

## GUEST EDITORS' NOTE (Main Section)

### ***Issue Theme: The Use of Social Media in U.S. Public Diplomacy***

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The rise of social media is revolutionizing how state and non-state actors communicate with publics in the international community. While governments across the globe are scrambling to adjust, U.S. public diplomacy has emerged as a clear leader in the field according to a new report (Hanson 2012). This special issue explores the various dimensions of the use and impact of social media on U.S. public diplomacy and the public diplomacy of other state and non-state actors directed at the U.S. public.

We take a necessarily broad view of both public diplomacy and social media. In a certain respect because media is inherently a tool for humans to communication, all media is social. Given media's tendency to amplify the impact of human communication, today's new social media tools are exhibiting the same combusive social impact as earlier varieties. In *Small Media, Big Revolution*, Sreberny-Mohammadi & Mohammadi (1994) explain how the circulation of cassette recordings helped lay a foundation for the 1979 revolution in Iran. The authors described "small media" as public, participatory and small, in the sense that it was not owned by government or business. The facsimile machine help spawn the 1980s Solidarity uprising in Poland and cell phones in Ukraine's 2005 Orange Revolution (Helle 2009, p. 6). Most recently, social media has been credited with fueling the Arab spring in 2010-2011 (Howard & Parks 2012).

Diplomats have long noted the impact of communication technologies on the conduct of diplomacy. Traditionally, the reaction has been mixed. The introduction of the telegraph, which provided transatlantic news, challenged the studied pace of diplomacy (Nickles 2003). At the time, diplomatic communication was tied to the physical transportation of written correspondence, which could take months if not years. Thomas Jefferson is said to have remarked, "We have not heard from our Ambassador in Spain for two years. If we do not hear from him this year, let us write him a letter," (quoted in Eban 1998, p. 92). Despite its initial resistance, the telegraph was also the origin of the "diplomatic cable," the main stay of diplomatic practice.

While new communication technologies impact diplomacy writ large, their impact is significant for public diplomacy, particularly for U.S. public diplomacy. Historically, U.S. public diplomacy has ebbed and flowed with wartime, when the need to rally public

support becomes critical (Zaharna 2010). The advent and use of the mass media closely parallels the emergence of propaganda during World War I and II, and the urgency of studies on persuasion, attitude change, and opinion research that followed in the war's aftermath (Simpson 1994). The recent surge of interest in public diplomacy we see today occurred in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. Over the past decade, the rising interest in public diplomacy has coincided with the accelerated development and proliferation of social media: Wikipedia (2001); Friendster (2002); LinkedIn(2003); Flickr and Facebook (2004); YouTube (2005); Twitter (2006).

In many ways, what we are seeing today is part of the long historical horizon of co-evolving trends. On one level, looking at the phenomenon of interacting influences over human history, nothing is new. An apt observation made by Phil Seib (2012) in *Real-Time Diplomacy*. On another level, looking at social media as new phenomena with associated effects, everything is new and changing at a seemingly accelerated pace.

### **Cascade of Changes: Social Media, Actors, Publics, Issues, & Practice**

This special issue tries to capture several of the interacting features of how changes in media produce changes in publics, which affects changes in issues, which affects changes in public diplomacy practices, which recycles back to changes in how media is used, which affects the public ... in short, a cascade of inter-related changes. Below are four critical dimensions in the cascading, co-evolution of social media and public diplomacy discussed in this special issue.

#### **State and Non-State Actors**

All of the papers grapple with the question of what is so different about social media. While literature is growing, what stands out for public diplomacy is the interactive, interconnected dimension that facilitates public communication. This is made most evident by contrasting the old with the new media. In public diplomacy, the old mass media represented an ideal communication experience for governments seeking control and dominance. The media was primarily one way, controlled by sponsor, directed at a target audience that was perceived as passive. The nostalgia for such communication dynamics is palatable even today. Compared to the mass media, the social media represents a daunting challenge. The social media is difficult, if impossible to control. Some suggest even the attempt to control is counterproductive. As Alec J. Ross (2012), who serves as Senior Advisor for Innovation to U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, recently remarked, "The 21st century is a terrible time to be a control freak."

