Social Media Messaging for Influence in National Security

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Executive Summary

Social media has drastically changed communication in the national security operating environment. Unmatched influencing opportunities have emerged from social media's low production costs, minimal skill requirements and near real-time delivery.
With this infrastructure available to any individual actor however, audiences are subject to a never before seen competition for their attention. The vast amount of signals have led to a "noise" in the information space that significantly impacts the ability to affect behavioral change.

In such an almost saturated information environment where information spreads faster than ever before and is less regulated than ever before, how must messages be designed to cut through the noise to reach their intended audience and have a desired effect on behavioral change? In an environment in which any person can have access to a huge audience at any moment, government authorities need to reconsider their messaging practices to stay relevant and have a sufficient effect in the information space.

Due to oversupply of information, audiences click away at the slightest inclination of unattractiveness. Message design is becoming a one-time opportunity that lasts for a few short seconds. Either the user likes the content on first sight, or it will not only have no effect, but the user will likely disregard the source in the future. It is essential to design messages as easy to understand as possible. A key to achieving attractive messaging is understanding the information environment of the target audience to be able to use the language of the TA and the stories and memories it relates to. The most important lesson for adapting targeting to the social media age is to first develop a reliable followership and then to prepare the audience for the message.

Introduction

With the emergence of social media in the form of initially Friendster in 2002 and particularly The Facebook in 2007, communication in the operating environment has drastically changed in forms, frequency and reach.

Unmatched influencing opportunities have emerged from social media's low production costs, minimal skill requirements and real-time delivery to platforms audiences carry with them 24/7. Particularly, over the past 10 years, social media platforms have become so tailored to the users that younger generations voluntarily check them up to 150 times daily, subjecting themselves to near constant influencing opportunities. With these new capabilities available to anybody, unsurprisingly, more and more actors are attempting to influence audiences.

However, with this infrastructure available to all individual actors in the information space – human or not[1] – audiences are subject to a never before seen amount of communication competing for their attention. The vast amounts of signals have led to the existence of noise[2] in the information space that significantly impacts the ability to affect behavioral change.

Far more than before social media, particularly non-state actors have not only entered but are also increasingly dominating the space. The new platforms have clearly broken the barrier between the traditionally few producers that practically had an information monopoly and the many others that just consumed their products. Any person can now simultaneously be a consumer and a producer of information. What we have witnessed is (seemingly)[3] the democratization of media. Theoretically, at least, anybody can have access to potentially very large audiences.[4] Many advantages have come from this development for the competition of ideas and policies.

For anybody attempting to influence behavioural change in the information space, though, vast consequences have emerged through the exponential increase of actors and available content.

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[1] Greengard, Samuel (2015): The Internet of Things, The MIT Press, Boston.

[2] "Noise" refers to signals in the information space that are not of interest to the individual recipient. Actors like China and Russia have deliberately attempted to overflow the information space with signals to crowd out unwanted information and the ability to access meaningful content to reduce the sharing of perceived undesirable knowledge.

[3] Only "seemingly" because there are still significant restrictions on who actually is heard on social media. See: Whibey, John (2014): The Challenges of Democratizing News and Information: Examining Data on Social Media, Viral Patterns and Digital Influence, Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy Discussion Paper Series #D 85, June 2014. http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2466058

[4] Economist (2016): Free Speech Under Attack, The Economist, June 4, 2016.

The role of information itself has changed both for the consumer and the producer as societies have become increasingly information-based in what has been described as the information age.[5] Societies have become far more transparent as never before seen amounts of information - intended and unintended, controlled and uncontrolled – enter the public domain. In an environment in which any person can have access to a huge audience at any moment, government authorities need to reconsider their messaging practices to stay relevant and to have an effect in the information space. The frequent preference of staying out of social media to avoid sharing information[6] only creates information vacuums that enable other actors to take over the information space. There is no longer a realistic expectation of privacy on any side. Just as there is very little plausible long-term expectation of secrecy relating to government documents.

In such an almost saturated information environment where information spreads faster than ever before and is more uncontrolled than ever before, how must messages be designed to cut through the noise to reach their intended audience and have the desired effect on behavioral change?

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[5] Quinn, Michael J (2014): Ethics for the Information Age, Pearson, New York.
[6] Kwoh, Leslie, Korn, Melissa (2012): 140 Characters of Risk: Some CEOs Fear Twitter Social-Media Gaffes Make Some Chiefs Leery of Twitter, but a Few Brave Ones Embrace It, The Wall Street Journal, September 26, 2012

How Social Media is Changing the Operating Environment

One of the largest impacts of services such as Twitter and Facebook is that every member of the audience now has a very effective voice of their own[7]. One significant effect this brings for actors sending signals into the space is that within seconds, a member of an audience can not only show approval but disapproval of a message by, for example, 'liking' or not liking a post on Facebook. The feedback can also be instantly shared with any number of like-minded people – referring to the original message or adding supporting or contradictory evidence to it. This creates a need for very high quality and authenticity in the messaging. Especially given that, when messages are framed so that they align with the goals of the target audience, they can have a significant effect on behavior change.[8] This can make the consequences of an altered message (enhanced for example by contradicting evidence), that then receives a very different meaning, potentially quite consequential. Especially as messages are easily retrievable at any time after they have been sent, creating a transparent track record.[9] Another fundamental change coming from what many describe as the digital revolution is that no longer just words are used as a primary element to convey messages to consumers. Instead, producing video messages, for example, has become so easily accessible that "the online and social media battlefield is now a whirlpool of text, urban slang, video imagery, animation, infographics, presentations and instant messaging".[10] With this widespread availability of major messaging formats comes the requirement for many more technical skills than were needed before for effective message design – if the message is intended to stand out in the noise. The ability to produce a high quality, professionally filmed video, attuned to a specific target audience in minimal time frames (as users have come to expect responses to events in near real time), requires very different skills than drafting a billboard message.

Besides the new forms of media requiring new skill sets, it is, particularly, the increased speed of message distribution that creates timing challenges and significantly complicates the task of message design and distribution. Resulting in not only new skills needing to be acquired as every new platform emerges, but these skills having to be

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[7] Mangold, Glynn W., Faulds, David J. (2009): Social media: The new hybrid element of the promotion mix, Kelley School of Business, Indiana University, Business Horizons, No. 52, 2009.

[8] Lindenberg, Siegwart, Steg, Linda (2007) Normative, Gain and Hedonic Goal Frames Guiding Environmental Behavior, Journal of Social Issues, Volume 63, Issue 1, pages 117–137, March 2007.

[9] McCay, Layla (2012): The Internet Never Forgets: How to Live in the 21st Century, The Huffington Post, June 30, 2012.

[10] Matejic, Nicole (2015): Social Media Rules of Engagement: Why Your Online Narrative is the Best Weapon During a Crisis, Wiley and Sons, Melbourne.

performed much faster and with much higher quality to project any desired effect in the information space due to the exponentially higher competition.[11]

If an event occurs relating to an organization and it does not react in almost real time to that event, an information vacuum occurs that will be immediately filled by interested third parties.[12] This will rarely lead to a narrative that is desired by the affected organization. Here again, the time factor poses significant challenges if signoffs are required from lengthy chains of command. Given the vastly increased potential spread of messages and possibly emerging consequences, there is a clear conflict between the need for increased message control and a lack of message impact due to delays that create an information vacuum.

Finally, what needs to be considered is that – despite the new technologies becoming seemingly easier to operate – the skills required on the side of message design and distribution have increased significantly. Very high skill requirements emerge from the potentially very consequential positive or negative impact of messages and the severely reduced timeslots for projecting effects.

