FRIENDING THE GOVERNMENT: WHY U.S. GOVERNMENT SOCIAL MEDIA WEBSITES DO NOT FUNCTION AS PUBLIC SPHERES AND WHAT CAN BE DONE TO PROMOTE CIVIC PARTICIPATION

by

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A Thesis
Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty
of
George Mason University
in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Arts
English

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Date: _____ Fall Semester 2010
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my husband, Tim Eyler, for his love and support. I would also like to thank Douglas Eyman, Susan Lawrence, and Paul Rogers, for their guidance and expertise.

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ABSTRACT

FRIENDING THE GOVERNMENT: WHY U.S. GOVERNMENT SOCIAL MEDIA WEBSITES DO NOT FUNCTION AS PUBLIC SPHERES AND WHAT CAN BE DONE TO PROMOTE CIVIC PARTICIPATION

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The promise of social media tools to facilitate virtual public spheres coupled with the recent push in the federal government for agencies to use the Internet to engage with the American public and create civic participation calls for a review of the discourse appearing on these sites. As such, an analysis of selected agencies' use of social media (specifically blogs and Facebook) shows that it is not yet being used to facilitate dialogue between the agencies and the constituents they serve due to the language, structure, and content of the communications. While some have made more progress than others in this regard, the communication on the sites is largely one-way and top-down. Furthermore, the citizens' participation on the sites more closely represents a mass rather than a desired public. If agencies' social media sites are to truly serve as public spheres, then agencies must adopt techniques and behaviors that demonstrate they value civic participation. Until this happens, users of these sites must understand that because an agency has

adopted new technology it does necessarily mean that it has adopted the spirit of participation that embodies Web 2.0 principles and they should not expect the sites to always function as a collaborative space.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Scholars have long considered the Internet's potential for providing a new virtual public sphere where civic participation could thrive. The development of Web 2.0,[1] and in particular social media tools, has expanded this potential even further. There are arguments being made both for and against social media tools' ability to provide an environment that promotes rational-critical debate, an essential component of a public sphere. The question has been posed many times: Can social media increase participatory governance and promote democracy by reviving the public sphere? Many of the answers have come from looking at social media broadly or from studying private citizens' individual sites. However, the idea that such spaces could improve democracy becomes especially interesting when considering the U.S. federal government's use of social media.

One way to frame the federal government's use of social media is to understand the communications as a form of rhetoric represented digitally by the government and disseminated via electronic distributed networks (Losh, 2009, p.47). If government social media sites are considered to be digital rhetoric, then it is necessary to scrutinize the sites,

[1] For my project, Web 2.0 will be defined as web applications that facilitate interactive information sharing, interoperability, user-centered design, and collaboration on the World Wide Web. The main distinction is that content on Web 2.0 applications is user-generated content as opposed to static websites that do not allow for interaction.

because politics online may not be fully transparent nor necessarily provide for collaboration. In fact, they may be digital representations of politics offline—or worse. That is, citizens may come to these social media platforms expecting the communications to be aimed at persuading users to collaborate on an issue or topic, not aimed at persuading them to take up the agencies' messages. However, more often than not what is found on these sites is top-down communication about the agency's position and an attempt to coerce the user into commenting if they agree or disagree, but not participate in a solution.

It is in this context that we must consider the recent push in the federal government for agencies to use the Internet in order to facilitate collaboration and engage the American public in civic participation. In early 2009, President Obama announced his open government initiative and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) released a subsequent memo in December 2009 that stated federal agencies were to take actions to implement the principles of transparency, participation, and collaboration. Among other things, the plan stated that agencies should take prompt steps to expand access to information by making it available online in an open format. Specifically, it required that agencies post information on a newly created website, www.data.gov, create an open government website, and post an open government plan on the website. The memo stressed that the plan should include elements that describe how each agency would improve participation and stated that each plan have "proposals for new feedback mechanisms, including innovative tools and practices that create new and easier methods for public engagement" (Orszag, 2009, p.9). In addition to this memo, the Chief

Information Officer has also stressed that agencies must use technology to "not only serve citizens, but to tap into their ideas for helping to tackle government issues." (CIO Council, 2009, p.1)

To fulfill the participatory requirement in OMB's memo, many agencies are leveraging social media tools. Moreover, the General Services Administration (GSA) has been a proponent of agencies using social media and has promoted it by developing policies and guidelines that explicitly inform heads of agencies how to use social media to comply with the open government initiative. As a result, there has been a proliferation of federal agencies creating social media websites. However, a cursory review of the sites suggest a lack of public participation, which may be because creators of the sites do not yet understand how to fully engage citizens or because creating the sites was an easy way to satisfy the initiative. Indeed, while these sites are intended to be spaces where the government and its citizens can be co-creators of ideas, it appears that some of the sites have been developed only to check off a box. Moreover, it is apparent that government leaders' overall attitude about the public's ability to be knowledge-makers and contribute to solutions has not changed—ultimately, the government continues to believe that it knows best and has the expertise.

I will argue that several agencies' use of social media tools, specifically blogs and Facebook, are not truly being used to facilitate dialogue between the agency and the constituents it serves due to the language, structure, and content of the communications. While some have made more progress than others in this regard, most still employ one-way, top-down communication. I will also argue that the extent to which these agencies

perceive their missions' reliance upon communication with citizens has a significant effect on whether or not the sites have attributes of a public sphere.

My paper will first explain Habermas's concept of the public sphere to establish the criteria I will use to interpret the social media sites. Then, I will briefly review recent literature about digital rhetoric, literature that discusses social media and its implications for democracy, and literature that focuses on the government's use of social media. After I describe my methods for selecting which agencies and websites I have analysed and give the current state of the federal government's use of social media, I will detail the results derived from an analysis of communications of selected social media sites. I will then conclude with discussing the few examples of social media sites that seem to be facilitating civic participation and provide a vision for a way forward.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW OF PUBLIC SPHERE THEORY, DIGITAL RHETORIC, U.S. GOVERNMENT'S USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA, AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION

In his work, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society,* Habermas develops the concept of the public sphere: it emerged in Europe during the 18th century as a space for critical discussion, open to all where private citizens came together to form a public and their "public reason" would be a check to government power. This public reason is known as rational-critical debate. Specifically, rational-critical debate had several qualities, such as the topic should generally be about rules governing relations between citizens, confront political ideas, and be a public use of reason (p. 27). To Habermas, it was important that the public sphere was a space between the private interests of everyday life in society and the state, or government. It served as an intermediate between the family and work domains (domains where private interests are expressed first and foremost) and the state domain (a domain where state interests are expressed by power). It was in this space, what Habermas called the "bourgeois" public sphere, where citizens discussed (1) common public affairs and (2) organized against an oppressive state and other of forms power. The most important characteristic of the public sphere was that it was critical and not passive. That is, there was an open discussion of issues of common concerns that were discussed

in which discursive argumentation was employed to ascertain general interests and the public good.

Prior to the formation of the public sphere the dominant culture was representational, where the government represented itself by overpowering its citizens. The public sphere in the 18th century then, emerged before the advent of freedom of speech, a free press, and the right to freely engage in political debate. Habermas thought of these freedoms, however, as the West's attempt to deceive citizens by offering free institutions. For example, Habermas discusses the mass press (a free Western institution) and says that it is a commercialization of the public sphere that led to its decline. While it extends the public sphere, it does not encourage critical debate (pp. 169-175.) Instead, the public is exposed to a "commercially fostered consumer attitude" (p.169) which shapes discourse and significantly limits topics to those that are sanctioned by the media. Hence, Habermas viewed the introduction of mass media as an element that led to the decline of the bourgeoisie public sphere.

In understanding Habermas's notion of rational-critical debate, it is helpful to turn to *The Power Elite* by C. Wright Mills. Specifically, he discusses "authority by discussion" where citizens discuss problems as a way to form several perspectives which are then organized. One viewpoint emerges as the winner and then the citizens (or representatives) act on it in a timely manner. (Mills, 1956, pp. 299-300). Furthermore, Mills draws a distinction between public and masses: publics are informed citizens who then make decisions (necessary for democracy) and masses are passive and ignorant. In this regard, Mills describes essential components to creating publics:

- Publics adequately balance the ability to both produce and consume ideas.
- Publics have an affordable and effective means.
- Publics' ideas are translated into action.

These components, taken together with the concept of rational-critical debate, serve as my framework for evaluating the agencies' sites.

As a way to think about renewing the public sphere in light of its supposed decline, many scholars are turning to social media sites to see if they are functioning as public spheres. For example, Matthew Barton discusses Habermas's rational-critical debate and uses it to explain why Web 2.0 is potentially valuable for the creation and maintenance of a critical public sphere in his article, "The Future of Rational-Critical Debate in Public Spheres" (2005). The author emphasizes the need for the democratic, decentralized structure of the Internet to be preserved or Web 2.0 will fail due to mass media and commercialism. He also provides a useful discussion of how Web 2.0 fosters public discussion and defines Mill's terms "public" and "mass" with regard to how Web 2.0 tools encourage the formation of a public, rather than a mass. Specifically, he argues that "online writing environments encourage users to engage in public discussion" and that they are invited to not only read content but can openly contribute to it and participate (p.182). My project discusses how a government-owned writing environment, such as an agency's blog, skews this notion. As my analyses will show, more often than not citizens are only encouraged to passively read rather than actively participate.

Two additional authors that extend Barton's argument are Megan Boler and Cass Sunstein. In Boler's book, *Digital Media and Democracy: Tactics in Hard Times* (2008),

several aspects of Web 2.0's potential for democracy are discussed and she concludes by stating that blogs are a space of debate and information exchange, and therefore can be considered a public sphere. An additional point the book makes is that social movements do not emerge out of technology alone; technology may be used to enhance the movements, but it does not initiate them (p. 13). Therefore, when agencies adopt new social media tools they do not automatically use them for collaboration. Indeed, the focus of this project is to show that the level of civic participation on these sites is minimal and more must be done if true collaboration is to be achieved. Just as Boler argues "real change" comes from a deeper place, I too will show that it is not enough for agencies to adopt new tools and that attitudes about who can contribute ideas must change as well.

In addition, Sunstein also takes the idea of the public sphere and explores what makes for a well-functioning system of free expression in his book *Republic.Com 2.0* (2007). He comes up with two requirements: people need to be exposed to materials that they would not have chosen in advance and most citizens should have a range of common experiences. The author also discusses the public-forum doctrine: there must be spaces kept open to the public for expressive activity (p. 23). He explains that a public forum is a place that is government-owned but it is open to free expression. In light of agencies operating virtual forums, this notion becomes especially important considering that some government sites (like the White House's blog) do not allow users to comment on posts.

Both Andrew Chadwick's article, "Web 2.0: New Challenges for the Study of E-Democracy in an Era of Informational Exuberance" (2009) and Andrew Baoill's "Weblogs and the Public Sphere" (2010) offer dissenting voices concerning Habermas's

public sphere theory and its applicability to Web 2.0. First, Chadwick states that the idea of rational-critical debate has been romanticized in literature while in practice it is difficult to embed public spheres into political organizations. He says this is because he has found that a majority of online policy-oriented consultations have only had participation from very small groups of citizens and that there has been reluctance on the part of elected officials and public sector bureaucrats to allow such public spheres. To be sure, my research has found that the government's use of social media tools have also reinforced Chadwick's idea. However, instead of hoping for a pure public sphere, his paper offers an alternative approach, and says that more granularity in participation should not only be thought of as valuable, but also encouraged. It is precisely this granularity in which I am interested in and will demonstrate the techniques that some agencies use on their social media sites that are beginning to inspire participation. The author claims that this granular information environment of Web 2.0 allows citizens to connect with "real" policy-making. While he concludes that the web may not provide for a public sphere, it does have value nonetheless in online consultation and public policymaking (p. 40).

In the same manner, Baoill's article assesses the impact of blogs on the public sphere by using Habermas's model. He says that there are three qualities a space must have to be considered a public sphere: the inclusivity of access, a disregard for the external ranks (that is participants are thought to be equal and they do not have a known preexisting social or political rank (Habermas, 1956, p. 54)), and potential for rational-debate until a consensus is achieved. After he assesses blogs against these criteria, he

says that improvements could be made to help blogs meet this ideal. Specifically, he claims there are many impediments that stop blogs from being considered a strong public sphere, such as the time commitment required, the influence of personal networks ("top bloggers" are considered to have preexisting rank), and the inability of people to properly use technological solutions (p.1). As my project will show, agencies' social media sites fail as least one aspect of the three criteria because they are not places where debate occurs until an explicit consensus is achieved.

If it is true that "government remains an important digital media-maker and regulator" as Elizabeth Losh says in *Virtualpolitick* (2009, p.5), then it is especially important to be critical of its use of social media. It is within this context that Losh analyzes the ideology behind the government's digital discourse, anxieties about new online practices, and what happens when official material is parodied and remixed by online users. It is also within this context that I will argue that agencies' sites I reviewed have a long way to go until they begin serving as public spheres. *Virtualpolitick* also provides context for understanding the larger implication of "public digital messages" as Losh defines digital rhetoric (p.4). Specifically, Losh's explanation of this new form of public rhetoric is particularly useful in my analyses of what agencies are doing. She argues that there are four ways government use electronic media: (1) institutional branding, (2) public diplomacy, (3) social marketing, and (4) risk communication (p. 66).