In addition to control, the pace of communication is another challenge. If foreign ministries were struggling to keep up with the news media and "the CNN effect," some have been overwhelmed by the pace of the "Facebook revolution." Traditional public diplomacy was predicated on the notion of national media, national audiences, and national issues. Social media operates on a global, network scale. In this special issue, Hayden's piece leads with a historical journey through the debates and current discussions in the U.S. State Department on how best to respond to the evolving media

dynamics and what these changes mean for U.S. public diplomacy. Observations made in 1922 appear remarkably relevant to Public Diplomacy 2.0.

While governments have been slow or wary of social media's accelerated pace and losses of control, non-state actors have exploited the connective, interactive and global reach of these tools. The rise of non-state actors has become a significant element redefining the conception of public diplomacy as primarily state-centric phenomenon. In the current issue, the two graduate papers illustrate the critical role of non-state actors working with the state -- and against the state. Jablonski's piece shines a spotlight on a non-state actor in U.S. public diplomacy working with the state. This study illustrates how a non-state actor, which shares a similar public diplomacy agenda as a state actor, may be able to operate with comparative less scrutiny and diplomatic ramifications than a state actor in high-risk, conflict situations. The Mazumdar piece on the activists in the Gaza "Freedom Flotilla" illustrate how non-state actors can challenge governments and create crisis public diplomacy.

### **Publics**

The social media is transforming the conception of audience in public diplomacy. In pre-9/11 U.S. public diplomacy, the audience was largely understood as foreign publics who were viewed as largely passive consumers of information. During the early post 9/11 years, public diplomacy actually used the term public diplomacy "products." With social media, the "audience" is likely to be the producers rather than consumers. Participation is rapidly replacing 'passive' as the assumptive characteristic of publics in public diplomacy and is in some respects reversing the roles between governments and publics. All of the pieces highlight the need to connect and engage audiences. Vanc's piece, in particular, discusses the shift from the broadcasting mode to the relational or dialogical and collaborative approach in public diplomacy scholarship.

Social media's impact on the concept of publics is somewhat contradictory though. On the one hand, the global reach of social media has fused the once technological separation between domestic and foreign publics into one global public. On the other hand, the global reach of the social media has helped crystallize and reconnect with a very special audience of the home country: its diaspora publics. Bravo's piece looks at how two Central American countries are using social media to reach their diaspora publics. She ties their contrasting patterns of social media use to the differences of the two diaspora populations as well as the political needs of their home countries.

### **Issues**

The global, interconnected aspect of social media is not only changing the conception of public in public diplomacy, but also, issues. Again several pieces in this special issue illustrate how the focus of public diplomacy has expanded in nature and scope well beyond the traditional nationalistic parameters. We can see this most clearly in the policy discussions in the Hayden piece. Initial conceptions of public diplomacy assume a very narrow focus on U.S. policies and understanding. Throughout the discussions

that Hayden documents we see an ever-growing, more expansive view of public diplomacy. It is not just the tools of public diplomacy that have become more global, but so too has the vision. One sees increasing levels of complexity in once seemingly us-versus-them issues over the course of the post 9/11 decade.

The complexity of issues associated with the social media phenomena is also reflected in the Newsom and Lengel piece. Compared to the mass media, the messaging dynamics of the social media have a dramatic effect on redefining issues and voices for those issues. Newsom and Lengel use the term “digital reflexivity” to describe how messages and voices are formed and transformed as they pass from the social media to traditional media and from the East to the West during the uprising in Tunisia.