Opportunities

Governments around the world have recognized the advantages social media offers for government operations.[13] Besides the above-mentioned advantages regarding the speed of distribution, reach and low cost per message, social media offers never before seen advantages for designing messages to best possible match the target.[14] Social media data mining can provide very accurate descriptions of audience preferences that enable highly relevant message designs. This highly accurate designing of messages, based on very detailed knowledge of the target audience preferences and activities, offers powerful influence opportunities.[15]

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[11] Benioff, Marc (2012): Welcome to the Social Media Revolution, BBC, May 11, 2012. http://www.bbc.com/news/business-18013662

[12] Kruh, Willy (2014): Social media have changed how we communicate ideas, Globe and Mail, June 29, 2014.

[13] Mickoleit, Arthur (2014): Social Media Use by Governments: A Policy Primer to Discuss Trends, Identify Policy Opportunities and Guide Decision Makers, OECD Working Papers on Public Governance, No. 26. http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/governance/social-media-use-by-governments_5jxrcmghmk0s-en#page1

[14] Schramm, Carly (2015): Capitalize On Social Media With Big Data Analytics, Forbes, May 27, 2015.

[15] DeMers, Jayson (2014): 2014 it the year of digital marketing analytics; What it means for your company, Forbes, February 10, 2014.

Exceptional influencing opportunity also arises from the fact that, with social media, audiences no longer have to walk by a billboard or receive a leaflet.[16] The audience voluntarily carries the messaging platform, a mobile phone, with them 24/7 in their pocket. Therewith – unknowingly – subjecting themselves to almost constant influencing. On average, across all age groups, Americans check their personal "platform" 46 times a day.[17] Not only do they carry the influencing platform with them at any time but they also willingly customize it by personalizing the platform with their exact personal preferences. Therewith – as this information is available from social media services and through social media data – informing influencers how exactly they prefer most to be influenced[18] – and in consequence, how they are most vulnerable to influencing.

Further advantages for influence operation emerge from the fact that the infrastructure cost for message distribution is very low compared to almost all other traditional forms of communication. Once the skill set is acquired to operate the platforms, social media allows for a much higher frequency of message distribution and also for targeting much larger audiences. Independent from where these audiences are located and what physical border crossings may exist between a message sender and recipient. Because usually, no physical borders need to be crossed, the risks for operators involved are also generally far less significant.[19] Messages can be sent practically without geographical restrictions and particularly, often without risking personnel involved as long as audiences are not located behind largely closed networks in places such as North Korea or China.

Much more accurate feedback can be obtained on the effectiveness of operations through the analysis of social media data. Data analysis enables measuring the exact spread of messages as well as their penetration of an audience. The resulting more precise customization of messages based on the feedback accuracy cannot be achieved with traditional media. Social media data analysis offers never before seen insight into the effects of information operations providing a completely new level of target audience analysis.

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[16] Coster, Helen, Cellphones: The New Billboards, Forbes, July 15, 2009.

[17] Eadicicco, Lisa (2015): Americans Check Their Phones 8 Billion Times a Day, Time, December 15, 2015.

[18] Story, Louise (2008): To Aim Ads, Web Is Keeping Closer Eye on You, New York Times, March 10, 2008.

[19] With the exception of locating capabilities that can be used to identify and find operators through social media (meta) data that can lead to serious risks in the field. See: MacAskill, Ewen (2014): Cover-up: Ukraine rebels destroying all links to MH17 air atrocity UN demands full inquiry but armed Russian separatists block access to crash site amid confusion over black boxes, The Guardian, July 18, 2014.

Being heard has never been easier, faster, cheaper and safer. Audiences are undoubtedly listening which can have positive effects on levels that have not been seen before.[20]

Challenges

Social media has, however, also brought many never before seen challenges for message distribution. The cost of mistakes can be much higher. This is not only due to distribution speed and reach. The internet "never forgives" as it acts as a near permanent archive of activities.[21] This archive can be accessed by practically anybody at any time. Therewith, a near-complete archive of previous messages sent by an organization is available to interested parties. This has huge implications for message design regarding authenticity, accuracy and possible narratives. With this comes the fact that messages cannot be designed to only have an effect on a certain event. The message which is intended for a specific event can have an effect long after the event as it continues to be available to interested parties. Due to the archive, messages always have an effect that goes way beyond the current situation. Therewith, the message designer is practically playing a two-level game. They are speaking to the audience in the moment but also to a future audience that might compare messages sent out by the same sender. In this regard, it is clear that social media can be both the solution and the cause of a crisis.[22]

Social media has fundamentally changed how audiences consume information. More and more people almost appear addicted[23] to "a" news cycle.

One has to be aware that this is not "the" news cycle but "a" news cycle as with the democratization of media, there are many news sources and therewith news cycles – many of which contain nothing more than entertainment value with primarily questionable news content. It appears that the primary interest of consumers is being fed by this news cycle, rather than an interest in actually getting accurate information. For message design, this means that not only is the amount of information available to the audience much greater but also that there is an expectation to be constantly informed about any issues that are perceived to be of relevance.

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[20] Barret, Victoris (2012): CEOs Afraid Of Going Social Are Doing Shareholders A Massive Disservice, Forbes, July 12, 2012.

[21] Rosen, Jeffrey (2010): The Web Means the End of Forgetting, The New York Times, July 21, 2010.

[22] Jacobsson Purewal, Sarah (2010): Facebook Messages: The Worst Thing That Ever Happened, PC World, November 16, 2010.

[23] Kleinman, Zoe (2015): Are we addicted to technology? BBC, August 31, 2015.

Undoubtedly, audiences are generally now hungrier for information than ever before.[24] "It appears like a race for the next news fix to feed the global population of information addicts."[25] Consumers want to constantly digest information very quickly and in real time. There appears to be a premium on time rather than quality, they need to feel up to date, connected to a constant stream or "feed" of information.[26] This is even the case if no new content is available. For example, if a plane is missing, media consumers seem to be happy even if constantly told there are no new developments in the story.

At the same time, consumers are much more media savvy.[27] They are much more easily able to identify information that is wrong from more trustworthy information. An almost constant bombardment of false information has trained the consumer to differentiate truth more easily from false information. The constant stream of false information has led to a more critical observation of sources. Particularly, messages from official sources are often met with great skepticism. This is partially the effect of too many official messages containing spin.[28] The audience now has much more influence than it used to have. They can now spread their perception of the accuracy of a message in real time to very significant audiences. At the same time, they can add contrary evidence, fabricated or not, to narratives. The audience has become consumer and producer, in their own right, of media at the same time.[29] Audiences have practically become part of the competition for attention.

At the same time, the role of traditional media has decreased significantly. This is not only due to huge challenges in traditional media business models. Audiences can now find, almost immediately, eye-witness reports of major events online long before traditional media even reports on the event. Traditional media itself now regularly picks up stories from the same sources available to all regular consumers on social media.[30] "Events have moved from largely contained to uncontainable and impossible to erase."[31]

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[24] Charles, G (2011): We're still hip! How social media is changing the life cycle of the news, Yale Law & Technology, November 14, 2011.

[25] Matejic, Nicole (2015): Social Media Rules of Engagement: Why Your Online Narrative is the Best Weapon During a Crisis, Wiley and Sons, Melbourne.

[26] Pew Research Center (2012): Millennials will benefit and suffer due to their hyper connected lives, Pew Internet/Elon University survey, February 29, 2012.

[27] Constantinides, Efthymios, et al. (2008): Social Media: A New Frontier for Retailers?, European Retail Research, Vol. 22, 2008

[28]Coffee, Patrick (2015): STUDY: the Public Thinks PR Is Mostly Spin, Adweek, March 23, 2015.

[29] Murthy, Dhiraj (2013): TWITTER DIGITAL MEDIA AND SOCIETY SERIES, Polity Press, Cambridge.