Losh also shows how the online spaces provide no more interaction or content than information available offline and draws the conclusion that the government is aimed at preserving its own power and is focused on regulation. Moreover, she notes that this

approach is delaying effective electronic governance. Finally, she also says that the government risks losing out on the opportunity to work with citizens and allowing them to have meaningful interaction with digital forms of government. Indeed, my review of the communications coming from blogs and Facebook show how these tools have the potential for allowing such interaction but the government is not yet capitalizing on the opportunity.

Losh addresses the larger field of digital rhetoric as she discusses James P. Zappen's article "Digital Rhetoric: Toward an Integrated Theory" which argues digital rhetoric is "an assemblage of heterogeneous elements" (p. 94). However, she adds that "discussions about civic participation, community membership, and appropriate timing inform each other across the multiple levels of disciplinary expertise" (p. 95). In his work, Zappen provides a survey of literature on digital rhetoric up to 2005. His aim is to form a theory about digital rhetoric that may help explain how traditional rhetoric strategies are being reconfigured in digital spaces. He reviews Laura Gurak's claim that Aristotle's notions of ethos, pathos, and logos also motivate action and belief in online spaces and also discusses Barbara Warnick's article, "Critical Literacy in a Digital Era: Technology, Rhetoric, and the Public Interest" which argues digital rhetoric can transform traditional notions of rhetoric as persuasion because the web welcomes invitational discourse—discourse that encourages self-expression, participation, and creative collaboration. Warnick, he says, provides a discussion of how new media enables the formation of identities and communities in digital spaces.

Outside the argument of the public sphere's relationship to online spaces, two voices in the debate concerning the potential of Web 2.0 to improve democracy and government have been Yana Breindl and Pascal Franq. In their article, "Can Web 2.0 applications save e-democracy?" (2008) they argue that Web 2.0 applications are useful for e-democracy. They begin by stating that the core consideration of Web 2.0 and the core concept of e-democracy are both concerned with citizen participation. Therefore, Web 2.0 is useful for e-democracy and the article shows how Web 2.0 applications are directly responding to users' needs. The article also provides a high-level overview of key concepts and terms, such as providing a discussion of three dimensions of e-democracy. Moreover, it presents results of a survey of individual's perceptions of e-democracy, and argues from this data that citizens will rely upon blogs to get their political information. The authors argue that there is a risk that political actors can misuse their position as opinion leaders, especially if they "express themselves beyond the constraints of traditional information selected mechanisms;" (p. 27) therefore, it is important that citizens have the ability to distinguish between political communications and information. In this regard, it is particularly important that citizens realize that much of what is presented on blogs tends to be political communications and not information, because as I will show, the blogs present only vague ideas not supported with specific details meant to persuade citizens.

A similar argument is also found in Erin Dietel-McLaughlin's "Remediating Democracy: Irreverent Composition and the Vernacular Rhetorics of Web 2.0" (2009). The author claims that political figures are using gate-keeping techniques that interfere

with Web 2.0's democratizing features, so students need to be prepared with rhetorical strategies. Clearly, this can be extended to all citizens interacting with Web 2.0 tools, especially social media sites.

More recently, Breindl's article, "Critique of Democratic Potentials of the Internet," (2009) clearly delineates what she sees as the two main arguments concerning the potential for the Internet to promote political participation: the Internet could either (1) empower individuals and foster genuine participation, or (2) it would be used as a tool by the government to monitor citizens. Breindl deconstructs the democratic potentialities of the Internet, and bases this deconstruction upon three axes proposed by T. Vedel for making sense of political issues of the Internet: information, discussion, and mobilization. For each element, the author shows how there is both an empowering aspect and a demobilizing aspect. The notion that the agencies mostly include material on their social media sites that is not purely information but instead are political communications clearly shows that they align more with Breindl's second argument.

The article by Malynnda A. Johnson, "Democracy and the Internet: An Analysis of the Use of Technology in Promoting Political Activism" provides a way of understanding the range of outcomes that technology can have upon citizens. This article discusses researchers that are examining the democratic potential of the Internet as a means to reinvigorate political participation. It does argue that there still remains a question about whether technology has any impact on political engagement, and whether that impact is positive or negative. The article demonstrates how websites can engage citizens and encourage their participation by getting their attention and urging them to

consider an aspect of politics they had not considered in the past. Though not related specifically to social media, the article's discussion about websites and participation can be transferred to these evolving sites. However, since most of the sites in my review have not inspired participation, it seems that for the time being the adoption of new technology has not yet made an impact.

In a more general sense, scholars are examining the way Web 2.0 is enabling communication and the effects advanced communication is having on society. For example, *The Cluetrain Manifesto* (2009) provides an overview for understanding how the Internet has transformed communication. Though it deals with business and the marketplace, the idea that "corporations work best when the people on the inside have the fullest contact possible with people on the outside" certainly is appropriate when thinking about the government's use of Web 2.0 tools. The authors present 95 theses that call for both consumers and organizations to use the Internet to establish a heightened level of communication both within and between these two groups. It finds that organizations must change in order to respond to the new marketplace environment.

Jeff Jarvis also looks at communication and collaboration in his book *What Would Google Do?* (2009). He provides a discussion of how Google's philosophy of openness and transparency has created a new (and better) model for how organizations should operate. He "reverse-engineers" Google and also applies what he learns to other disciplines: he has a section on how governments can benefit from upholding Google's model and argues that it is especially important for governments to use Web 2.0 for

collaborative purposes. Taken together, these works provide powerful examples of why the government should be striving to create platforms for collaboration.

Finally, there is an evolving body of literature that describes how the federal government is, or should be, using Web 2.0. They either provide (1) positive examples, (2) negative critiques, or (3) guidance to governments about how they should be using Web 2.0. First, the best example of a positive outcome using Web 2.0 comes from *Wiki Government: How Technology Can Make Government Better, Democracy Stronger, and Citizens More Powerful* by Beth Noveck (2009). The author worked on a collaborative project for the Patent and Trade Organization (PTO). She finds that collaborative democracy is a new vision of governance in the digital age and shows some of the ways that this vision can become reality. She argues that it is very important to use technology to connect the expertise of many to the power of the few (pp. 13-15). The book describes three arguments for collaborative democracy: collaboration as a distinct form of democratic participation, visual deliberation, and egalitarian self-selection. In addition, she replaces the theory of institutional expertise with collaborative practices for gathering and evaluating information and transforming raw data into useful knowledge. She offers lessons for designing better practices for engaging the public in government.

The Center for Digital Governments also offers successful examples in its paper, "Real Life. Live: When Government Acts More Like the People it Serves" (2010). The paper begins with an introduction to e-government and gives three defining directions that it recommends the government should take. The second direction, "going mobile and going social," is related to understanding social media in terms of a public sphere. It

discusses the benefits of Web 2.0 and states that when you make "friends" with these tools, the government is placed in the middle of social networks rather than expecting the citizens to come to the government from a website without an introduction through a trusted environment. While this notion is considered a positive aspect in the paper, my research has shown that citizens should be wary of this because it more easily allows the government to market its message.

While understanding the positive outcomes of governments using Web 2.0 is important, understanding the negative outcomes also provides valuable lessons. Jerry Brito's paper, *Hack, Mash & Peer: Crowdsourcing Government Transparency* (2000) is critical of how the government is providing information online and says that very little is online and access to it is limited (it should be noted that this paper is from 2000, but some of the arguments are still applicable). The author describes how third parties improvise and take what data they can find and use online tools to make the data useful. What is particularly interesting is the author's discussion of crowdsourcing, which occurs when a large group of people create a product that is usually produced by a single individual or organization by making small individual contributions. This process is made possible by Web 2.0 tools. Moreover, the article goes on to argue that the government should provide the necessary building blocks for crowdsourcing to be used to its potential so that expertise of citizens can be leveraged for solutions.

In addition, Evan Ratcliff's "The Wired Presidency: Can Obama Really Reboot the White House?" (2009) discusses Obama's open government initiative and begins by describing his first web video address as President-elect on YouTube. Specifically, he

says that critics have noted it lacked an outlet for citizens to respond because the comment feature was disabled and response videos were forbidden to appear next to it. Therefore, even communication from the biggest advocate of open government is still one-way (and as the paper will show, this still remains the case). The article states that the President was simply harnessing the latest tools to talk to its citizens, not with them. It goes on to discuss challenges with Obama's promised transition to bring social media tools to the executive branch and discusses a few successful cases of the federal government already using these tools. The article ends with a question that gets to the heart of my research: What will allowing users to post feedback accomplish?

A blog post by Mark Drapeau, "Government 2.0: How Social Media Could Transform Gov PR," (2010) provides suggestions about how agencies can successfully use Web 2.0 to transform their image. He argues that governments must adapt to the Internet-enabled, hyper-connected world if they are to effectively communicate. He says that authentic and transparent personalities portrayed via social networks can serve as public outreach ambassadors and this will help transform government for the people into government with the people. Concepts that he uses when talking about the benefits of using social networking tools are "ambient awareness" or an "ambient intimacy." This allows the government to connect with the audience on a more personal level. Though Drapeu finds agencies should discuss political as well as personal issues to be effective, many have yet to fully embrace the concept of cultivating personalities on their social media sites.

The authors Suzanne Acar, Alonso Jose, and Kevin Novak also put together a report to serve the federal government called “Improving Access to Government through Better Use of The Web,” (2009) which found that fully using web technology within government is a challenge due to environment, policy, legal, and cultural issues. It also says that the government would have to embrace openness, transparency, and collaboration as well as learn the appropriate technical skills to use the tools. However, outdated policies, budgeting and personnel constraints, and a slowing-moving bureaucratic culture have impeded change thus far. While some progress may have been made since this article, agencies have nonetheless been slow to fully use social media as it is intended.

Finally, an abundance of guidance to agencies from the federal government exists. For example, GSA created a document, “Government and Social Media” (2009) to instruct agencies on how best to implement Web 2.0 tools. This is important to see how agencies are encouraged to not only use the tools, but to see what other instructions they are given. For example, they are told to use graphics that are eye-catching, and to be “fun,” as well as use language that is less elevated and more conversational. However, it seems agencies largely have not adopted the guidelines since my research has found that the language and content is similar to official press releases.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS FOR ANALYZING U.S. GOVERNMENT SOCIAL MEDIA WEBSITES

As previously mentioned, Losh has found that there may be missed opportunities on government websites and I propose that there are also missed opportunities on government social media sites. To provide an analysis of the federal government's use of social media, I performed case studies of selected agencies' blogs and Facebook pages and compared those with an analysis of the same communications found in their official reports or press releases and on their official websites. Specifically, I selected four agencies that have blogs, official websites, and accessible press releases and analyzed four sets of communication from each agency. In addition, for two of these agencies, I also offer a broader perspective by looking at their Facebook pages in addition to their press releases, .gov website, and blogs in order to compare the differences, if any, between platforms.

To select the blogs, I performed a cursory review of all the federal blogs that exist (there are currently about 16 blogs for executive branch agencies) and chose two that have a large amount of activity and one that had little activity, as well as two that were somewhere in between that spectrum. My aim was to choose blogs that represented different levels of activity and participation. I was concerned with the size and status of each agency, so I focused on executive agencies with large budgets.

To this end, I reviewed communications for the following agencies: Department of Defense (DOD), Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Department of State (State), and the White House. I selected these agencies because they had similar budgets and were of similar size. In addition, their missions varied, so that was useful in terms of understanding how mission may affect the use of social media. They also used social media in different ways, which was important because I could provide a range of examples. To take this review a step further, I also looked at the Facebook pages of State and the White House. This allowed me to select from a wide range of communications and provide more examples to compare to one another.

For all of the previously mentioned communications and agencies, I performed a rhetorical analysis of their sites and discourse analysis of the text to link both text and sites with underlying power structures. Specifically, for the rhetorical analysis, I first looked at the genres as a whole (reports, websites, blogs, and Facebook) to see if the government communications upheld the conventional notions of those genres or if they purposefully deviated from them. Next, I also analyzed how each site or report was framed and what perspective was being presented. I asked questions such as, is this blog entry coming from an official voice within the agency and do they have a deliberate message to share? Or is this a mid-level manager posing questions and ideas in order to gain feedback? The angle for each site and entry was important in understanding if this message was to be understood as the agency perspective or if it was open for discussion. In the same manner, I analyzed the images and graphics, the keywords and headings used, what presuppositions were being made, and if elements were left out entirely.