The increasing complexity of issues is also reflected in the U.S. foreign policy link between “defense, diplomacy, and development.” Because of this link, we see an increasing role and connection between the activities of the Department of State, U.S. Agency for Development (USAID) and Department of Defense under a larger umbrella of U.S. global outreach. In this issue, we have pieces that provide views of public diplomacy from these differing perspectives. Abdullateef, whose work in evaluation has been primarily with USAID, helps illustrate the connection of development to public diplomacy. The Mazumdar piece illustrates the link between defense and public diplomacy. His examination of how the Israeli Defense Forces tried to use its YouTube channel to mitigate negative reaction in the U.S. media and public opinion its actions against the Gaza Freedom Flotilla in 2010.

## **Practice**

A final point for this special issue looks at practice. Here again, there are multiple levels or facets to consider. All of the pieces, in some aspect, touch on how the social media tools are transforming the practice of public diplomacy. Vanc looks at how social media has been used in conjunction with traditional, mass media tools in U.S. public diplomacy’s outreach in four Eastern European countries. Metzgar looks at U.S. public diplomacy’s online engagement for the Iranian public in the first U.S. virtual embassy. She discusses the importance and effectiveness of this online initiative in the absence of offline, or formal diplomatic relations between America and Iran.

While effectiveness has become a clear concern in U.S. public diplomacy, measuring effectiveness has been a murky and even neglected area. Several of the papers, in their rigorous methodology, offer insights into how to evaluate public diplomacy initiatives. Jablonski’s piece provides critical insights for assessing public opinion polls. Mazumdar’s piece introduces the narrative paradigm as an analytical tool for evaluating the logic of a strategic narrative, critical to assessing “whose story wins.” Abdullateef, whose professional work is steeped in evaluating development projects, responded to our invitation to provide a practical, relatively simple model for analyzing the social media impact of a project.

The effect of practice is also seen in training, of both current and future public diplomats. Several of the papers speak to the skills needed for those working in the field today. However, to get a vision of what it is like to train tomorrow's public diplomats; we invited Williamson and Kelley to share how they are trying to keep themselves abreast of the rapid changes in social media and ahead of the tech-savvy, digital natives in their public diplomacy class. Rather than read about how social media is changing public diplomacy, something you are doing at this very moment, the students learn how to use Twitter, Facebook and mobile applications in simulated public diplomacy scenarios. It's public diplomacy teaching 2.0 for public diplomacy 2.0.

## **Overview of papers**

All of the papers in this special issue on the Use of Social Media in U.S. public diplomacy touch on these inter-related, cascading features of social media, actors, publics, issues and practice. We highlight in more detail their contributions below.

### **Invited Papers**

In "USAID's First Public Engagement Campaign: Measuring Public Engagement," Eric Abdullateef, a specialist in monitoring and evaluation in development communication and currently a consultant for U.S. Agency for International Development, tackles the challenge of assessment in public diplomacy. How do you measure effectiveness? Abdullateef discusses the need for and benefits of evaluation. To underscore his point, he turns to an evaluation of the FWD campaign, the first U.S. public engagement campaign by the USAID. He introduces the Rapid Assessment Procedure (RAP), a method that is gaining currency as an exploratory evaluation tool for social media use in public engagement campaigns.

Willow F. Williamson and John Robert Kelley offer an innovative approach to teaching future public diplomats in their piece, "#Kelleydpd: Public Diplomacy 2.0 Classroom." Williamson served as the teaching assistant for Professor Kelley's class. They share conception of the course, social media logistics, lessons learned, class dynamics, and the public diplomacy scenarios for the team in-class presentations. The logic to their pedagogical approach is quite simple: if social media is transforming public diplomacy, let's use social media in the classroom to teach public diplomacy. They open with an overview of the dynamic co-evolution of Classroom 2.0 and Public Diplomacy 2.0. With this grounded foundation, they turn to explore ways to integrate social media tools into their curriculum to develop a 2.0 Teaching approach to public diplomacy.