[30] Anderson, Monica, Caumont, Andrea (2014): How social media is reshaping news, Pew Research Center, September 24, 2014.

[31] Matejic, Nicole (2015): Social Media Rules of Engagement: Why Your Online Narrative is the Best Weapon During a Crisis, Wiley and Sons, Melbourne.

In many areas, almost everybody has a camera in hand at any moment where any video can be uploaded to social media within seconds. This information then spreads, whether true or not, so fast that the effects are likely significant. The result of these developments is that the way crises are managed and perceptions are defended has drastically changed with the digital revolution. For government institutions, there is no question that the efforts to influence effectively have become much larger with social media. This refers to multiple aspects. Time involved in drafting messages that can spread faster not only requires a higher degree of accuracy but also proper planning and preparation long before a message needs to be sent out in reaction to an event. This requires preparing the audience for message distribution by creating a network of supporters on social media that will spread a message. This network and with it trustworthiness of social media accounts needs to be built up long before messages need to have their desired effects.

What people expect from a message has also fundamentally changed. Therewith, what is required for a message to keep the attention of an audience has become more complicated than it was in the past. "If they aren't learning something, laughing at something or getting a spectacular deal on whatever it is you are selling one-click and they're gone."[32] The competition for the attention of the audience is so high that almost always there is a more attractive option for the audience.[33] A potentially more interesting story is always just a click away. This has significant implications on the possible complexity of messages that the vast majority of people have become accustomed to.

With the consequential significant reduction in attention spans, messages must be designed to bring points across as fast and as easy to understand as possible. This raises huge challenges for designing messages in the defense and security domain where issues dealt with are often of a complex nature. There can be no doubt that, to manage all of these challenges, significant pre-emptive planning and preparations are necessary. A robust social media policy is an effective first line of defence but a very specific, extensive training and awareness program combined with sufficient resources and staffing is unavoidable.

Effective Message Design in the Age of Social Media

[32] Matejic, Nicole (2015): Social Media Rules of Engagement: Why Your Online Narrative is the Best Weapon During a Crisis, Wiley and Sons, Melbourne.
[33] Turkel, Sherry (2015): Reclaiming conversation: the power of talk in the digital age. Penguin, Toronto.

With the above-described opportunities and challenges, how then should messages be designed on social media services to achieve optimal uptake and intended target audience behavioral change? While much has changed in the information space, many fundamentals still apply. It remains critical that the communicator must be highly trained to communicate effectively, now, however, in a much more complex environment characterized by higher competition and more noise. Increasing the amount of messaging – which is easier than ever on social media – still does not outweigh a single message that is optimally tailored to the TA to achieve a very specific behavioral change. The skill sets required for optimal message design in the past still remain essential. What is new is that these skills need to be performed within much shorter timeframes, continuously, also in the pre-boom phase, on many different platforms and to a much higher standard. Therewith, the job of the operator has become far more complex and challenging – not easier, as it may seem given the comparatively easy task of private social media use when tweeting[34] or friending.[35]

Message automation has also not yet reached a level that is reliable in achieving very specific behavioral changes and likely will not do so in near future. However, what has clearly changed is that "how we communicate has become just as important as what we communicate."[36] Therewith, the form factor has become much more prominent along with the skill sets to operate these new technologies on a professional level. Despite the new increased relevance of the form, what has not changed is that "communicating with a clear purpose, in ways and places you will be heard, is the only way to connect with and influence an audience."[37]

Message Design for Optimal Uptake and Influence

Even more than before, gaining and holding the attention of the audience is the first critical step to enable influence. As in any communication, the attention of the audience is the most precious and critical resource. On social media, the temptation to choose another message is greater than in any other space. The use of social media – particularly on mobile platforms – has generally led to significantly reduced attention spans. The user is always only one click away from potentially much more promising messages. In fact, due to the nature of internet surfing, consumers are used to

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[34] "Tweeting" is defined as sending out a 140 character message on the social media via the service Twitter.
[35] "Friending" is defined as building up a network on the social media service Facebook by sending out a friend request to another user.
[36] Matejic, Nicole (2015): Social Media Rules of Engagement: Why Your Online Narrative is the Best Weapon During a Crisis, Wiley and Sons, Melbourne.
[37] Matejic, Nicole (2015): Social Media Rules of Engagement: Why Your Online Narrative is the Best Weapon During a Crisis, Wiley and Sons, Melbourne.

constantly switching around different information channels. This clicking away can occur for a variety of reasons. It is completely cost neutral, takes literally a second and based on past experience, often results in more interesting content for the user. As soon as a message does not appear authentic, timely, insightful, newsworthy, interactive, easy, direct or stimulating enough, most users will click away. More than with any other more classic form of communication, this challenge must always be in focus. This results in an increase of message design requirements to command the attention of a TA.

The more specifically the message is tailored to the preferences of a TA, the more likely it will hold its attention. When trying to understand a message the audience members first try to identify how it relates to them and their experiences.[38] The more they can directly identify the relevance of a message to their goals, the more likely they are to continue to subject themselves to it. Any content not directly relevant to the interests of a TA risks creating the impression that another message may be more relevant.[39] Accordingly, in this space, the traditional D3A targeting cycle has to be adapted on all levels. While there are consequences for decide level, for example, in relation to the necessary awareness that messages will remain visible indefinitely and are accessible for any audience, this research report focuses specifically on the detect and deliver phases of the D3A targeting cycle that are most effected while adding a fourth dimension called the "develop phase".

D4A Targeting Cycle for Social Media Messaging

Effects on the Detect Level of the D3A Targeting Cycle

The most substantial affect that social media has on the detect phase is the need for very enhanced preparations before effective messaging can happen. In social media, one has to be aware that they can't believe what they see when looking directly at their Facebook responses or the Twitter responses received from individual users.[40] This is just the tip of the iceberg. One has to look way beyond to what is actually happening underneath. That means, for social media, that one needs to effectively target, read and

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[38] Wilkinson, J A (1996): Psychology 2: message received and understood? British journal of nursing (Mark Allen Publishing), Vol. 5, Issue 14, July 1996.

[39] Lautenslager, Al (2014): 8 Ways to Make Your Marketing Message Stand Out, Entrepreneur, July 1, 2014

[40] Bradbury, Danny (2013): Effective social media analytics Social media isn't just about collecting Facebook "likes" any more, says Danny Bradbury. The smart money is extracting intelligence from the network, The Guardian, June 13, 2013.

drive social media and analytics.[41] It is not possible to leverage a way around social media data analysis which is a complex task but also promises large rewards and is essential to achieve a controlled effect in the social media space. "In the military you need to be able to assess the data, for OSINT, including threats, opportunities, of audience sentiment and offline influence in the physical area of operation."[42] It is not sufficient to simply monitor social media feeds for directly visible feedback such as likes, retweets and comments. All of these barely scratch the surface. They will lead to a false interpretation of data at best, more likely, they will impact message delivery as it leads to misinforming one's strategy and planning cycle. There can be no doubt that a significant investment is required to leverage the actual information social media can provide through data analytics. In order to attempt to control the effect of social media messaging, analytics are an essential tool.

Social media metadata is most essential for identifying where to target your message. Again, it is not what is visible on the surface in social media streams but what lies beneath the surface of social media networks, thus data is essential here. The data is essential here to know where, when and how to post a message. In order to most effectively target an audience, the first step is to assess what the target audience data set looks like before it has been targeted.[43] This way, it is possible to more easily assess the effect a targeting campaign may have on the TA. Secondly, it is essential to identify as exactly as possible the geographic location of the target audience. This is essential to identify audience characteristics such as when to actually deliver messages to achieve maximum effect.[44] This can be identified by peak post engagement times and by analyzing when the specific target audiences post most and when they are most active on social media.[45] While it may be natural to start posting messages at 9:00 am because that is when the work shift begins for the operator, this may not be the most effective time to reach the actual target audience depending upon where they are in the world. Even if the operator shares the same time zone with the target audience, spam is often sent overnight. Early in the morning, the target audience may have too much material to sift through.[46] Also, age and gender information can be identified through social media data analytics and can lead to more refined message drafting. Another

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[41] Demers, Jayson (2014): 2014 Is The Year Of Digital Marketing Analytics: What It Means For Your Company, Forbes, February 10, 2014.