I also performed a discourse analysis of each set of communications to provide a more microscopic level of detail by looking at sentences, phrases, and words. I specifically looked at topicalization for each sentence and paragraph, agency and who/what was given power, omission of information, connotations to see what other meanings are associated with the words that were used, and tone. To accomplish this task, I used a common rubric that had the following categories: use of informal language, use of jargon, use of technical language, use of persuasive images, use of hedging, use of intentional vagueness, use of specific examples, use of direct quotes, use of rhetorical questions, use of language that appeals to emotion, use of appropriate subjects, use of ambiguous or conflicting information, use of authoritative author, and use of commenting. (Please see the appendix for the rubric.) The categories were chosen because of their ability to either encourage or discourage rational-critical debate within the communications. For example, if there was jargon, technical language, hedging, vague phrases, and ambiguous information the reader may not clearly understand the facts and arguments being presented and therefore may not have enough information within the communication to engage in a discussion. Moreover, if the author was not providing clear information this could be a device in which to persuade a user to accept the message. However, if there were specific examples and appropriate subjects in the communications, the reader had a better opportunity to understand the topic and not be influenced by the author's persuasion, and therefore was more likely to comment. Furthermore, I noted the use of persuasive images, direct quotes, rhetorical questions, language that appealed to emotion, and the use of an authoritative author to see if the

reader was being persuaded to accept the message or if he or she was actually being encouraged to participate. Finally, the general level of commenting also suggested if rational-critical debate had the potential to exist—if there was very little or no comments then certainly no discussion was taking place.

I also analyzed the comments on the sites as a way to draw additional conclusions about the communications. For sites such as Facebook pages that had more than 100 comments, I took a random sampling of comments that were intended to represent the entire set of comments. In addition, I reviewed the policies and guidance the agencies are creating about the use of social media sites in order to understand the reasons for differences and/or similarities in the communications.

Finally, I found government social media sites that were functioning differently than the blogs and Facebook pages that I included in my main review. They seemed to be offering places where civic participation and collaboration were occurring, and therefore may be models for serving as public spheres. I included descriptions and analysis of these sites in my review as a way to show comparisons with those agencies and sites that I analyzed and as a way to demonstrate aspects that agencies may want to consider in the future.

CHAPTER 4: OVERVIEW OF U.S. GOVERNMENT SOCIAL MEDIA WEBSITES

The General Services Administration (GSA) is responsible for assisting web managers at federal agencies, including providing information about general requirements, common web practices, staffing and governance issues, website design and usability, and performance measures. In addition, GSA provides guidelines to agencies about how they are to fulfill executive initiatives, such as the open government initiative. Therefore, it is the prominent authority in the federal government about social media and as such offers guidelines, tips, and best practices for agencies that desire to implement social media sites.

GSA is also an advocate of social media as well as one of the first adopters. For example, on its web page dedicated to social media, GSA informs agencies that social media can be used to "further promote government information and services." It gives examples of how an agency can use the sites, such as bringing together employees and citizens who are interested in an agency's work, using them for recruitment, and announcing events. Moreover, GSA states that social media can assist agencies in achieving their missions.

At the time of my review, GSA listed 109 blogs associated with federal agencies. In addition, the Facebook page titled "Government on Facebook" listed 59 pages that are

affiliated with the federal government. The following are some examples of agency blogs:

- "2010 Census: The Director's Blog," the official blog of Robert M. Groves, director of the U.S. Census Bureau.
- "The Justice Blog," the official blog of the Department of Justice.
- "Library of Congress Blog," a blog that highlights news and collections from the Library of Congress.
- "NARAtion," a blog about public access to the records of the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration.
- "Smithsonian Institution," a blog that offers insights and information about Smithsonian Institution exhibitions, events, collections, research projects, and more.

Examples of agencies now using Facebook pages are Department of Labor, Department of Treasury, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, Federal Emergency Management Agency, and Veterans Affairs. In addition to blogs and Facebook, agencies are also using other social media tools, such as YouTube, Wikis, Podcasts, Twitter, and Tumblr.

It is clear that the push to use social media and other Web 2.0 tools is growing. It seems inevitable that soon all agencies will use some form of social media. What remains to be seen is if the federal government is using these tools for collaboration or if it is taking advantage of them to market their message in new forums.

CHAPTER 5: DETAILED ANALYSIS OF FOUR U.S. GOVERNMENT SOCIAL MEDIA WEBSITES

The agencies I reviewed—Department of Defense (DOD), Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Department of State (State), and the White House—are using social media differently from one another but none are fostering collaborative spaces. State seems to be using the tools the most to encourage civic participation. The White House uses the tools less so than State, but more than both DOD and DHS, which seem to be using them the least in terms of collaboration. While State and the White House seem to be making more progress than DOD and DHS, no agency is yet enabling these sites to serve as public spheres. A detailed analysis of the communications on these platforms as well as a comparison between the communications found in press releases and official websites will illuminate the ways in which rational-critical debate is both (minimally) encouraged and discouraged.

When considering Mills's three aspects of publics, in general the blogs and Facebook pages of the agencies do not allow the users to adequately balance the ability to both produce and consume ideas. Mills states that in a public "as many people express opinions as receive them," whereas in a mass, "far fewer people express opinions than receive them" (pp. 303-4). The government's use of social media has not changed the balance between production and consumption. Agencies produce the opinion on any

given site because they control what is posted and how the message is framed. In terms of commenting, there is opportunity for citizens to express themselves, but the majority of those who do comment (and not many do so on the blogs) do not directly address the political topic (as we will see in the detailed analysis) and therefore are what Mills would call an "abstract collection of individuals," which more closely aligns with a mass than a public. Indeed, simply providing a way for users to express themselves by enabling the comment feature (and again, we will see that not all agencies enable it) does not automatically transform a mass into a public. Exceptions to this will be noted as beginnings of where publics are starting to form.

In addition, the majority of sites I reviewed provided an affordable means to produce ideas (though this is an attribute of the Internet and therefore inherent in social media). Specifically, insofar as users are provided an opportunity to comment on a post it can be considered affordable due to the prevalence of Internet access. However, the sites did not provide an effective way of producing ideas that contribute to an end solution due to the nature of the language in the post. According to Mills, communications should be "so organized that there is a chance immediately and effectively to answer back any opinion expressed in public;" however, in a mass, "the communications that prevail are so organized that it is difficult or impossible for the individual to answer back immediately or with any effect" (Mills, 1956, pp. 303-304). Specifically, this means it should have an effect on the group's decisions, but as Trebor Scholz notes and as seen in the social media sites, "individual goals of participants are not always shared by the 'group,'" which means they are not collaborating—"[an] intensive form of working

together with a common goal. The gain or loss is shared among all." What they are doing can be thought more as cooperation, where the gain or loss is not shared, but felt individually. In light of these distinctions then, social media users on the agencies' sites "cooperate," in that they contribute a few comments to a post and either tend to agree or disagree but they do not collaborate toward a common goal. Therefore, what is seen on these sites still resembles a mass.

Finally, the last feature of a public is that ideas are translated into action. According to Mills, this happens when "opinion formed by such discussion readily finds an outlet in effective action, even against—if necessary—the prevailing system of authority" (Mills, 1956, pp. 303-304). On the contrary, "the realization of opinion in action is controlled by authorities who organize and control the channels of such action" in a mass (Mills, 1956, pp. 303-304). There was no indication (except for a few instances) that the owners of the sites were reading the opinions in the comments or that the groups were taking action toward enacting those opinions. Indeed, the best hope for action deriving from the discussions would be controlled by authorities; however, it is doubtful that these comments affected an outcome.

For each of the following chapters, I present a rhetorical analysis of the sites I reviewed as a whole and then a discourse analysis of each of the four sets of communications coming from those sites and official press releases. The following table describes the topics of the communications and the agencies' use of traditional and social media.

Table 1: List of Agencies and Communications across Platforms

Agency/Subject	Blog Post	Official Website	Official Press Release	Facebook Post
DOD				
General McChrystal Resignation	X		X	
NATO in Afghanistan	X	X	X	
Response to BP Oil Spill	X		X	
Stop Loss Pay for Service Members	X	X	X	
DHS				
Secure Flight Program	X	X	X	
Response to BP Oil Spill	X	X	X	
Open Government Initiative	X	X	X	
Public-Private Sector Partnership Efforts	X	X	X	
White House				
Fatherhood Efforts Program	X		X	X
Health Care Reform	X	X	X	X
Improper Payments Elimination and Recovery Act	X		X	X
Response to BP Oil Spill	X	X	X	X
State				
World Press Freedom Day	X		X	X
Increase Aid to Gaza	X		X	X
Opportunity in the Americas	X		X	X
World Food Prize Laureate	X		X	X

CHAPTER 6: DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE'S USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The Department of Defense (DOD) has not yet begun to use its social media site to encourage public participation. Instead, it is mostly using the site to echo its official press releases and content from its official website. This chapter presents (1) a rhetorical analysis of DOD's social media site that demonstrates how it contributes to the lack of civic participation and (2) four discourse analyses of communications coming from this site as well as comparisons to discourse analyses of communications appearing in either official press releases, DOD's official website, or both.

Analysis of DOD's Social Media Site

Overall, DOD's blog, "DOD Live," is traditional, moderately user friendly, and upholds some conventions of a blog. For example, the design of the blog is straightforward and does not contain flashy images, an abundance of graphics, or special fonts. The color scheme uses traditional colors for a U.S. government site, blue and white. (See fig. 1.)

Figure 1: Screen Shot of the Homepage of DOD's Blog.

The header also uses shades of blue with a logo that is a watermark under the words "DoD Live" in white. The main navigation menu is very terse, offering the user four choices. In addition, there is also a navigation menu that offers categories of blog subjects, which contain archived blog posts related to these subjects. The design of the page, especially the header, sets a very serious tone and does not create an appealing environment for socialization, but rather serves as a place where a user can gather information.

In addition, the site is only moderately user friendly. The presentation of the actual blog posts is user friendly because the page is split into two columns and the left column, which contains the posts, is larger than the right column. In addition, the entries are consistent and have a blue title that is flush left. There is occasionally a corresponding image in a post which is found immediately under the title and is also flush left.

However, some elements are not presented adequately. For example, if a post is not related to one of the subjects in the aforementioned navigation menu, then it is archived by date. Also, to the right of the navigation menu there is a search engine that enables the user to search with keywords. This can be confusing for a user because he or she is presented with numerous choices for finding an archived post.

Moreover, the content in the right column is focused on social media tools and is presented in an overwhelming fashion. First, there is a box at the very top which lists DOD's most recent tweets from its Twitter account. Next, there are links to follow the department on Facebook and Twitter, listen to podcasts, or send the department an e-mail. Directly under those links is a box filled with nine different icons that are links to podcasts. Finally, the users gets inundated with specific posts or pages from the sites: there are links to the blog's archives by dates; links to Facebook pages of DOD employees, links to Twitter pages, a federal government blogroll, and a box that shows the most recent comments on the blog. The following graphic illustrates the abundance of links.

Figure 2: Screen Shot of Social Media Column on DOD's Blog.

Finally, the site upholds familiar conventions of a blog. For example, it has a blogroll, which is a list of other blogs recommend by the blogger by providing links to them (usually in a sidebar list) (Barrios, 2009, p.16). DOD also posts several times a day, which is considered a best practice in blogging in order to gain an audience (Wei, 2004,

p.3). However, while these are two elements users may be familiar with, it does not seem like they are functioning on DOD's site as one would expect. For example, a blogroll indicates a community that has similar interests and in which the bloggers read one another's posts and comments, but none of the entities on DOD's blogroll commented in the posts I reviewed. In fact, most of the entries did not have any comments and a few entries only had one or two comments. In addition, judging from the lack of comments, DOD is not engaging its audience with its prolific posting.

While the design of the blog is relatively user friendly and it contains some conventions, the traditional and serious tone of the blog may deter users from actively participating in dialogue, which will be detailed in the following analysis.

Detailed Analysis: General McChystal Resignation

The first set of communications is about General McChrystal's interview in Rolling Stone magazine and his subsequent resignation. The communications are from three platforms: an official press release, DOD's official website, and DOD's blog. The language on the blog post is extremely similar to the language found in the press release and on the website, and as a result does not encourage users to participate in the discussion. In fact, the blog post and the website offer the same content and link to one another. Instead of offering a perspective other than the official stance on the issue, DOD repeated itself in three different platforms. The following table provides a high-level comparison of the language across all three mediums.