## Refereed Papers

“Social Media at State: Power, Practice, and Conceptual Limits for US Public Diplomacy,” by Craig Hayden analyzes how the policy discourse regarding social media's role in U.S. public diplomacy has shaped the conceptual development of U.S. public diplomacy. As he observes, social media has emerged “as catalyst to rethink the role that public diplomacy plays in the broader structure of U.S. diplomatic institutions.” Hayden provides an overview of the historical perspective of U.S. public diplomacy and concludes with vision of “polylateral, collaborative diplomacy in public.”

In December 2011, the United States launched Virtual Embassy Tehran. Emily Metzgar, in her piece, “Is It the Medium or the Message? Social Media, American Public Diplomacy & Iran,” examines this virtual embassy. Noteworthy, the two countries do not have formal diplomatic relations. The establishment of this virtual U.S. embassy in cyberspace, as she explains in her piece, represents as “an effort to deploy the tools of social media for the purposes of public diplomacy.” She lays a foundation for her study by exploring “the received wisdom of social media and its place in the practice of public diplomacy.” She then proceeds on an analytical tour of the Virtual Embassy Tehran, to explore whether digital outreach is better than none at all.

In “Post-9/11 U.S. Public Diplomacy in Eastern Europe: Dialogue via New Technologies or Face-to-Face Communication,” Antoaneta M. Vanc explores whether U.S. public diplomacy practices have moved away from disseminating messages to the adoption of a more two-way dialogical or collaborative approach. She provides an expansive overview on the shift within the literature to relationship building. Comments from her extensive interviews with U.S. diplomats in Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia, provide one picture of how social media is being used in the field to build relations. However, it appears that not all U.S. diplomatic posts are embracing the tools with same enthusiasm found at the State Department in Washington.

“Framing messages of democracy through social media: Public diplomacy 2.0, gender, and the Middle East and North Africa,” by Victoria Ann Newsom & Lara Lengel, looks at how social media influences the messaging dynamics. The study draws upon extensive field work in Tunisia. They introduce a message framework that follows the multidirectional flow of public diplomacy discourse from the Middle East and North Africa to the West and back again. The study shows how voices, particularly women's voices, can become marginalized in the global digital exchange. This exploration may become increasingly important as the promise of the Arab spring, appears to reverting back to historical political power structures.

Vanessa Bravo in her piece, “Engaging the Diaspora: El Salvador and Costa Rica's Use of Social Media to Connect with their Diaspora Communities in the United States,” provides a overview of the growing recognition of the important role of the diaspora communities for their countries of origin. Thanks to social media, countries now have the tools to reach this community. But how effectively are they using these tools? In her detailed study she documents two very different levels of engagement and use of social

media, speculating that the contrasting patterns of use are related to the characteristic features of each diaspora community and nation of origin.

### **Graduate Section**

In “Shifting the Blame on the High Seas”, B. Theo Mazumdar studied a case of attempted Israeli public diplomacy following an incident in May 2010 when activists on a “Freedom Flotilla” of small ships tried to reach Gaza, despite an Israeli blockade. The resulting clash with Israeli commandoes, who intercepted the flotilla, left nine activists on the ship *Mavi Marmara* dead. Israel undertook a campaign to explain its side of the story, using Youtube videos with a narrative designed to put the blame on the activists as “terrorists”. Mr. Mazumdar reports that the campaign was unsuccessful, in part because the video images did not support the Israeli claims, but instead appeared to viewers to be “manipulative rhetoric”. He concludes that such campaigns need to be credible and have due regard for their international reception.

Michael Jablonski’s study *Polls as Persuasion Instruments for the Media* describes a case of “guerrilla polling” in Syria in 2010 and 2011. He demonstrates how the dissemination of poll data, by social media and conventional means, might be used for purposes of persuasion. This was not a case of traditional public diplomacy by a government but rather information dissemination by a non-state actor, an NGO called the Democracy Council. Jablonski argues that since the Council collected poll data clandestinely (Syria would not allow polling during the uprising), the conclusions were biased, but the Council failed to disclose the bias, leading to suspicion that its effort was deliberately deceptive. The study has lessons for full disclosure of sources and methods, and close examination of data accuracy.

### **Notes**

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### **Resources**

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