[42] Matejic, Nicole (2015): Social Media Rules of Engagement: Why Your Online Narrative is the Best Weapon During a Crisis, Wiley and Sons, Melbourne.

[43] DeMers, Jayson (2014): Why Knowing Your Audience Is The Key To Success, Forbes, September 3, 2014.

[44] The Muse (2015): Surprise! The Best Time of Day To Send Emails (That Get Responses) Is Not What You Think, Forbes, August 3, 2015.

[45] Bennett, Shea (2015): What are the Best Times to Post on #Facebook, #Twitter and #Instagram? [INFOGRAPHIC], Adweek, January 6, 2015.

[46] Benna, Steven (2015): The best times to post on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, Business Insider, July 29, 2015.

valuable input to message design comes from the ability to identify the aggregated interests both professional and private of target audiences.[47] These can be identified by which types of posts are primarily liked and which form of media is preferably consumed, for example, pictures versus videos. This information can again be used to decide which messaging form should be selected.

One can additionally expand the social media data equation by including web browser history and e-commerce interactions.[48] This allows for a far deeper insight into preferences of the audience which can lead to more messages designed that are perceived as interesting. For the security environment application, reverse engineering social media data sets will provide further valuable insights about the target audience.[49] Another important component for message design that comes from data analytics is the ability to perform audience sentiment analysis. Audience sentiment analysis is essential to identify when the best moments are to introduce messages in terms of what is on the mind of the audience. If, for example, a specific event occurred that is dominating the social media feeds such as, a terrorist incident or natural disaster, posting a message during a time of threat that does not relate to the incident will not appear authentic or relevant. On the other hand, if a message ties into the currently existing primary sentiment of the audience it will appear more natural and will be more likely to be shared and integrated into the social media debate. In order to become relevant and stay relevant, it is essential to be able to pick-up the debate among the target audience members. This again cannot happen from just focusing on the openly visible feeds. It is essential to see the underlying data analysis as it refers to sentiments of the entire target audience community. Only effective target audience analysis can enable messages to be designed in a way that appears as if they originated from the targeted community. Conversely, if sentiments are not matched, the messages will appear alien to the community. Finally, in order to build trust, it is essential that messages over the long-term be coherent to the target audience community. Furthermore, target audience sentiment analysis enables one to monitor sentiment and as soon as it starts to rain, for example, one can issue a statement to that effect. [50] Over time, matching audience sentiments will be a key component to building trust and awareness of the message deliverer. Furthermore, when communicating during a crisis there will be no way to manage audience reactions without knowledge of the actual sentiment. This then enables one to indicate that they have heard what the audience is saying and that they are considering their feedback.

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[47] Arnold, John (2015): 6 Ways to Use Social Data for Targeted Marketing, Entrepreneur, December 7, 2015.

[48] Matejic, Nicole (2015): Social Media Rules of Engagement: Why Your Online Narrative is the Best Weapon During a Crisis, Wiley and Sons, Melbourne.

[49] Matejic, Nicole (2015): Social Media Rules of Engagement: Why Your Online Narrative is the Best Weapon During a Crisis, Wiley and Sons, Melbourne.

[50] Agius, Aaron (2015): 5 Social Media Marketing Metrics You Should Be Tracking, Entrepreneur, April 9, 2015.

Social Media Targeting Cycle
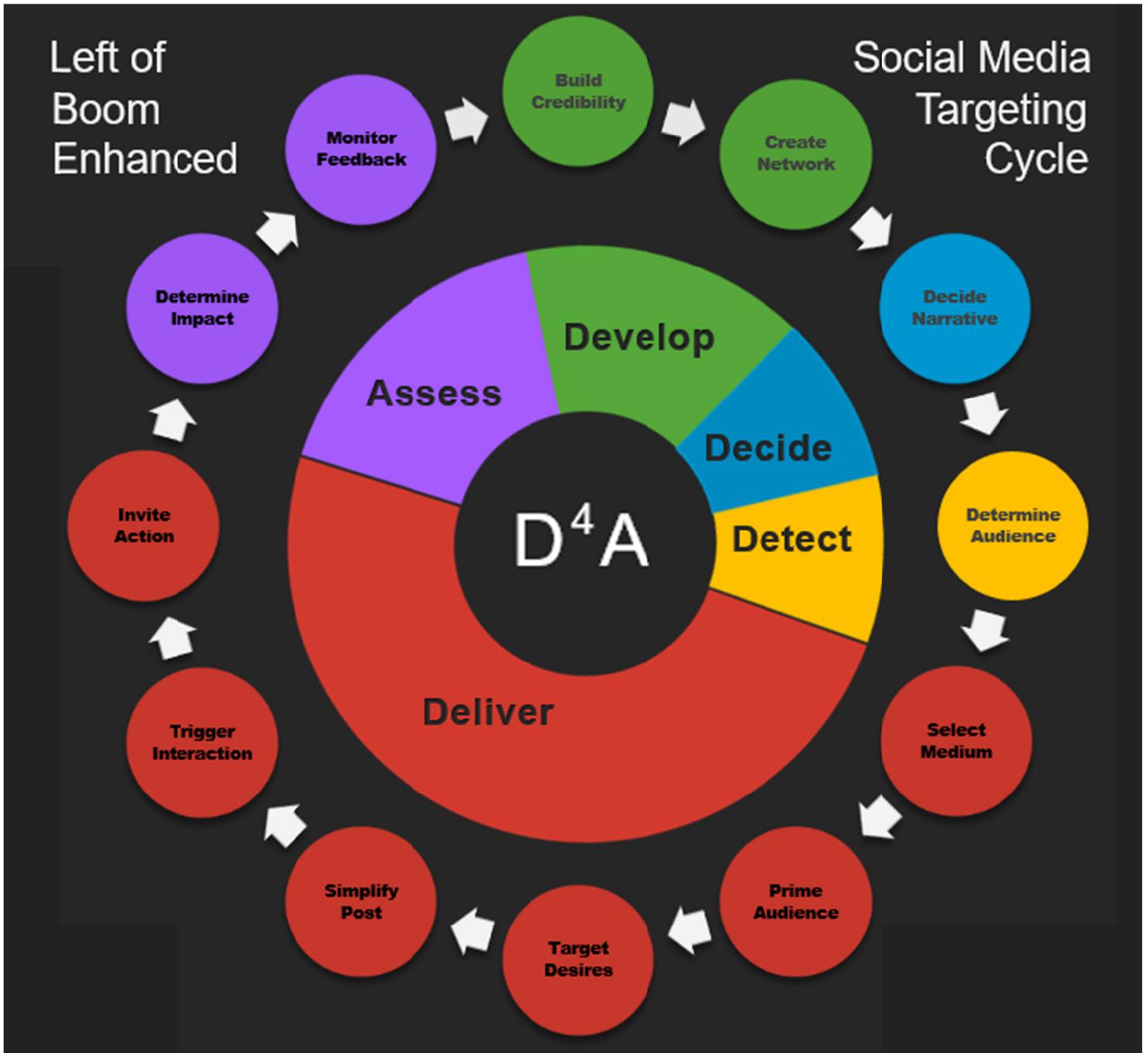
Targeting in the age of social media

After the general overview of how targeting changes in the age of social media the second part of the report gives very brief practical insights for the operator. The goal is to provide the operator with some basic ideas on how to target audiences on social media while achieving more message uptake and more predictable effect on behavioral change. This overview concentrates on the areas in which there is the most change and – to not exceed space requirements – does not cover all changes that are necessary to target effectively on social media.