Table 2: Comparison of Analysis for General McChrystal Resignation Communications

	Official Press Release	Official Website	Blog Post
Use of informal language	○	○	○
Use of jargon	●	●	●
Use of technical language	○	○	○
Use of persuasive images	○	○	●
Use of intentional vagueness	●	●	●
Use of specific, detailed examples	○	○	○
Use of direct quotes	●	●	●
Use of rhetorical questions	○	○	○
Use of language that appeals to emotion	●	●	●
Use of appropriate subjects	ϴ	ϴ	ϴ
Use of authoritative author	●	○	○
Use of commenting	◒	n/a	○

Key:
● Greatly used
ϴ Moderately used
○ Not used at all

Official Press Release

The official press release is from Robert Gates, Defense Secretary, and the title is "Gates Issues Statement on McChrystal Profile." Overall, the language in the press release is vague and does not offer specific details. Gates also uses many appeals to emotion throughout the release. For example, the beginning of the release states that Gates read, with "concern," a profile piece in Rolling Stone magazine and he believes McChrystal made a "significant mistake" and "exercised poor judgment." The use of negative words connotes that McChrystal has committed an offense, but it is never outright stated in the release what he has done. In fact, the piece never discusses what the mistake was. In addition, even though the article is about McChrystal, he is the subject in less than half of the sentences. For example, the focus shifts away from McChrystal to

the troops: "…our troops are making extraordinary sacrifices, our singular focus must be supporting them…without distractions." Again, the reader infers that the distraction is McChrystal but it is not specifically stated. The reader may also perceive that the interview in Rolling Stone has already made an impact on the troops, but does not know for sure. The release ends with the reader learning that McChrystal has been recalled to Washington to discuss the issue in person; however, specifics concerning timeframes, possible outcomes, or whether McChrystal intends to go to Washington are not given.

The press release also uses tactics to appeal to emotion. For example, Gates says "We are fighting a war against al Qaeda and extremist allies, who directly threaten the United States…" He invokes al Qaeda as a way to scare the reader into agreeing with him. He also uses phrases to get the readers to sympathize with the military, such as "Our troops and coalition partners are making extraordinary sacrifices on behalf of our security."

DOD allows its users to comment on its press releases for a certain period of time. At the time of my review, there were 10 comments. Of the 10, 2 comments agreed with the statement and called for his resignation, and 4 disagreed. For example, one commenter that disagreed stated that McChyrstal did the right thing and was being "scapegoated." Overall, the majority of the comments seemed well-informed and only one was off topic. The following figure is excerpted from the comment section of the press release.

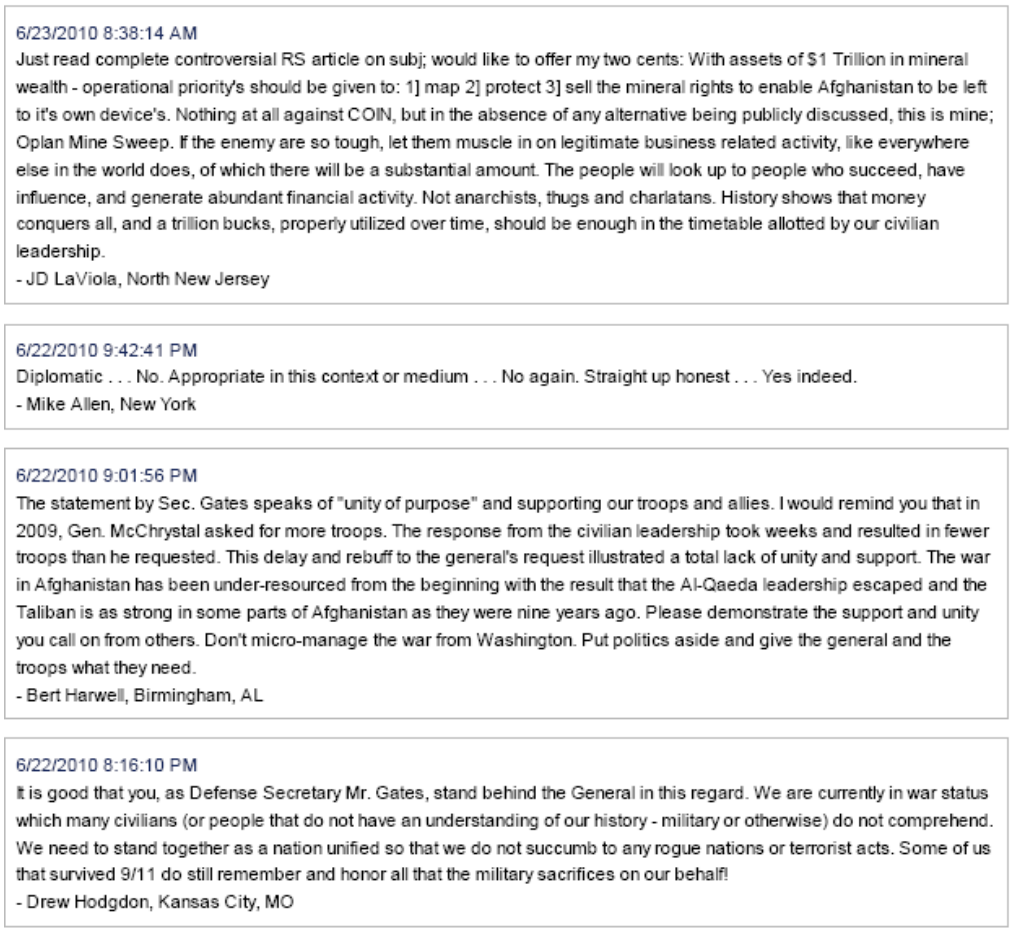


Figure 3: Comments from DHS's Blog Post on McChrystal's Resignation.

As the majority of comments illustrate, the article incited some debate, though no one talked back or with one another; they were only speaking to DOD. Nonetheless, the article did garner some thought-provoking comments.

Official Website

The post on DOD's website about McChyrstal's resignation includes many quotes from President Obama and also does not give specific information. For example, it includes a quote from President Obama that elaborates on McChyrstal's service to the country, especially in Afghanistan. He goes on to say that it was not a personal decision

and the reader finds that the language in the quote is very formal and contains jargon: “War is greater than any one man or woman, whether a private, a General or a President.” Next, President Obama invokes national security to appeal to the reader’s emotions by stating, “We are going to break the Taliban’s momentum...we are going to build Afghan capacity...we are going to relentlessly apply pressure on al-Qaida.” It is not clear how these declarative statements about the future relate to the resignation of McChyrstal.

Again, an appeal to emotion is made with the following quote from President Obama, “I've got no greater honor than serving as commander in chief of our men and women in uniform, and it is my duty to ensure that no diversion complicates the vital mission that they are carrying out.” This statement contains numerous words and phrases to invoke emotions: “honor,” “vital mission,” “strength and greatness,” and “come together as one.” The piece ends with Gates’s reminder that there is nothing more important than winning the war on terror. This is very strong, direct way to end and can be seen as justification for calling for the General’s resignation.

Blog Post

The corresponding blog post related to this issue is “McChrystal Resigns, Petraeus Nominated.” The author is not given for the post. The entry is also rather short; about 5 sections or paragraphs. The blog entry is an excerpt of the communication found on the website. In fact, the reader is given a link to go back to DOD’s website for more information.

The post uses many of the same quotes from President Obama and also uses vague language. In addition, McChrystal is not the subject of the majority of sentences; in

many instances President Obama is the subject and at one point "the decision" McChrystal made is a subject. This shifts the focus to the President and the decision, and removes the focus from the actual call for resignation. Moreover, the post closes with two quotes from Obama. He says that McChrystal's conduct does not meet "the standard set by a commanding general and it undermines the civilian control…the core of our democracy system and erodes trust that's necessary for our team to work together to achieve our objectives in Afghanistan." These statements contain an immense amount of jargon and yet again the reader's focus is shifted.

It is not surprising then that there were no comments on the blog post. It was a recitation of the website which used formal language, numerous quotes from the President, and constantly shifted focus. While the press release did encourage some commenting even though the language was similar in the blog post, the users were not engaging in rational-critical debate. In addition, instead of using the blog as a tool to inspire a discussion concerning dissention within the military, DOD chose to lift the website material and therefore created a communication that served only to impart information to citizens.

Detailed Analysis: NATO Presence in Afghanistan

The next set of communications concern the presence of NATO in Afghanistan. The communications come from two platforms, DOD's official website and blog. The website and blog post treat the subject differently and provide balance: the website gives a high-level overview and the blog post is from an Army General who provides an assessment of the effort. In addition, the website communication appears to have been

intended for military personnel, while the blog post was aimed at citizens. However, the perspective in the blog post did not stimulate conversation since the language did not encourage civic participation; instead the reader finds the General having a one-way conversation. The following table compares the language found on the website to the language in the blog post.

Table 3: Comparison of Analysis for NATO Presence in Afghanistan Communications

	Official Website	Blog Post
Use of informal language	●	ϴ
Use of jargon	●	●
Use of technical language	●	●
Use of persuasive images	●	○
Use of intentional vagueness	○	●
Use of specific, detailed examples	●	○
Use of direct quotes	●	●
Use of rhetorical questions	○	○
Use of language that appeals to emotion	ϴ	ϴ
Use of appropriate subjects	ϴ	ϴ
Use of authoritative author	●	●
Use of commenting	n/a	○

Key:
● Greatly used
ϴ Moderately used
○ Not used at all

Official Website

DOD's webpage for this topic serves as a repository for links to other pages on DOD's website that discuss the issue. Therefore, the page presents many different ways to learn about the mission by clicking on links and going outside of the page. It also does not have much text and the information is high-level, but the tone can be gleamed from

the captions (see fig. 3): this mission is extremely organized, it is very serious, it is a positive mission, and there is a sense that this site is intended to prepare service members. It also uses images to convey the importance of the mission.

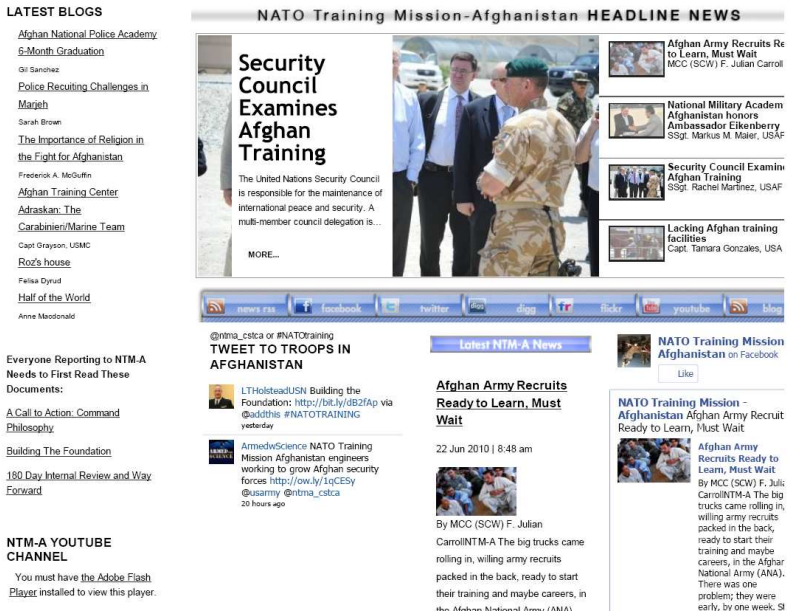


Figure 4: Screen Shot from DOD's Website.

As previously mentioned, the site seems to be more for service members than citizens. For example, there are links related to training with titles such as "Police Recruiting Challenges in Marjeh" and "The Importance of Religion in the Fight for Afghanistan."

As shown in the figure, the middle of the page contains a large headline "NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan Headline News" and a large picture of a man in a camouflaged uniform. This picture works to illustrate the seriousness of the mission and helps the reader gain personal attachment. Interestingly, the website allows the user

options to connect with the troops via social media tools. For instance, a user can "tweet" to troops.

Blog Post

The blog post on DOD Live is titled "NTM-Afghanistan, Six-Month Assessment" and is written by US Army Brigadier General Gary Patton, who is the NATO Training Mission Afghanistan deputy commander. Throughout the post, the author mixes both formal and informal language. He also frequently uses jargon and makes an effort to invoke authority as a way to establish credibility.

For example, the post begins informally, with the author giving his title and stating that he is responsible for training the Afghan army. Next, he says that he is going to give the "180-day assessment in terms of themes." These themes are central to his post. In addition, when he discusses training, he mixes both formal and informal language while explaining the approach. First, he says that the approach to training has been changed. The training is no longer focused on producing quantities of individual for the army, now there is "an eye toward quality." He calls it "standard-based training."

He also uses "we" in numerous cases so that it appears he is speaking on behalf of DOD, which helps to establish credibility. For example, he says "we've reversed the negative, in some cases stagnant growth trends" and that "we in conjunction with the Afghan leadership have reversed the trends in the army." Not only does the reader get jargon in these phrases, but they are also vague. He also does not provide numbers for the trends. In addition, he goes on to say that the army was not growing at the rate to meet the objectives and that now there are positive trends in all the numbers. The reader does

not know what objectives is he referring to and still does not get any more information about the trends.

Next, he ends the post with stating that it has been a challenge to ensure leader development, but that he has been making improvements. He further clarifies this by saying that it takes “experience” and years of service to create an “effective leader.” Since this is an assessment, one would expect to see information detailing how many leaders there are and their titles. However, he simply states they are working to reduce the deficit. In addition, he added that “we lack a sustainment capacity in the Afghan army largely due to the order that we have created a force structure in the army, and the creation of service support units are in the future.” It is unclear what actions are being taken to create service support units and if there is a timeline. Further, it is unclear how this addresses his initial challenge.

