study and serve as examples of the possible success of two-way dialogue through social media. The level of engagement displayed by these accounts challenges this paper's initial thesis that SMT is ineffectively used by foreign policy officials, and would disprove it entirely if not for the underutilization of Twitter displayed by the other accounts studied. Nevertheless, these accounts serve as evidence of the possible successes that can be attained in pursuing two-way dialogue and engagement through SMT.

The second trend is that power, prestige, and notoriety draw the public's attention, and perhaps do so too well. We have previously noted the disproportionately high response rate for the accounts with the most followers and most notoriety, @AmbassadorRice and @StateDept (Tables 1 and 2 respectively). In these cases, officials were deluged with tweets made by the general public. It is likely safe to say that officials do not have the time to respond to this kind of volume as their primary duty is not to manage their social media presence but to conduct diplomacy. This being the case, official accounts on the receiving end of a flood of citizen interest suffer from an overload of comments to potentially respond to every day. It is possible that this leads to a certain discouragement on the part of policy practitioners, who neither have the time to answer every tweet nor the inclination to look through 300+ mentions to try and find a relevant comment that they can respond to.

More well-known official accounts also serve as “lightning rods” for public criticism of foreign

policy. For the majority of our country's history, single individuals have had few ways of letting government officials know their opinion of the foreign policy of the United States. Citizens could write letters to their congressional representatives or make their opinions known with their vote, but these are both indirect forms of communication that may not reach the ears of practitioners. Individuals who do not have citizenship lack even these limited options – their only option is mass protest, or perhaps certain economic alternatives (choosing not to buy U.S. products, etc). But with the arrival of SMT, and the growing number of policy practitioners with accounts on sites like Twitter, the ear of the establishment is now within reach and critics are not holding back. The result is an environment in which it is much more difficult for officials to engage, as officials cannot be seen to be engaging in petty internet arguments, and must remain on guard against criticism at all times. While it is certainly possible to ignore the criticisms of angered individuals, this also defeats the two-way engagement paradigm, as an important part of engagement is being willing to hear your faults and address them.

The result of the information overload and the “lightning rod” effect that well-known Twitter accounts in this study experienced is that engagement appears to be utterly stifled. There are simply too many people attempting to engage at once, and officials are too wary of those who may be attempting to engage in a negative fashion. This may suggest that the two-way engagement paradigm is best practiced by more obscure officials who will attract less attention and less criticism. There may still be a role for accounts such as @StateDept and @AmbassadorRice as broadcasters of information, but this is a function that can be accomplished through every modern communication medium and it fails to take advantage of the interactive strength of SMT.

The third and perhaps most important trend was that interactivity was not accomplished through a mere output of content; at no point was it ever noted that there was any kind of correlation between the number of tweets made and the mentions of the account by citizens. This suggests that the factors that determined whether or not two-way dialogue occurred were qualitative rather than quantitative – it

was more about what these accounts said, and the manner in which they communicated, rather than the total output of content. This should cause us to recall Jorge Heine's work and his conviction that we should be less interested in the means of communication than in how policy practitioners can speak on issues with efficacy. Social media is certainly a new type of technology that offers a new means of interaction, but it requires a human operator. No matter how revolutionary the technology, no matter how the means and method of dialogue has changed, it will not create interaction in and of itself. That falls to the operator, and for the operator to have effective interaction, they must have the ability to communicate their position and thoughts in a clear, concise manner while also being able to listen. Thus, it may be said that the “best practices” for SMT interaction will not be alien, strange, or revolutionary – instead, our “best practices” will be similar to those for holding a simple conversation: listening, establishing common interests, and regarding the thoughts and ideas of other parties with respect.

As notable and interesting as these trends are, they and the case studies they originate from are not explicit proof that SMT is not being used effectively to accomplish the goals of two-way dialogue as originally proposed in this paper's thesis. This is primarily due to the level of interactivity demonstrated by the @USEmbassyCairo and @ConnectStateGov accounts, which may be pointed to as examples of successful engagement through SMT by officials. But the fact that these are the only two accounts which may be argued for as success stories out of the six surveyed indicates that there are substantive issues affecting practitioner engagement through SMT. Thus, this paper's thesis cannot be explicitly disproved either, as evidence of underutilization also exists.

In all, this mixed bag of results demonstrates that we cannot yet make absolute statements or assumptions concerning the role of SMT in the practice of public diplomacy. There remain significant variables and unknowns, including the composition of the audience that officials are reaching and the value and role of specific types of content for encouraging interactivity. If officials intend to continue to

pursue outreach through SMT, further research on these variables will be required to gain a comprehensive understanding of the medium, and the “best practices” that will ensure successful relations between policy practitioners and the public they serve.

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