Develop Phase

The develop phase is a new phase that needs to be added to the D3A in order to affect behavioral change of a target audience through social media. A message distributed through a social media will only gain relevant uptake if the user has already previously gained a critical mass of followers that consistently engage in sharing its messages. Only if interaction and sharing of the account's content have previously become a regular activity of a critical mass of followers can there be a reasonable expectation that this support will reliably occur when desired.

It is, therefore, essential to develop these conditions "left of boom". They cannot be built up when the need to influence emerges. This raises many logistical challenges relating to the focus of resources. It also requires advance knowledge of potential future operational requirements. As it is impossible to know the exact audience that will need to be targeted in the future, planning based on deep analysis of potential future needs is required. Likely, this will mean that there is no alternative than to include as many potential relevant audiences as resources permit. In order to affect desired influence, the first task of these resources is then to build credibility in the selected audiences.

Credibility

Users will only come back to a source of information when they see value in considering its offerings. Normally, that will mean that a source must build a reputation for providing reliable, relevant information. Besides the content, the form of how the information is provided is also crucial for building a reputation. Authenticity in communication is key in building a reputation of high credibility. Therefore, to capture the attention of an audience, it is essential to offer reliable, relevant information in a form that is perceived as authentic.

Communication that the recipient does not perceive as authentic, new and relevant will not only not be shared with others but will lead to the likely disregard of the source in the future. Only a source that over the long-term provides such substance will build a reputation that enables influencing by creating trust. Trust in the source is directly connected to message uptake and interaction. As in offline communication, message recipients are more likely to collaborate and build a relationship with that source if they trust it.[51] Different in the online space is that most previous communication is easily revisited at any time. This makes actually checking a track record easier. Also, as with offline, building a trusted voice of authority takes time.[52] Mistakes in spelling and grammar can also damage the credibility of a previously trusted source as is the case offline.[53] As in offline communication mistakes risk being interpreted as a lack of attention to detail[54] and may result in an audience dismissing a message and the source.

Building a sufficiently credible reputation is a long, complicated and resource intensive process. There is though no way around building a sufficiently credible reputation if the goal is to achieve an effect through social media.

Network

Once a social media account is created that has succeeded in creating creditability and initial followership through its activities, the next step is to build a sufficiently large network that interacts with its content. Besides reliably distributing content that is relevant in an authentic form, other measures need to be added to increase the speed with which a network expands. A key factor for network expansion is the distribution of social currency in messages. "Social currency" distribution makes users more likely to return to the source of information and share the information as it appears to have social value that can reflect well on the recipient when shared.[55] Ensuring that a message has a social currency component will, therefore, increase the chances that it will be shared with a larger audience that may be interested in the source. Additionally, the inclusion of trending memes, combined with content that triggers strong emotions, can also lead to the perception of social currency. It is essential to understand that these first two phases of the D4A targeting cycle are key steps for any long term

[51] Dartmouth College (2015): Trust me: Research sheds light on why people trust, Science Daily, August 11, 2015
[52] Newman, Daniel (2015): Love It Or Hate It: Influencer Marketing Works, Forbes, June 23, 2015.
[53] Patel, Neil (2014): 8 Must-Have Ingredients of a Successful Blog Post, Entrepreneur, May 19, 2014.
[54] Gutner, Toddi (2009): Can Poor Spelling Derail a Career? The Wall Street Journal, September 1, 2009.
[55] Konnikova, Maria (2014): The Six Things That Make Stories Go Viral Will Amaze, and Maybe Infuriate, You, The New Yorker, January 21, 2014.

success in the social media domain. They require planning and development long before any influence is needed.

Decide Phase

This may be the targeting phase with the least changes in the social media domain. The major change in this phase is that the general decision on where targeting may appear necessary in the future must be made long enough in advance to enable the above-described development phase. Once it comes to the actual targeting, the decision space is then limited to already "developed" target audiences. Only among those is there a reasonable expectation to achieve an intended effect. Even if a specific target audience has been developed sufficiently in advance, many other factors can still affect the actual impact on behavioral change. Other events may crowd out a message, or a new social media service may have become more popular that has not yet been "developed" by building up an account that has sufficient followership. Therefore, more uncertainty is introduced on the decide level as achieving actual behavioral change on social media is a complex process that will likely always contain a rather large level of unreliability. Finally, any decision-making process has to consider the increased transparency as well as the fact that targeting will rarely only affect the intended audience.

Narrative

In this phase, the actual general narrative that will be distributed to achieve influence is designed. There are several factors of concern when designing a message. First of all, there can be no spinning in message design on social media. Yes, of course, it is possible to include spin in a post. The problem is, however, that almost immediately at least one user will likely find countering evidence to the spin and post this in the target audience community on social media. If this happens, not only the credibility of the message but the long-term credibility of the source is also severely undermined. This is particularly the case because long after such an event, the exchange will still be visible on the internet for anyone to read about. The potential short-term benefits of including spin are therefore usually decisively outweighed by the long-term consequences as the track record is visible and such a practice has a long-term effect on the effectiveness of a social media account. More than any other medium, on social media it is essential to "mean what you say and back up your words with demonstrable action online and

offline"[56] as a large degree of transparency can easily be created by interested parties. Otherwise, access to the ability to influence the audience through the specifically developed channel will be lost. "Authenticity is the holy grail of social media success."[57] Any deviation from authenticity is, in effect, just handing over the narrative to other interested parties.

When considering the design of a message, timing is critical. An information vacuum must be prevented at all costs. This is particularly complicated in the government environment as often long chains of command have to be processed before a response to an event can be posted. It is paramount to understand that if you don't disseminate your narrative, others will often post their version of events. An information vacuum emerges when an absence of credible information exists at the same time as there is a high demand for it. It is created when communicating stops – for example if it takes too long to draft a message. It most certainly emerges when a relevant actor in an event is not present in the information space while users are interested in knowing the actor's position. Interested parties notice the absence and will take over the message distribution and spread their own narrative instead.

Once others have established themselves in the information vacuum, it can be very complicated to command attention and to regain the control of a narrative. It is essential to keep in mind that once others have taken over the main narrative of an event, they have succeeded in conditioning the audience to their messaging which effectively creates a severe, strategic disadvantage.[58] Any comments along the lines of "this is an ongoing investigation we cannot comment on it" just create a wall of silence that leads to distrust of a source. Particularly, when others are speaking to the audience about the issue of concern.

This emerging distrust weakens significantly any opportunities to influence perceptions. Once an information vacuum is created there is almost no positive way to regain control of a message; therefore the only way to reduce the effect of information vacuums is not to let them emerge. There is no other way in the social media space to succeed in influencing TAs other than to continuously be present, engage early and engage often.[59]

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[56] Matejic, Nicole (2015): Social Media Rules of Engagement: Why Your Online Narrative is the Best Weapon During a Crisis, Wiley and Sons, Melbourne.

[57] Matejic, Nicole (2015): Social Media Rules of Engagement: Why Your Online Narrative is the Best Weapon During a Crisis, Wiley and Sons, Melbourne.

[58] Dipietro, Ben (2015): CEOs Face Reputation Pitfalls If They Avoid Social Media, The Wall Street Journal, April 2, 2015.

[59] Dutta, Soumitra (2010): Managing Yourself: What's Your Personal Social Media Strategy? Harvard Business Review, November 2010.