As demonstrated, this post uses a lot of jargon and does not provide any specific detail. Furthermore, the author is invested in establishing his credibility throughout the post. While the blog appears to offer a different approach than the website, the language in the post shows that DOD was yet again pushing its idea out to citizens in an attempt to sell a message. Therefore, DOD missed an opportunity to engage citizens in a discussion about the effort in Afghanistan and present a forum where it could have received feedback, as demonstrated by the fact that it did not receive any comments on its blog.

Detailed Analysis: DOD Response to BP Oil Spill

The next set of communications are concerning the government’s response to the BP oil spill. Both communications I reviewed (an official press release and a blog post) about

the oil spill are vague, but the blog post is particularly lacking in detail. As demonstrated, a lack of specific detail and the extreme use of jargon did not foster a space where rational-critical debate could occur. As a result, this seemingly controversial blog post did not receive any comments.

The following table compares the language in the press release to the language in the blog post.

Table 4: Comparison of Analysis for DOD Response to BP Oil Spill Communications

	Official Press Release	Blog Post
Use of informal language	●	ϴ
Use of jargon	●	●
Use of technical language	●	●
Use of persuasive images	●	○
Use of intentional vagueness	○	●
Use of specific, detailed examples	●	○
Use of direct quotes	●	●
Use of rhetorical questions	○	○
Use of language that appeals to emotion	ϴ	ϴ
Use of appropriate subjects	ϴ	ϴ
Use of authoritative author	●	●
Use of commenting	○	○

Key:
● Greatly used
ϴ Moderately used
○ Not used at all

Official Press Release

The official press release titled, "Military Supports Federal Oil Spill Response," was written by Donna Miles. The release does not state her title. The release uses jargon and consistently makes statements without providing support. There are also many officials presented to the reader throughout the piece. For example, it opens with an Admiral

stating that he flew over the “massive oil slick” in the Gulf and said this made him reiterate DOD’s commitment to working “hand-in-glove” with other agencies. This term is not defined and the Admiral does not elaborate. The next section is a quote from another official from a podcast interview where he says it is a “tragic event that we are all focused on and that there is an awful lot of effort on the part of the entire government to mitigate this as quickly as we can.” While he mixes formal and informal language that helps the reader relate to him, he offers no specific details as to what this effort consists of.

The next section presents the reader with yet another official, a representative from Northcom, who discusses aerial spray missions. To his credit, he does explain what these missions entail, but when he talks about future missions he uses the term “expected” and does not commit to resuming the missions. The reader is also presented with more vague information when the release says that the Navy has positioned equipment aimed at reducing the impact, but does not offer specific measurements of how much it has been reduced. Instead, the only concrete facts are about the Navy’s resources and not how it has reduced the oil: it dispatched 66,000 feet of boom and 7 skimming systems, and has used 50 civilian contractors to operate and maintain this equipment. The reader also learns statistics about the Louisiana National Guard: 600 have been called to federal active duty and there are 5,400 available. As shown with these examples, the author avoids specifics of the actual spill and shifts the focus to different subjects and facts. Indeed, these sentences are the first time the reader is presented with solid information.

The next line tells us that the guardsmen are serving under Title 32 authority (that is, they serve under state control, but are funded through federal government) but does not tell us the relevance of this fact. The next section presents readers with yet another person, the onsite coordinator for the Coast Guard, Rear Admiral Mary Landry and they learn that she is reviewing similar Title 32 requests from states in the Gulf Coast. There is a lot emphasis on Title 32, but the release does not address why this is important to the effort.

The piece ends with giving the locations of all seven staging areas that have been set up from "Louisiana to Florida to protect sensitive shorelines." This is a passive sentence and the piece ends as it started—very vague. Furthermore, there were no comments on this press release.

Blog Post

The corresponding blog post is titled, "Oil Update: 'All Hands on Deck'" and the author is Ian Graham. The reader is not given his title or biography. The blog post is filled with many qualifiers and hedging. For example, the first section states that BP and government officials say they are moving quickly to plug the holes at the source of the spill, but says, "While states along the Gulf and the federal government work to keep oil off their shores…BP is taking action." Attention is deflected away from BP and onto the actions of the government, even though the point of the article is presumably about plugging the spill. Moreover, another official says that every available measure is being taken to minimize the impact of the spill and that "this is an all-hands-on-deck response."

The reader never learns about the measures and the phrase of the title gets repeated without being explained.

The piece also has several sentences that provide positive information first and then come to the point (which is in fact negative). For example, one section introduces the reader to Doug Suttles, COO for BP, and says that the flow of oil has not been reduced after learning that "work was going on currently that would ideally plug one of the holes." He also explains that more containers to capture the oil will be ready in the following days, but he could not say exactly how soon. Suttles consistently uses vague terms such as "ideally," "couldn't say," and "eventually;" however, this may be overlooked since the author is quoting the COO who is clearly an authority figure. This appears again when the release discusses the dispersant chemicals and says that concerns have been raised but that the lead science coordinator for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said studies showed that the benefits of the chemicals outweigh the possible negative effects the chemicals may have. It quickly glosses over this information and once again uses vague terms: "some," "possible," and "may."

Yet again, the blog post contains a link to the official press release about the military's response and to the website dedicated to the response. It is interesting that the reader is sent away from the blog post to get specific information and can only gain vague and high-level information on the blog. This topic was handled similar in both the press release and blog post: the reader is introduced to many officials and topics, but the point of each communication is never articulated. It would seem a topic such as the oil spill would have received attention on DOD's blog; however, the post was fashioned so

that citizens were not provoked to respond because there was nothing definitive being said.

Detailed Analysis: Stop Loss Pay for Service Members

Finally, I reviewed communications surrounding stop loss pay for service members. These communications come from three platforms, an official press release, DOD's website, and DOD's blog. Each platform does offer a significant difference in the treatment of the subject; however, the language in each set of communications, particularly in the blog, consistently avoids the actual subject of stop loss and therefore misses an opportunity for civic participation. In addition, the language concerning the procedure to receive pay is also vague in places which can lead to confusion. The following table provides a comparison among the three platforms.

Table 5: Comparison of Analysis for Stop Loss Pay for Service Members Communications

	Official Press Releases	Official Website	Blog Post
Use of informal language	●	○	●
Use of jargon	●	●	●
Use of technical language	○	○	○
Use of persuasive images	○	○	●
Use of intentional vagueness	⊖	⊖	⊖
Use of specific, detailed examples	○	○	○
Use of direct quotes	●	●	○
Use of rhetorical questions	○	○	○
Use of language that appeals to emotion	○	○	○
Use of appropriate subjects	●	●	●
Use of authoritative author	●	○	○
Use of commenting	○	n/a	○

Key:
● Greatly used
◒ Moderately used
○ Not used at all

Official Press Release

The official press release is titled "Time Running Out for Troops, Veterans to Claim 'Stop Loss' Pay" and the author is Army Sgt. 1st Class Michael J. Carden. The structure differs from the previous releases reviewed: it presents a fact and then a quote throughout release. Also, most of the subjects in the sentences were service members/veterans and stop loss pay, but stop loss itself was never a subject. It seems like the topic of stop loss may be controversial, so the fact that service members are not always receiving payment for when they are stop lossed is not brought to the surface. In addition, the press release uses informal language throughout, which is possibly an attempt to appeal to service members. For example, one section states that DOD wants to make sure that everyone who is eligible gets reimbursed and provides a quote from Carden, "We only have three months left…notify anyone you've served with…even family members of separated folks to apply." In addition, the article then states "Congress authorized a fairly generous number, so we're not concerned about the money running out."

At the end of the release, the reader learns for the first time how stop loss happens: Secretary Gates has authority and "stop loss" troops are extended involuntarily in order to extend military service during a period of national emergency. He says "the department uses it sparingly and only when it's absolutely necessary…it's contrary to the way we operate the all-volunteer force." This is a rather casual treatment of the subject: it is told in an offhand manner at the end of the release. For example, the sentence says that the Army is the only service that has current stop loss troops but it is on track to have all

involuntary service ended by March 2011. This seems important, yet it is buried in the release. It ends with a final quote: “stop loss is a mechanism of last resort…the Secretary has made it very clear…he wants the services not to use stop loss at the current time.”

Official Website

DOD’s web page about this topic is titled “Retroactive Stop Loss Special Pay: Those Eligible Must Submit a Claim by Oct. 21, 2010.” Most of the information presented on this page is straightforward and factual, such as the first paragraph which sites the act, how much the beneficiaries are to receive, and the time frames in which they had to have been stopped lossed. Another section also states that eligible individuals must submit an application between October 21, 2009 and October 21, 2010. However, some phrases are confusing: DOD says that “by law, there is no authorization to make payments on claims that are submitted after Oct. 21, 2010.” There is no actor in this sentence, so the reader does not know who can/cannot make payment. This is ambiguous because even though there is not a law stating this, it leaves the door open for some to think they may receive payment nonetheless. In addition, the site tells the service member to choose the appropriate method for submitting claims and to find out this information he or she must go to another website that corresponds to the service. Finally, it is noted that the documents provided by the link are examples and they may not be comprehensive.

The page also offers a interesting feature that is found on many social networking sites: “tell a friend.” You can click on the link to supply an e-mail address of a friend and send them to this page. This is helpful because it upholds conventions and may be

familiar to users. However, it is noteworthy that there is not a place to comment or submit questions on this site. In addition, the information is scattered in many different places, instead of being a central repository for the information. It mostly sends the user out to different places. Also, for a website of this nature, the tone is unusually formal, such as citing the act and using terms like "individuals." Due to the redundancy in topics and inconsistency in language, it feels like this page was pulled together from numerous sources and was not created in a cohesive fashion.

Blog Post

The blog post about this subject is titled, "Receiving Retro Stop Loss Payment, Solider Shares Story" and the author is Mr. Thomas Breslin. The reader learns that he is a veteran and now works for FEMA. The post is written in first person, which is not common on DOD's blog but is a convention of private blogs. It begins with his story: he was going to be retroactively paid for one year that he was stop lossed while being deployed to Iraq. He said his initial reaction was that "this was not going to be easy" and that "he would never see the money." This helps the reader relate to his situation and sympathize, therefore he gains trust.

He then details how he completed the form online. He uses very informal language. For example, he says, "the website isn't the fanciest, but no harder to deal with than filling out other paperwork." He uploaded a form (he called the form DD214 with no explanation, assuming the audience would know what that was) and said that the site stated he would need his memo stating his retirement was denied, but he "simply" skipped that part and provided the information he thought would be needed to prove he

was stop lossed and then he “crossed his fingers.” This is very vague information and does not tell the reader how to navigate the system.

Next, the reader learns that in the meantime he was sent a link to a Facebook page that was set up to handle stop loss pay. This is interesting because he does not say who sent the link and why DOD is using Facebook in lieu of its website. This assumes that all of the users have a Facebook account. However, this “impressed” him and he said it seemed like someone was following up on “folk’s issues” and giving them helpful information. He says that the Facebook page had “stop loss folks that were more than upfront and told you the best way to get your claim processed.” He said two months later he received an e-mail that his claim was found to be valid and shortly thereafter the funds appeared in his account. He says “grand total” it took about 30 minutes of his time. In the end, he decides the process was easy. As illustrated, the author uses very casual terms, possibly as a way to relate to people who may have issues with the process. He is believable, but it also comes across as a way to quiet service members who find the process is complicated; if he can navigate the system, so can they. Again, there were no comments on this blog post.

This blog post is DOD’s best example of how it potentially can use social media to engage citizens. It is told from the veteran’s perspective and uses informal language. However, it is really giving instructions (and not very good ones) instead of discussing a subject. In fact, where there could be potential to have debate about stop loss in general, the blog, like the press release, avoids it and glosses over it. This could have been an

opportunity for citizens to come together to discuss stop loss and come to a consensus about the topic.

CHAPTER 7: DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY'S USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) also has not yet begun to fully engage citizens on its social media sites—the Blog @ Homeland Security and the Leadership Journal (also a blog). While there is significantly more user comments on DHS's blog posts than the Department of Defense's (DOD) blog posts, a review of both DHS's blogs and four sets of communications appearing on the blogs will illuminate the ways in which the comments and interaction does not constitute debate. Furthermore, a comparison of the language found on the blogs to language found in DHS's official press releases and website will also show how the department distributes its official message using social media instead of promoting participation.

Analysis of DHS's Social Media Sites

As previously mentioned, DHS has two blogs. The communications I reviewed came from both blogs because a topic was generally covered on one blog or the other, but not both. The first, the Blog @ Homeland Security, "provides an inside-out view of what we do every day at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security." The perspective of this blog comes from the different components of DHS and is presented as a collective voice of the specific agency. Overall, this blog is user friendly and differs from the traditional blue

and white color scheme. It also differs from conventional blogs as the posting is inconsistent, with an average of about two posts a month.

Figure 5: Screen Shot of the Blog @ Homeland Security's Homepage.

As illustrated, the header incorporates more advanced design elements. For example, the colors green and black are used and the words "The Blog" are splashed across the background on the left side. The right side of the header has a logo, but it is abstract. For example, it is quite large and off center so that the user only sees part of a circle.

The layout under the header is traditional since the blog posts are on the left side and the extraneous items are on the right side. Specifically, the right side contains links to the archive, e-mail alerts, RSS feed, a place to read the most recent Tweets from DHS, previous posts, and links to other blogs within federal government (similar to a blog roll,

but not titled as such). In addition, there was an emphasis on graphics in the posts and almost every post contained at least one graphic.

Under the posts are three sections that remain static on the bottom: “More About the Department” (which links back to a select few pages on DHS’s website), “Authors” (which has a dead link titled “The Team”), and “Important Notices,” which includes a comment policy, the privacy policy, and terms of use (with a link to a very detailed, lengthy document). While it is common for blogs to contain links to other pages within the blog that supply more information, they usually do not take the reader outside of the blog and to other websites as DHS’s links do.

The second DHS blog is the Leadership Journal, which is described as:

> “a forum for Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano, and key DHS officials, to share news and insight. It brings you closer to the people and policies working to keep our nation secure, build a culture of readiness, enforce our immigration laws, and unify our department. And it welcomes your thoughts.”

Figure 6: Screen Shot of the Leadership Journal's Homepage.

The Leadership Journal has a similar design to DHS's website, using the same color scheme, logo, and a similar layout. For example, like the website, there is a large border of blue that goes around the text in the middle, which is mostly black and white except for links and title headings. It is a very simple, straightforward design with no graphics on the homepage other than the logo. Occasionally there is a small picture associated with the entries.

As shown in the figure, the heading is in large white letters, which is also very similar to its website. The entries on the left side of the page and are listed by date, again following the conventions of a blog. The entries are usually a few paragraphs long and they almost always provide links back to DHS's website. They are also signed by an official who wrote the entry. At the bottom there is a section that lists each "label" that

applies to the blog entry and links all the entries together with the same label. These entries are located on one page. There is a place to comment at the bottom of each entry. When selecting the comment section, the user is warned that the site uses "comment moderation" and all comments are approved by the blog moderator. Furthermore, the site asks the user to choose an identity, but he or she can select "anonymous." This could possibly deter users from commenting freely.

As with DHS's other blog, the right side of the page provides a place for users to subscribe to the blog, a list of previous entries, and an archive organized by month and year. However, this blog also offers a list of contributors and their titles as well as links to their page on DHS's website.

The posts on the site are very sporadic, with an average of two posts a month. However, sometimes there would be a post within two days of another post. It is not evident what drives the posting, but certainly if one was not subscribed to the e-mail alert or RSS feed it would be hard to follow the posting.

Detailed Analysis: Secure Flight Program

The topic of the first set of communications is Secure Flight (a Transportation Security Administration (TSA) initiative) and comes from the Blog @ Homeland Security, DHS's website, and an official release. On the whole, the blog post offered a different perspective from the official press release and website, but as this section will demonstrate, the blog did not function as a public sphere. While the blog post generated the most comments thus far, the users were not given an opportunity to weigh in on this

subject. They were simply presented with an achievement of the department after decisions were made and left to comment. As a result, there were many negative comments but there was no action that could be taken. Furthermore, the only real information about the program was on the website and not contained in the blog post or press release. While the language on the blog was different from the press release and upheld some conventions of a blog, the content was so vague that it did not generate rational-critical debate. The following table offers a comparison of the language on the blog to the website and official press release.

Table 6: Comparison of Analysis for TSA Secure Flight Communications

	Official Press Release	Official Website	Blog Post
Use of informal language	○	○	●
Use of jargon	●	●	○
Use of technical language	○	●	○
Use of persuasive images	○	○	○
Use of intentional vagueness	●	●	●
Use of specific, detailed examples	○	○	○
Use of direct quotes	ϴ	○	○
Use of rhetorical questions	○	○	ϴ
Use of language that appeals to emotion	●	●	●
Use of appropriate subjects	ϴ	ϴ	●
Use of authoritative author	●	○	○
Use of commenting	n/a	n/a	●

Key:
● Greatly used
ϴ Moderately used
○ Not used at all

Official Press Release

The title of the press release is “Secretary Napolitano Announces Major Aviation Security Milestone,” with the byline “DHS Performs 100 Percent Watchlist Matching for Domestic Flights.” The release uses many vague phrases and does not present specific information. The author assumes that the audience already has knowledge of the program. In addition, the reader is presented with numerous quotes from the Secretary of DHS that serve to establish credibility so that readers will not question the information.

For example, the opening paragraph restates that the Secretary is announcing 100 percent of passengers are being checked against watchlists for TSA’s Secure Flight program. The reader has not been told what Secure Flight is or what it is intended to prevent, but is presented with a statistic. The next line says that this is a major step in fulfilling a key 9/11 Commission recommendation, which is backed up by a quote from the Secretary and Secure Flight is the subject in both of the sentences of her quote. She also uses vague phrases, such as “one of our many layers of security,” “leverage to protect,” and “coordination with partners.” The reader is finally presented with a description of how the program works in the following section and is also told that the program is positive because it (1) facilitates secure travel and (2) helps prevent misidentification of passengers with the same name as those on the list.

In the next paragraph, the reader is offered another quote from an official from the Air Transport Association, further establishing credibility. The reader learns that this was a positive outcome for both the airlines and TSA, and that the two performed “collaborative” work. The quote also says that the program used a phased implementation

so that the transition from airlines performing the check to TSA performing the check was smooth. This information does not seem relevant to understanding the new process and is directed at the wrong audience.

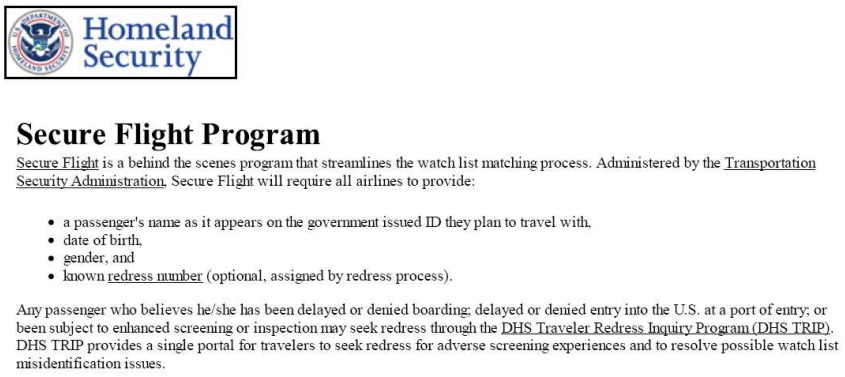
The next sentence offers more explanation of the process: 99 percent of passengers will be cleared to print boarding passes at home; however, if passengers match the list, they will be "subjected to a secondary screening, a law enforcement interview, or prohibition from boarding the aircraft, depending on the specific case." This is really what Secure Flight is intended to do, but the message is obscured by placing it within the message that DHS is now performing the watchlist matching. This is the information that citizens need to know, but it comes last, almost as an aside.

The last takeaway is that TSA began implementing Secure Flight in late 2009 and that all international carriers with direct flights to the United States will be using it by the end of 2010. The reader does not know what kind of impact this will have. To be sure, this release was intended for an audience who was familiar with Secure Flight and its history. It seemed like an update; however, it is interesting that some information for the layperson gets discussed in pieces throughout.

Official Website

In addition, DHS has a page on its official website that discusses Secure Flight. However, there is not a specific page that deals with the issue of TSA conducting 100 percent of watchlists matches. The page provides a high-level overview of Secure Flight. For example, it states the goals of the program and presents a bulleted list of what is

required by airlines and passengers to comply with Secure Flight. Though this information is described in both the official press release and in the blog posting, it is the first time that it is communicated succinctly. The reader also learns on the website that there is a program in place that assists people who believe that they were misidentified and have been delayed or denied boarding of an aircraft; this information is not in the official release. In addition, Secure Flight is (appropriately) the subject in the majority of sentences on the page.



Homeland Security

Secure Flight Program

Secure Flight is a behind the scenes program that streamlines the watch list matching process. Administered by the Transportation Security Administration, Secure Flight will require all airlines to provide:

- a passenger's name as it appears on the government issued ID they plan to travel with,
- date of birth,
- gender, and
- known redress number (optional, assigned by redress process).

Any passenger who believes he/she has been delayed or denied boarding; delayed or denied entry into the U.S. at a port of entry; or been subject to enhanced screening or inspection may seek redress through the DHS Traveler Redress Inquiry Program (DHS TRIP). DHS TRIP provides a single portal for travelers to seek redress for adverse screening experiences and to resolve possible watch list misidentification issues.

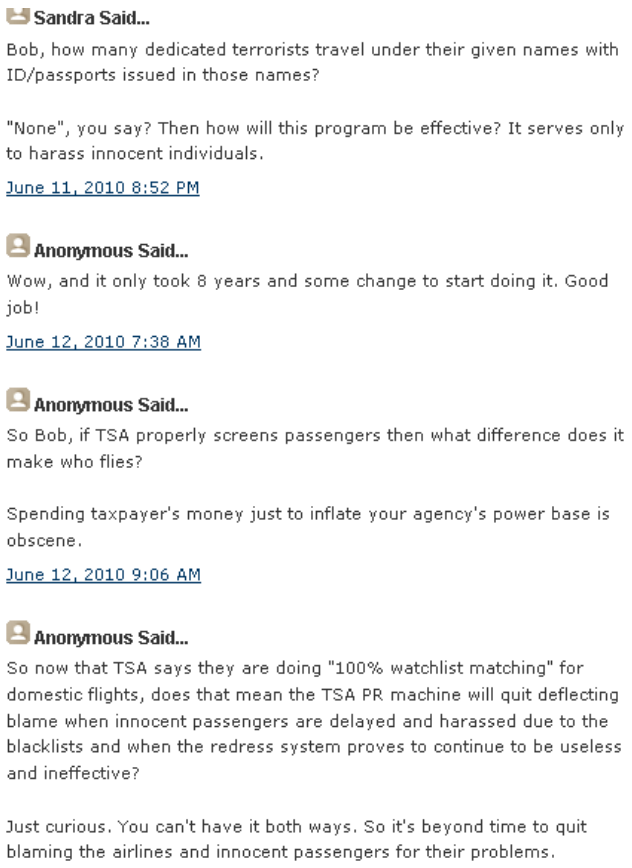
Figure 7: Screen Shot of the Secure Flight Page on DHS's Website.

Below the introduction, the user is presented with a group of links that go to TSA's website for more information on the program. Again, this is an extremely high-level and straightforward overview, but is useful because it describes the program. In contrast to the press release (and the blog post as will be discussed), there is minimal discussion of authority or use of phrases meant to appeal to emotions.

Blog Post

Finally, the blog post (which is cross-posted from TSA's blog) is titled, "Secure Flight: TSA Now Performing 100% Watchlist Matching for Domestic Flights" and is written by "Blogger Bob from the TSA Blog Team." The reader is not given further information about Bob, but clearly this title is to make him seem more personable. It is written in the first person and immediately uses pathos to pull in the reader when he says "I'm happy to announce that TSA is performing 100% watchlist matching." He then asks, "What is watchlist matching?" which helps readers relate to him because it appears as though he is on their level. He also uses informal language, such as "rolling out" and "we've been blogging." Overall, this is very short post, just four sections with a total of seven sentences and one rhetorical question (which is one of the only examples of a blog to use this device). Appropriately, Secure Flight was the subject in the majority of sentences. In addition, the post places emphasis on what TSA has achieved and subordinates the airlines' role and the fact that they used to perform the task. Finally, the author provides links to obtain information outside of the blog post, such as on DHS's website.

When I reviewed the blog post, there were 91 comments. Sixty-four of the comments were negative or critical and only 3 comments were positive; 24 of the comments were not related to the topic, were not very serious, or contained nonsensical language. Many of the comments contained arguments against the program by providing sources and what appeared to be researched evidence. In addition, there was an overall concern about Secure Flight. The following screen shot shows of some of the negative comments that illustrate citizens' concerns about Secure Flight:



Sandra Said...

Bob, how many dedicated terrorists travel under their given names with ID/passports issued in those names?

"None", you say? Then how will this program be effective? It serves only to harass innocent individuals.

June 11, 2010 8:52 PM

Anonymous Said...

Wow, and it only took 8 years and some change to start doing it. Good job!

June 12, 2010 7:38 AM

Anonymous Said...

So Bob, if TSA properly screens passengers then what difference does it make who flies?

Spending taxpayer's money just to inflate your agency's power base is obscene.