As it is impossible to be present in all areas of social media space, it is essential to identify where a presence is most needed. This automatically means that, as mentioned above, planning in advance of when influencing the space is necessary. "A pre-emptive entrance into the online and social media domain long before […] the first soldier hits the ground"[60] is essential. As in any military mission, it is essential to build a support base long before it needs to be relied upon. In the social media domain, the local support base consists of followers and a network of users that consider and spread a message. Following the above recommendations for message design will significantly enhance the ability to command the attention of the target audience and potentially achieve desired influence effects.

Detect Phase

The most substantial affect that social media has on the detect phase of the targeting cycle, again, is the need for very enhanced preparations before effective messaging can happen.

On social media, to detect the most relevant target audience it is key to not believe the impression that emerges when looking directly at Facebook responses or the Twitter responses received from individual users.[61] This impression would just represent the tip of the iceberg. It is necessary to look beyond the openly visible impression a social media account is enabling at a given time to understand what is really happening. To really understand social media activities social media data analytics must be applied.[62] It is not sufficient to simply monitor social media feeds for directly visible feedback such as likes, retweets and comments as all of these barely scratch the surface of what is actually going on relating to a social media account. Neglecting the underlying social media data will lead to a false interpretation of activities at best. More likely, it will impact message delivery as it leads to a misinformed strategy and planning cycle. There can be no doubt that a significant resource investment is required to leverage the actual information social media can provide through data analytics.

Social media metadata is especially essential in the detect phase for identifying where to target your message. If interpreted correctly, the data will provide the basis for

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[60] Matejic, Nicole (2015): Social Media Rules of Engagement: Why Your Online Narrative is the Best Weapon During a Crisis, Wiley and Sons, Melbourne.
[61] Bradbury, Danny (2013): Effective social media analytics Social media isn't just about collecting Facebook "likes" any more, says Danny Bradbury. The smart money is extracting intelligence from the network, The Guaridan, June 13, 2013.
[62] Demers, Jayson (2014): 2014 Is The Year Of Digital Marketing Analytics: What It Means For Your Company, Forbes, February 10, 2014.

understanding where, when and how to post a message – for example by identifying who the most relevant distributors of messages are in a TA.

Here again, preparation is necessary long before actual influencing can begin. In order to most effectively target an audience, the first step is to assess what a target audience data set looks like before it has been subjected to influenced by the operator.[63] This enables assessing more accurately the effect a targeting campaign may have on the TA. Secondly, it is essential to identify as exactly as possible the geographic location of the target audience. This is essential to identify audience characteristics such as when to actually deliver messages to achieve maximum effect.[64] This can be identified by peak post engagement times identifying when target audiences post most and are most active on social media.[65] While it may be natural to start posting messages at 9:00 am when a shift begins for the operator, this is likely not the most effective time to reach the actual target audience. Even if the operator shares the same time zone with the target audience, spam is often sent overnight. Early in the morning, the message may be crowded out by other content.[66] Also, age and gender information, identified through social media data analytics, can lead to more refined message drafting that uses for example language that matches more what the target audience uses. Another valuable input to message design from social media data comes from the ability to identify both professional and private aggregated interests of target audiences.[67] These can be identified by which types of posts are primarily "liked" and which form of media is preferably consumed by the TA. This knowledge can again be used to decide which messaging form should be selected to achieve the maximum effect.

Including data from web browser history as well as e-commerce interactions will provide an even more detailed picture of TA preferences. This far deeper insight into TA preferences can lead to messages that the TA perceives as more interesting. Another important component for message design that comes from data analytics is the ability to perform audience sentiment analysis. Audience sentiment analysis is essential to identify the best moments to introduce messages relating to what the TA is emotionally experiencing. If, for example, a specific event occurred that is dominating the social media feeds, such as a terrorist incident or natural disaster, posting a message during a time of emotional reaction that does not relate to the incident will likely appear less

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[63] DeMers, Jayson (2014): Why Knowing Your Audience Is The Key To Success, Forbes, September 3, 2014.

[64] The Muse (2015): Surprise! The Best Time of Day To Send Emails (That Get Responses) Is Not What You Think, Forbes, August 3, 2015.

[65] Bennett, Shea (2015): What are the Best Times to Post on #Facebook, #Twitter and #Instagram? [INFOGRAPHIC], Adweek, January 6, 2015.

[66] Benna, Steven (2015): The best times to post on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, Business Insider, July 29, 2015.

[67] Arnold, John (2015): 6 Ways to Use Social Data for Targeted Marketing, Entrepreneur, December 7, 2015.

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authentic or relatable. On the other hand, if a message ties into the currently existing primary sentiment of the audience it will appear much more natural and will be likely more shared and integrated into the social media debate. In order to become relevant and stay relevant, it is essential to be able to pick-up the debate among the audience community. This again cannot happen from just focusing on the openly visible feeds. It is essential to see the underlying data analysis as it refers to sentiments of the entire target audience community. Only effective target analysis can enable messages to be designed in a way that appears as if they originated from the targeted community. Conversely, if sentiments are not matched, the messages will appear alien to the community.

Constant target audience sentiment analysis provides the valuable added benefit, that as soon as it starts to "rain", one can issue a statement to that effect.[68] In other words, it enables the operator to see tendencies of where debates are heading early and post messages that match the sentiment – independent from the overall messaging goal. Over time, matching audience sentiments is a key component to building trust and awareness of the message deliverer. When communicating during a crisis, there is no way to effectively influence audience reactions without prior knowledge of current TA sentiment.

Deliver Phase

Medium

Selecting the ideal medium for communicating with the TA is significantly simplified by social media data analytics. As described above, analyzing the data will enable identification of social media most used by the TA.

In this targeting phase, again, success of message impact depends on the advance "preparation" of the operating environment. In addition to the necessity of always planning authentic and effective narratives before the need to influence arises and to establish the above-described base of support within a target audience, it is essential to "prime" the audience. Priming a TA means creating an environment in the TA that is favorable for a message. This effect can be achieved by slowly introducing an audience to messages of the kind one wants to have an effect in the future. This is a long process. But if done effectively, it can lead to messages appearing more natural to a TA when distributed. Without priming of an audience, a message can easily appear either

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[68] Agius, Aaron (2015): 5 Social Media Marketing Metrics You Should Be Tracking, Entrepreneur, April 9, 2015.

off-topic or otherwise unnatural to a TA. Depending on the kind of message, it can, therefore, be essential to slowly build up to the actual distribution of an intended message.

Priming

Also, how a TA has been primed to engage with messages can play a critical role in message uptake.[69] If interaction in the form of sharing of a message is desired, then the audience has to be primed to that effect by making it used to messages from the account that are normally worth sharing.

The bottom line is that messages from other sources will simply crowd out any message that does not meet a prepared operating space if the message is not natural to the environment. Any message sent will be competing with sources that have already primed their space or are natural to the environment as they are not distributed for a specific new agenda. ISIS achieved this goal by creating its own app that mass distributed messages in an environment where users specifically came for its messages.[70] For a message to be effective, therefore, a TA has to be transitioned into a message that is intended to have an effect. Ideally, transitioning in and out of an event or crisis occurs to keep a supportive reputation of the source for future messaging needs. Looking ahead as far as possible to prepare for communications is a key requisite for effective social media communication.

When designing a message, including the following measures can additionally promote message uptake and behavioral influence.

Repetition

Sufficient repetition of a message is also crucial. Not only from a technical perspective, posting a message just once is insufficient. It would only reach those users that are online close to the timeframe of distribution as it would soon be crowded out by other posts in a Twitter or Facebook feed. Sufficiently repeated messages also increase audience comprehension and understanding.[71] Messages are also simply more likely to

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[69] Evans, Vyv (2016): The Realm of the Emoji, Why and how has the emoji taken the world by storm? Psychology Today, Apr 08, 2016.