June 12, 2010 9:06 AM

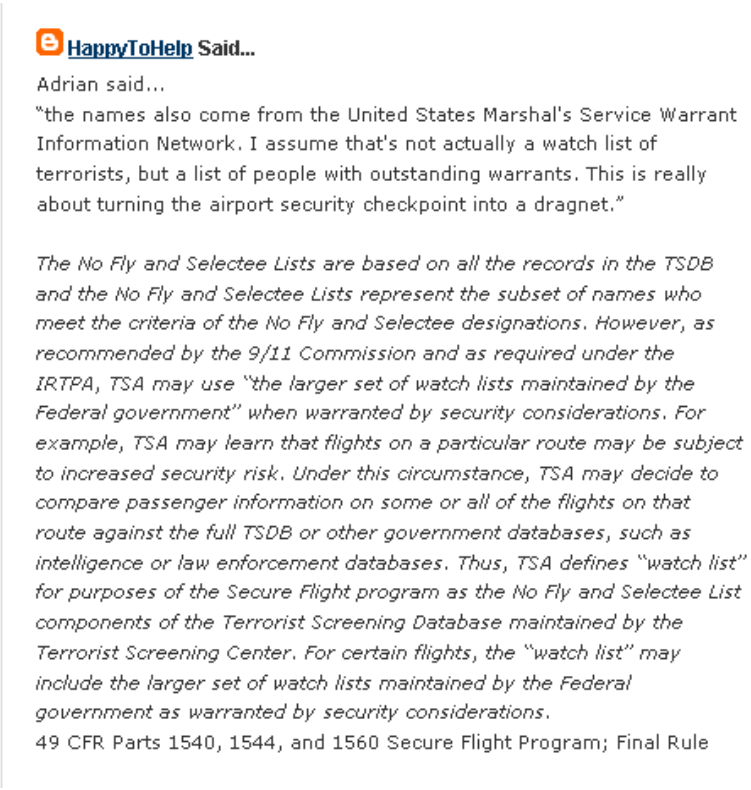
Anonymous Said...

So now that TSA says they are doing "100% watchlist matching" for domestic flights, does that mean the TSA PR machine will quit deflecting blame when innocent passengers are delayed and harassed due to the blacklists and when the redress system proves to continue to be useless and ineffective?

Just curious. You can't have it both ways. So it's beyond time to quit blaming the airlines and innocent passengers for their problems.

Figure 8: Screen Shot of User Comments from Secure Flight Blog Post.

In addition, a user named "Happytohelp" replied to comments on behalf of DHS three times; however, he only responded to the issues with what seemed like official facts (see fig. 9) and did not comment on the questions more broad in nature that challenged the program. Therefore, there were many more issues and questions directed at DHS that he did not reply to.



HappyToHelp Said...

Adrian said...
"the names also come from the United States Marshal's Service Warrant Information Network. I assume that's not actually a watch list of terrorists, but a list of people with outstanding warrants. This is really about turning the airport security checkpoint into a dragnet."

The No Fly and Selectee Lists are based on all the records in the TSDB and the No Fly and Selectee Lists represent the subset of names who meet the criteria of the No Fly and Selectee designations. However, as recommended by the 9/11 Commission and as required under the IRTPA, TSA may use "the larger set of watch lists maintained by the Federal government" when warranted by security considerations. For example, TSA may learn that flights on a particular route may be subject to increased security risk. Under this circumstance, TSA may decide to compare passenger information on some or all of the flights on that route against the full TSDB or other government databases, such as intelligence or law enforcement databases. Thus, TSA defines "watch list" for purposes of the Secure Flight program as the No Fly and Selectee List components of the Terrorist Screening Database maintained by the Terrorist Screening Center. For certain flights, the "watch list" may include the larger set of watch lists maintained by the Federal government as warranted by security considerations.
49 CFR Parts 1540, 1544, and 1560 Secure Flight Program; Final Rule

Figure 9: Screen Shot of DHS Responding to User Comments on Secure Flight Blog Post.

This blog post was one of the better examples of DHS's use of social media to promote discussion. There were many comments and responses to the issue. However, although the blog post used informal language and was not as vague as the press release, there is no indication that DHS will collaborate with citizens about this issue and take into consideration some of the concerns with the program and watchlist. Yet again, DHS was using the blog as a way to disseminate its message about Secure Flight and to try to persuade the readers to buy into the message.

Detailed Analysis: DHS's Response to BP Oil Spill

The next set of communications is about DHS's response to the BP oil spill in the Gulf Coast. The section presents analyses of communications from three platforms: the Blog @ Homeland Security, DHS's official website, and the official press release. All three communications use relatively formal language and numerous technical terms. In fact, as the following discussion will demonstrate, the blog post is a presentation of similar facts from the website and press release merely being presented in a different platform. The table provides a comparison of the language from all three platforms.

Table 7: Comparison of Analysis for DHS's Response to BP Oil Spill Communications

	Official Press Release	Official Website	Blog Post
Use of informal language	○	○	○
Use of jargon	●	●	●
Use of technical language	●	●	●
Use of persuasive images	○	●	●
Use of intentional vagueness	●	●	●
Use of specific, detailed examples	○	○	○
Use of direct quotes	●	○	○
Use of rhetorical questions	○	ϴ	○
Use of language that appeals to emotion	●	●	●
Use of appropriate subjects	ϴ	ϴ	ϴ
Use of authoritative author	●	○	○
Use of commenting	n/a	n/a	○

Key:
● Greatly used
ϴ Moderately used
○ Not used at all

Official Press Release

The title of the press release is "Top Administration Officials Discuss Ongoing Oil Spill Response with BP Leadership" and it did not have an author. The press release does

not provide much specific information and instead uses hedging and vague terms. In addition, there is a strong emphasis on people in positions of power that attended the meeting being discussed, which works to distract the reader from the real issue of the oil spill.

For example, the beginning of the press release gives the names of the agencies and leaders who met with BP officials on the day of this release. The next section reiterates the names of the participants of the meeting again, as they are the subject of the sentence, and states that they requested an update concerning BP's plans. The focus shifts to the important people at the meeting instead on the aforementioned plan. Finally, the following section also uses the administration and other federal agencies as the subject and in the closing presents a full, bulleted list of the participants of the meeting. This is the third time the reader is learning these names.

The release also states that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the response effort and receive an update on BP's mitigation plan. The plan is for "potentially" affected Gulf Coast states. The use of potentially is interesting here, especially since it was well-known which states were affected. Using potentially lightens the sentence and makes it seem as if the department is hedging.

The reader learns in the next section that these leaders have participated in an "all-hands-on-deck" and "relentless" effort response, since "day one." This is a vague description of what they have actually accomplished and there are no specific examples given. In addition, in the closing of the release the reader learns that BP is accepting claims through this command statement: "Please call BP's helpline." However, there are

no guidelines concerning who should call and what they should expect. The last sentence in this section does provide a link to the types of damages eligible.

Last, it is particularly interesting that the release uses the words “coordination and communication” three times. Since the release repeats this phrase so many times, it may coerce the reader into believing that the department is providing sufficient coordination and communication, when in fact this has not been stated directly or verified.

Official Website

DHS also has a special page dedicated to the oil spill on its website. This page provides an overview of information about the oil spill and is more high-level than the two other platforms. However, it also contains vague information and hedging. For example, one paragraph explains that the oil spill is “dynamic” and it has been a challenge for both private and public sectors. It then notes that the American people have questions about the crisis, which is stated as fact. The proceeding section states that National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has a website intended to answer these questions which will provide “clarity” and “transparency,” and is a “one-stop-shop” and “near-real-time.” There is an abundance of these vague words, so much so that overuse of them becomes glaringly obvious.

The website also uses images to appeal to users. For example, it has a picture of an oil rig in the ocean with multiple structures and a ship surrounding the rig. The picture does not have a caption. The user is to assume that this is the Gulf Coast and the area where the spill took place; however, it looks like this could be anywhere drilling occurs. In addition, there is no action going on in the picture and it does not look like a disaster area

with an oil spill at all. Overall, it is a rather positive image for what was a negative situation.

Figure 10: Image from DHS's Response to Oil Spill Blog Post.

The site also contains two pictures of people on a coast line; in the first picture the people are simply standing on the beach and in the second picture they are loading bags onto a vehicle. They appear to be the same people in both pictures. The reader is to assume they are performing work; however, it is not really clear what is going on in the pictures and could be interpreted many ways. Finally, there is also a video on the site that shows the Coast Guard bringing pelicans to a refuge. Both of these images are being used by the department to appeal to the users' emotions.

The site also poses a question that asks: "What will the hurricane do to the oil slick in the Gulf?" The use of a question gets the user's attention, but as the answer only focuses on what may happen to the oil it does not provide a definitive answer. For example, all of the statements have qualifiers such as, "which can help," "may" (used

three times), “difficult to say,” and “depend greatly.” The answer does not tell the user specific information.

Blog Post

Finally, the title of the blog post concerning the oil spill is “The Ongoing Administration-Wide Response to the Deepwater BP Oil Spill” and the author is not given. However, the reader learns this post is prepared by the Joint Information Center (which immediately establishes authority) and that this particular posting only reflects what has occurred in 24 hours prior to posting. This post is a synopsis of additional action taken in response to the oil spill. Overall, the piece is quite long and organized into eight different sections. Similar to the press release and website, the post contains vague and technical language

For example, the subject of the first section describes President Obama’s second trip to the Gulf Coast and states that he is “assessing” and “mitigating” but what this has accomplished is not mentioned. The reader also learns that “there are also many of the brightest scientific minds both in public and private sectors there.” Again, no specific information is given.

The post also uses statistics to put a positive spin on the topic. For example, one section’s title, “Fishing restrictions are Expanded; More Than 77 Percent Remain Open” is presented in a contradictory manner that manipulates the percentage. The title states that the restrictions are expanded, but it does not focus on the percentage that is closed; instead it states how much is still open. The information in the section does go onto say that the closes area represents 54,096 square miles, which is “slightly” more than 22

percent. It then reiterates that this leaves more than 77 percent of waters available for fishing and this is a precautionary measure to ensure consumer safety.

In addition, the post has a bulleted list of "numbers to date." The list contains the amount and types of vessels responding, boom, how much oil-water mix was recovered, and how many gallons of dispersant that has been deployed and is available. The last bullet is about how many staging areas there are and where they are located. While this gives concrete facts, it does not give evidence or examples of the stated facts. It is also written in a very positive tone; one statement focuses on the higher percentage and another uses words like "quickly" and "dispersant." It does not give any information about negative statistics, such as how many of gallons leaked or how many people the spill has affected.

The next section marks a drastic change in topic and tone as the reader learns that the Small Business Administration is giving out assistance loans. Not only is the section itself interesting because it is unclear and probably not helpful to those who need information about the loans, but it distracts readers from the information about the oil spill. This section makes the post seem hasty and gives an effect of a document that was pulled together from several sources instead of written in one voice.

The post also uses a lot of technical language without explaining terms and concepts. For example, it discusses certain instruments that the government is using in the response effort, but only says that they will aid researchers in monitoring. It also discusses an area that will be closely monitored, the Loop Current, but does not give any further

information. This is a very brief section and assumes the reader understands the technical details.

The blog post is primarily a recitation of the official message on the oil spill situation and is not structured in a way that promotes collaboration about the issue. Instead of posing the issue as open-ended and asking for participation, DHS disseminated information to the public about selected facts in a very one-sided manner. The author of this post missed an opportunity for citizens to participate in a discussion about a problem that was affecting them and use the social media tool in a way to gather ideas about a solution.

Detailed Analysis: DHS's Open Government Initiative

The next set of communications discusses DHS's open government plan from its official press release, website, and blog. As the following discussion will show, the website provides the most concrete examples and presentation of the plan, even though it also contains vague information similar to the press release and blog post. In addition, the blog post does not serve as a public sphere as it fails to give any specific information about the initiative as to provide a reader with context so that he or she may participate in a conversation.The table compares the three platforms' treatment of the topic.

Table 8: Comparison of Analysis for DHS's Open Government Initiative Communications

	Official Press Release	Official Website	Blog Post
Use of informal language	○	○	⊖
Use of jargon	●	●	●
Use of technical language	○	○	○
Use of persuasive images	○	○	●
Use of intentional vagueness	⊖	○	●
Use of specific, detailed examples	⊖	●	○

	Official Press Release	Official Website	Blog Post
Use of direct quotes	●	●	●
Use of rhetorical questions	○	○	○
Use of language that appeals to emotion	○	○	○
Use of appropriate subjects	ϴ	ϴ	ϴ
Use of authoritative author	●	○	○
Use of commenting	n/a	n/a	ϴ

Key:
● Greatly used
ϴ Moderately used
○ Not used at all

Official Press Release

The title of the official press release is "Secretary Napolitano Unveils DHS' Open Government Plan." The release is vague and does not immediately discuss the purpose of the plan. For example, the first section states that the Secretary unveiled the plan and it "leverages" public input to uphold the three "cornerstone" principles as part of President Obama's Open Government Initiative. There is emphasis placed on the three principles and the reader immediately senses they are very important; however, they are not directly explained. Instead, the reader is offered quotes from the Secretary, such as the fact that "openness and transparency are critical to our security mission and that this is a critical step allowing citizens to take a more active role." In addition, the reader finds that the word "critical" is repeated numerous times, and the redundancy of it signifies that the topic must be important but the importance is not explicitly stated.