[70]Griffin, Andrew (2015): Isis Android app launched to let supporters keep up with news and propaganda
The app comes as traditional platforms look to shut down supporters using their sites, The Independent, August 4, 2015.

[71] Everse, Georgia (2011): Eight Ways to Communicate Your Strategy More Effectively, Harvard Business Review, August 22 ,2011.

affect behavioral change if they repeatedly reach their target.[72] Creating as far as possible the impression of a message being designed specifically for the individual recipient is also important. If a message appears to be distributed too widely, it may be may be interpreted by at least some of the recipients as irrelevant.[73]

Repetition in a different medium in addition to social media – for example with text messages – can provide an effective additional avenue of influence that does not appear as repetitive but still reinforces the message while appearing personal. Text messages can have a highly motivating effect on recipients[74] and are especially valuable in influencing behaviour as they appear more specifically addressed to the recipient.[75]

SMS in combination with social media also offer other advantages as they are truly instant[76] - which social media feeds cannot guarantee. Compared to other media that can be combined with social media text messages are also inexpensive.[77] While repetition is an important tool, it must not be overused. Too many reminders can displease a recipient and result in complete disengagement of a TA member from a source.[78]

As in any communication, people are more likely to engage with messages that trigger their emotions. When a message triggers an emotion, it is more noticed and also stays longer in our focus than a message that contains only non-emotional content . For this reason, ISIS is using cat pictures on social media to both get a wider distribution of their messages and also achieve positive name recognition by trying to create a soft image. ISIS is therewith combining a message (for example that ISIS fighters are "normal" cat loving people) with content that triggers positive emotions through the use of pictures.

It matters, however, not only that a post triggers emotions but also which emotions are triggered. A message that entices positive emotions will not only reflect more positively on the source, but it will likely be more interacted with and spread. Therefore, if the

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[72] Prestwicha, A, Peruginib, M, Hurling, R. (2009): Can the effects of implementation intentions on exercise be enhanced using text messages? Psychology and Health, Vol. 24, Issue 6.

[73] Nazar, Jason (2013): The 21 Principles of Persuasion, Forbes, March 26, 2013.

[74] Jones, Caroline O. H., et al. (2012): "Even if You Know Everything You Can Forget": Health Worker Perceptions of Mobile Phone Text-Messaging to Improve Malaria Case-Management in Kenya, PLOS One, Vol. 7, Issue 6, June 13.

[75] Fjeldsoe, Brianna S., et al. (2009): Behavior Change Interventions Delivered by Mobile Telephone Short-Message Service, American Journal of Preventative Medicine, Volume 36, Issue 2, Pages 165–173, February 2009.

[76] Cole-Lewis, Heather, Kershaw, Trace (2010): Text Messaging as a Tool for Behavior Change in Disease Prevention and Management, Epidemiological Reviews, January 25, 2010.

[77] Weatherby, Colin (2012): Is Text-Messaging About to Revolutionize Therapy? Fighting the global mental health crisis with technology. Psychology Today, September 13, 2012.

[78] Boynton, John (2015): Digital Marketing: The Power To Be Emotive, Marketing Magazine, August 17, 2015

intent is to create followers that further spread the information posted, it is essential to find ways to increase the "likeability" of posts.[79] One way to achieve this is by framing the message in a context that guides and leads the audience to a particularly favourable perception of the message.[80] The more pleasurable the information exchange appears for the recipient, the more likely they will return to the source for more information. Positively framed messages are also more persuasive.[81]

Story-Telling

Connecting on a personal level with the audience, if possible, further enhances the TA's positive experience.[82] This is ideally achieved by framing a message as a relatable story,[83] including human elements and relatable descriptions of events. If possible, messages should contain a story arc, with a clear beginning, story climax and conclusion. These can be broken down into several posts to not overwhelm the recipient as long as the messages appear to belong together. Different from factual messages, stories are more likely to engage a target[84] and are more persuasive than, for example statistics.[85] A story also creates memories that are more likely to be remembered longer.[86] A story is most effective if it is combined with a positive message that appeals directly to the emotions of the target audience.[87] Even more so if the message matches the emotional state of the target audience.[88] The recipient can then relate much easier to the message as it triggers a similar emotion to what is already being experienced. In order to provide this level of customization of a message, long term constant social media data analysis is necessary. While the costs of such operations are high, their insights will significantly increase the message uptake and its influence on a TA.

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[79] Sanders, Tim (2006): THE LIKEABILITY FACTOR HOW TO BOOST YOUR L-FACTOR AND ACHIEVE YOUR LIFE'S DREAMS, Three Rivers Press, New York.

[80] Raffoni, Melissa (2009): How to Frame Your Messages for Maximum Impact, Harvard Business Review, April 21, 2009.

[81] Tilottama Ghosh Chowdhury, et al. (2015): What to Get and What to Give Up: How Different Decision Tasks and Product Types Affect the Persuasiveness of Promotion- versus Prevention-Focused Messages, Psychology and Marketing, August, 2015.

[82] Peters, Brian (2016): Solving the 10 most common social media marketing challenges, Chicago Tribune, April 26, 2016.

[83] Schachter, Harvey (2016): A three-step narrative approach to telling your company's story, Globe and Mail, January 17, 2016.

[84] Gunelius, Susan (2013): 5 Secrets to Use Storytelling for Brand Marketing Success, Forbes, February 5, 2013.

[85] Nishi, Dennis (2013): To Persuade People, Tell Them a Story Narrative Is a Powerful Way to Get a Message Across, The Wall Street Journal, November 9, 2013.

[86] O'Hara, Carolyn (2014): How to Tell a Great Story, Harvard Business Review, July 30, 2014.

[87] Mourdoukoutas, Panos (2013): How To Get Your Message Across, Forbes, March 7, 2013.

[88] DeSteno, David, Et. Al (2004): Discrete Emotions and Persuasion: The Role of Emotion-Induced Expectancies, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 2004, Vol. 86, No. 1, 43–56.

Simplification

To achieve the optimal effect, a message not only needs to meet the above conditions but it must also be kept as simple as possible at the same time. Messages that are easy to understand are more persuasive and as they also ease processing of the new information they also appear more attractive. Beginning a message with a simple, direct and clear headline helps to capture an audience's attention.[89] It instantly creates a positive first impression for the audience[90] and makes it more likely that the audience reads on.

Within the text of a message, it is important not to enable different interpretations of what a message could mean. This risks creating a misunderstanding of the message. The less clear a message is, and the more choices needed to be considered by the audience, the more likely the TA is to feel overwhelmed.[91] The effort to comprehend messages from this source may be perceived as higher than the effort needed to understand other competing messages. Given the competition for the attention of the audience in the information space, this can easily lead to not only the message being disregarded but also the source. A more attractive message is only one click away. The number of claims made in a message should also be kept as small as possible, or the message will likely be met with increased skepticism.[92]

Given the above-mentioned tendency of the audience to click away at the slightest notion of disinterest and the lack of tolerance for almost any noticeable effort to consume a message, it is essential to really get straight to the point.[93] Social media is designed to constantly present new, attractive content that triggers senses and "hijacks attention."[94] The intent is to guarantee that users stay on the social media platform and further consume and provide clicks for the messages. The result is that many target audience members have largely lost their attention autonomy.[95] They no longer have full control of what they focus on. Their attention spans are also significantly reduced.

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[89] DeMers, Jayson (2013): The Online Marketer's Guide To Writing High-Converting Headline, Forbes, September 5, 2015.

[90] Konnikova, Maria (2014): How Headlines Change the Way We Think, The New Yorker, December 17, 2014.

[91] Barry Schartz (2004): The Paradox of Choice: Why More is Less, Harper Perrennial, New York.

[92] Shu, Suzanne B., Carlson, Kurt A. (2014): When Three Charms but Four Alarms: Identifying the Optimal Number of Claims in Persuasion Settings, Journal of American Marketing, January 2014, Vol. 78, No. 1, pp. 127-139.

[93] Weatherhead, Rob (2014): Say it quick, say it well – the attention span of a modern internet consumer Media organisations must adapt to cater for a generation of internet consumers who expect 'instant gratification and quick fixes', The Guardian, February 28, 2014.

[94] Newport, Cal (2016): Deepwork Work Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World, Little Brown Book Group, New York.

[95] Newport, Cal (2016): Deepwork Work Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World, Little Brown Book Group, New York.

Messages have only a few seconds to capture the attention of the audience and achieve the desired effect.

If target audience members do not feel a clear connection or recognize the relevance of the message within these few seconds, they will click to another seemingly more attractive message. As with any communication, the attention of the audience is the most precious resource. What is new is that the attention spans are so significantly reduced and alternative options have increased so exponentially the competition for attention seems tougher than ever. Social media is specifically designed to trigger the greatest emotions in the shortest possible time. It, at the same time, enables communication under such circumstances and also feeds the need for even faster and shorter communication. Consequentially, effective communication in an increasingly more complex environment must be designed to achieve its effect in increasingly short time frames.

Visuals embedded in messages and particularly videos enable communication in very short time frames.[96] The challenge is though to ensure that images and videos are understood exactly as intended. If this is the case, moving images are much easier to relate to than text or even pictures. They resonate because they resemble most closely to what the audience naturally sees in their environment, making them easy to process and remember. Videos enable a much faster and direct story-telling than longer texts.[97] Videos are also more likely to be remembered than text because they trigger emotions on more different levels (visually and acoustically) and therewith, activate more and different parts of the brain.[98] They also actually enhance more accurate verbal and visual memories.[99] Finally, the use of videos leads to a more personal connection and a likelier, easier and faster identification with the message.[100] Therefore, including visuals but particularly videos should be part of any social media operation.

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[96] Trimble, Chris (2015): Why online video is the future of content marketing Video is taking content marketing by storm, but you'll have to do more than just make one to realise its full potential, The Guardian, July 30, 2015.

[97] Margalit, Liraz (2015): Video vs Text: The Brain Perspective, Watching a video and reading an article activate separate cognitive functions, Psychology Today, May 1, 2015.

[98] Schiappa, Edward (2015): Visual Persuasion in the Digital Age, MITSloan, Executive Education, Webinar Series, February 5, 2015.

[99] Chambers, Bette, et al. (2006): Achievement effects of embedded multimedia in a success for all reading program, Journal of Educational Psychology, Vol 98(1), Feb 2006, 232-237.

[100] Knight, John (2015): 4 Ways to Establish Yourself as an Influencer Online, Entrepreneur, May 12. 2015.

Emoticons

Faster communication can also be achieved by using emoticons. The use of emoticons has not only become accepted,[101] but their use is often an expected practice (depending on the environment) in social media messaging. Any message intended to appear natural in a community using emoticons must adhere to this practice to match expectations and blend in. Emoticons are "a visual representation of a feeling, idea, entity, status or event."[102] They are employed to provide further social cues beyond, for example, simple text to make sure that a message is understood precisely as intended. They are used to add social cues that would normally come from, for example, facial expressions[103] in non-digital communication. Emoticons ideally enable the interpretation of non-verbal cues, otherwise impossible with digital text. Emojis are also an effective way to inject tone and feeling into a social media message.[104] The same counts for emoji and stickers that we are here also referring to as emoticons[105]

Of course, as facial expressions are interpreted differently by individuals depending upon their culture or personal experiences, so are emoticons. There is no generally agreed upon reference that could be used to translate emoticons into what their user most likely intended to convey with their use – which significantly complicates the use of emoticons when trying to blend into communities or distribute a specific message.

Interaction

On social media, an actor is delivering a message even when no message is being posted. In this space, non-communication is not possible. "There is no hiding offline; with or without you, people are talking about your organization […] on social media."[106] Not communicating is just handing over the opportunity of narrative control to other interested parties. The social media space will be filled by others if an information vacuum emerges. For that reason, it is important to provide a platform for two-way

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[101] Kermodd, Robin (2015): Emoji invasion; the end language as we know it;\ emojis are the fast growing language in the UK – what does this mean for the future of communication? The Guardian, June 25, 2015.

[102] Evans, Vyv (2016): The Realm of the Emoji, Why and how has the emoji taken the world by storm? Psychology Today, Apr 08, 2016.

[103] D'Costa, Krystal (2011): Communicating Meaning Online: A Digital Expression of Theory of Mind, Scientific America, July 18, 2011.

[104] Evans, Vyv (2016): The Realm of the Emoji, Why and how has the emoji taken the world by storm? Psychology Today, Apr 08, 2016.

[105] Hern, Alex: (2015): Don't know the difference between emoji and emoticons? Let me explain, The Guardian, February 6, 2015. https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/feb/06/difference-between-emoji-and-emoticons-explained

[106] Matejic, Nicole (2015): Social Media Rules of Engagement: Why Your Online Narrative is the Best Weapon During a Crisis, Wiley and Sons, Melbourne.

communication. On social media users expect to have input on posts they receive. If a source invites responses and interacts with them, the source will more likely gain the opportunity to influence all aspects of their messaging, including negative feedback.[107] Therefore, successful messaging on social media is as dependent upon listening to the TA as it is on issuing messages.[108] It is these relationships with target audiences that significantly improve the chances of message uptake and behavioral influence.[109]

Action

Finally, messages that specifically outline the benefits of a particular action are more likely to motivate behavioral change.[110] A message meant to change behavior should include a simple call-to-action that clearly instructs the audience about what they need to do and how to do it. Users are more likely to act if they are told exactly how to take action and why it is a good idea for them.[111] Simplicity though is key here as well. The call-to-action message must be easily attainable otherwise the necessary effort will make a message seem unattractive. If an audience feels they are powerless, isolated or in any other way incapable of changing behavior they will not follow through and will not take action.[112]

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[107] Mangold, Glynn W., Faulds, David J. (2009): Social media: The new hybrid element of the promotion mix, Kelley School of Business, Indiana University, Business Horizons, 2009, 52.

[108] Gunelius, Susan (2011): 10 Laws of Social Media Marketing, Entrepreneur, February 16, 2011.

[109] Lavis, John (2016): From Research to Practice: A Knowledge Transfer Planning Guide, Institute for Work & Health, 2006.

[110] Covey, Judith (2014): The role of dispositional factors in moderating message framing effects, American Psychological Association, Inc, January 2014

[111] Cheval, Boris (2015): Supplemental Material for Reflective and Impulsive Processes Explain (In)effectiveness of Messages Promoting Physical Activity: A Randomized Controlled Trial, Health Psychology, Vol. 34, No. 1, pp. 10–19, 2015.

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Conclusion

Due to the oversupply of information, audiences are used to clicking away at the slightest inclination of irrelevance or effort. Message design is becoming a one-time opportunity that lasts a few short seconds. Either the TA likes the content on first sight, or the message will not only have no effect, but the TA will likely disregard the source in the future. The audience has no tolerance to search for meaning in a message. It is essential to make the message as easy to understand as possible. A key to attractive message design is deeply understanding the information environment of the TA. Only then can one adequately consider the language of the TA and the stories and memories it relates to. Tying into these stories and abiding by the specific language characteristics enables the fastest understanding of messages. The more natural to the environment the messages appears, the less likely the information will be perceived as alien to the target audience. The most important lesson though for adapting targeting to the social media age is to first develop a reliable followership through trust and then to prepare the audience for the message.

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