The next section emphasizes that the plan was developed with public feedback but is yet again vague. While this is an interesting concept, DHS does not elaborate how this was accomplished or who was involved.

Finally, the release provides a link to the plan at the end and also more information about President Obama's Directive and what it is to accomplish. While this is useful information, it is out of place at the end of the release since it sets up the reason why DHS undertook this initiative. However, perhaps this is intended to help the focus remain on the department.

Official Website

DHS's website provides an overview of the initiative and again uses vague terms and also incorporates quotes from officials. For example, it begins by stating "The Open Gov directive is an effort to implement the three principles that are the cornerstones for an open government: transparency, collaboration, and participation." It provides a sentence for each principle, but the descriptions are not concrete examples.

The next section highlights DHS's Open Government Plan. It says that the plan "encapsulates" the Secretary's vision for making DHS stronger and "shrinking" the separation between government and citizens. In addition, DHS will use "modern technologies, traditional communication channels, and long-term and developing innovations." It does not give examples or say how it will do this. Moreover, it is ironic that the department is making this statement when it is clear that it has yet to undertake this effort.

The next section states that DHS solicited citizen input for the draft of the plan in April 2010 and it appreciates all the suggestions that were received, which "informed the draft." It also says that input has been archived and provides a plan to make it accessible. To its credit, if this actually occurs, this would be a step in the right direction. Not only did the department request input, it may be able to provide documentation that the input was considered and incorporated into its plan.

The website does eventually provide examples for each of the three cornerstone principles: there are 14 examples for transparency, (i.e., a link to one of DHS's component's fiscal year 2009 in Review Fact Sheet), 5 examples for participation (i.e., community input on Southwest Boarder Fence), and 8 examples for collaboration (i.e., "IdeaFactory" and "Virtual USA").

Examples

Transparency

- Data.gov Open Government Directive Agency Datasets
- Biometric Standards Requirements for US-VISIT (NPPD) *(PDF, 70 pages - 711 KB)*
- National Processing Volumes and Trends (USCIS)
- Immigration Statistics
- U.S. Coast Guard Search and Rescue Statistics
- CBP Fiscal Year 2009 in Review Fact Sheet
- Intellectual Property Rights Seizure Statistics: FY 2009 (ICE and CBP) *(PDF - 14 pages, 421 KB)*
- Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (ICE) *(PDF - 9 pages, 180 KB)* Statistical breakdown of the system's performance and trends in foreign student representation in U.S. academic and exchange programs.
- Historical Transportation Security Fee Collection Data (TSA)
- Fire Statistics
- Public Assistance Grant Program Trends (FEMA)
- 2009 Disaster Statistics (FEMA)
- USCIS Equal Employment Opportunity Data Posted Pursuant to the No Fear Act 4th Quarter 2009
- Department of Homeland Security Budget and Finance Documents
- Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) created a new section of their FOIA Reading Room to proactively post information.

Participation

- Quadrennial Homeland Security Review
- Proposed Homeland Security Regulatory Rules Currently Open for Comment
- Comment on Greater New Orleans Infrastructure Projects (FEMA)
- Software Comment Form (FEMA) Comment on software distributed by FEMA in support of the National Flood Insurance Program
- Community Input on Southwest Border Fence (CBP)

Collaboration

- IdeaFactory
- Virtual USA
- USCIS
- United States Secret Service Partnerships with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and the Boys and Girls Clubs of America
- San Diego Border Patrol Sector Community
- USCIS Community Outreach Event Calendar
- ICE ACCESS Program Law enforcement partnerships
- Industry Partnership Programs (CBP)

Figure 11: Excerpt from Screen Shot of DHS's Open Government Web Page.

As shown in the figure, to explore these items and understand them, the user must click on a link because there is no explanation provided on DHS's web page. Overall, these examples are satisfactory, given that there is little else concrete about the Open Government subject. However, they could have been even stronger, with perhaps explanation under each main heading showing how each is really an example. Nonetheless, this section is the most useful for understanding Open Government.

Blog Post

Finally, the blog post is titled "Open Government: The Plan" and there is no author. The blog post uses an image to illustrate "openness" and this is the first item to capture the reader's attention. The image is a box with the words "Open Gov" that has a tab on the box which is made to appear like it can be pulled open (see fig. 12). The logo is an attempt to convey transparency.

Figure 12: Logo from DHS's Open Government Web Page.

The post uses both third and first person voice inconsistently. For example, in the same section it will say "the department" and also use "we." The change in voice has a disjointed effect. The entire post should be in one voice as to convey as sense of cohesion. It also appears that the voice changes to third person when the information presented is more technical. For instance, when the post discusses that the plan "recommends" the expansion of Virtual USA it is discussed in terms that are vague and

at a distance by invoking the department. It also occurs when the post discusses the department's efforts to support fusion centers and explains what they are. Moreover, it does not say how these two items specifically relate to Open Government or describe future actions to be taken.

In addition, the post also uses vague phrases without explaining specific details. One section says that the department has drafted a document that would "chart a clear course" forward and that it was not a "box checking exercise." The next sentence states that "it is critical as we work toward these goals" without detailing what the goals are. When the reader gets to the goals, they are given using the following words: "culture of transparency," "public engagement," and "active outreach."

Finally, the post talks about how the department solicited and incorporated public feedback into the plan. It changes to first person and says "we plan to continue this and that the reader should look for new ways to engage with the department in the coming months." While the post ends on a positive note about the Open Government plan, it does not describe specifically how it will engage citizens.

There were six comments on this post. Only three discussed the topic and the other three were requests for a different topic to be blogged about. One comment was particularly insightful and argued that while transparency may provide citizens with greater access to information, it must be coupled with civic education and cited statistics of voting rates. However, no users actually engaged in rational-critical debate about the topic since there were very few comments. Perhaps this was because the blog does not mention that it archived past comments about the plan or that department plans to release

them. In addition, it also does not provide specific examples as the website does. As previously mentioned, the press release provided more context for a reader to understand the issue. While the blog contained one comment which offered an idea that could be implemented, there is no indication that the department read the comments and took it under consideration. Furthermore, if it did, the effort would most likely have been government-led. DHS could have used its blog post as way to gain feedback about its effort to collaborate with citizens. Instead, in a post that was supposed to be about collaboration, the department failed to effectively interact with users and merely presented them with information that boosted its own image.

Detailed Analysis: Public-Private Sector Partnership Efforts

The final set of communications is about the public-private sector partnership. My review included communications from an official press release, as well as the department's official website and blog. While the press release and website used formal and vague language, the blog post had potential to serve as a public sphere where concerned citizens could have discussed the value of this effort. For example, the presentation of the information was less formal, did not invoke authoritative figures, and was open-ended by calling for participation. However, there were no comments on the blog post. The following table shows a comparison of the language across all three platforms.

Table 9: Comparison of Analysis for Public-Private Sector Partnership Efforts Communications

	Official Press Release	Official Website	Blog Post
Use of informal language	○	○	●

	Official Press Release	Official Website	Blog Post
Use of jargon	●	●	○
Use of technical language	●	●	○
Use of persuasive images	○	○	○
Use of intentional vagueness	●	●	○
Use of specific, detailed examples	○	○	●
Use of direct quotes	●	●	○
Use of rhetorical questions	○	○	●
Use of language that appeals to emotion	○	○	●
Use of appropriate subjects	ϴ	ϴ	ϴ
Use of authoritative author	●	●	○
Use of commenting	n/a	n/a	○

Key:
● Greatly used
ϴ Moderately used
○ Not used at all

Official Press Release

The title of the press release is "DHS Releases Resource Catalog for Private Sector." Overall, the release uses many vague terms without providing specific information and generally is marketing a positive message to the public. For example, one section says this is first time the department made an effort to encompass all of DHS and that this represents a "commitment to facilitate public access and increase transparency" but does not describe the commitment. Another section states that the catalog "recognizes the diversity" of the public sector and has provided resources accordingly, but the reader does not know specific details about what the diversity entails or how it is being accommodated. Moreover, the subject of several sentences is the "effort" so the focus is advocating the effort instead of discussing the catalog.

Finally, there is a section that discusses a report to Congress called the "Quadrennial Homeland Security Review" that DHS released. The reader learns that this report contained an "enterprise approach," which describes how private and public share roles and responsibilities to uphold U.S. public safety. The article does not describe how this report and catalog are related, but leaves it to the reader to infer that the catalog is a positive step in enabling the private sector to uphold this responsibility. However, there is no direct connection made. Overall, this release provides a positive message, but it is too high-level and not at all specific.

Official Website

DHS's Private Sector Office has its own website that provides an overview of the office, but does not deal specifically with the catalog. The first section states that the Private Sector Office is part of the Office of Policy within DHS and discusses its mission. While the site is high-level, it provides additional context that could have been in the press release so that the audience could understand the significance of the two sectors working together.

Blog Post

Finally, the title of the blog post is "Connecting DHS to the Private Sector" and there is no author. The blog post effectively uses informal language, appropriate subjects (the catalog), and presents a clear message to readers. In addition, it also appeals to readers' emotions by establishing the significance of the effort. For example, in the first paragraph, the reader is told in casual terms "a few months ago" the DHS Private Sector

Office started a project to centralize information and make it available to private sector parties creating the “Private Sector Resources Catalog.” In addition to this official title, it also gives the jargon term for the catalog, “white pages.” This section also uses other jargon, such as, “centralize,” “catalog,” “direct lines of access,” and “at-a-glance information.”

In the paragraph that discusses the results of the catalog, the subject of all the sentences is appropriately the catalog. It says that it is a “fantastic resource” and it has “value” for both sectors. It also gives specific examples of what one can find in the catalog by using rhetorical questions. For example, one question asks, “Need the 411 on liquid restrictions for passenger travel?”

The post ends by invoking emotion when it states “We hope that our partners will find this useful” and “the President and Secretary are committed to transparency and public access and this tool serves that purpose.” Finally, it asks the reader to click on the link to the catalog, and leave feedback in the comments; however, there were no comments at the time of my review. Nonetheless, this was the first blog post that was open-ended and prompted users to express their thoughts.

This post had some features that could have enabled it be a public sphere. For example, it uses mostly casual language and does not repeat verbatim sections from the press release. In addition, it does not include quotes from high-level officials. Finally, the actionable item at the end has potential for encouraging readers to a submit comments on the catalog. If this approach would have been used on a topic that the public was more

concerned about (i.e., the oil spill) it may have generated more rational-critical debate that brought citizens together to find a solution for a problem. However, since public-private partnerships are not an issue that is perceived to be problematic to the public, the blog did not receive any response.

CHAPTER 8: THE WHITE HOUSE'S USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The White House is using one of its social media sites (Facebook) more so than the Department of Defense (DOD) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to facilitate collaboration; however, it is not fully serving as a public sphere. In addition, the White House does allow commenting on its blog so it is not possible for users to participate in rational-critical debate. This chapter provides an analysis of the White House's social media sites (Facebook and its blog) and analyses of communications originating from those sites, as well as from its official website and press releases.

Analysis of the White House's Social Media Sites

Blog

The Administration's blog is titled "The White House Blog" and there are numerous authors that post who have varied positions. The design of the blog is the most sophisticated thus far. It uses a traditional color scheme of red, white, and blue and also uses patriotic images. For example, the logo is a picture of the White House against a blue background. It also has an image of the flag that serves as the link to the White House's website.

Figure 13: Screen Shot of The White House Blog Homepage.

The site is also the most user friendly of all the agencies in my review. For example, the user immediately focuses on the blog entries on the page because there is no distracting material on the site. The site also has a list of issues on the right side and all of the posts are categorized and archived under these issues. In addition, a user can find a post by using the archive that contains the posts according to month and year. All of these links are constant when a user navigates forward or backward within the blog. Finally, while the blog contains links to other executive branch blogs, it does not have any additional items on the right side and therefore does not overwhelm the user.

There were usually around five posts a day, with fewer posts on the weekends. About half of the posts include a photo or an embedded video related to the post, the other half consisted only of text. The posts all included the first and last name of an author and sometimes at the end of the post it would describe the position each author held, but this was not always described. When the author was given, it was usually a head of agency and part of the President's cabinet. Many of the posts also provided a link to

learn more about the issue and these links take the user to the agencies' website page for the related issue.

Finally, a very important omission from the blog is that it does not allow users to post comments. There is nowhere for users to interact on the blog, which goes against the traditional concept of a blog. In addition, it is worth noting that the blog appears to have changed drastically over time: the first posts were all by one person and posting was more erratic. They also contained fewer images and included transcript-like material, similar to press releases.

Facebook

In addition to its blog, I also reviewed the White House's Facebook page for communications. The Facebook page upholds many conventions of a typical page, but this is largely due to the fact that the platform is structured so that entities are limited in customization. However, one default the White House selected is that when users arrive at the Facebook page, they are brought to the "Wwall" and the setting is to view posts only by the White House. This can be changed when a user selects "White House + Others," or "Others Only."

The White House page has four tabs that are not found on personal Facebook pages. First, White House's "Info" tab differs from personal Facebook pages since it lists website addresses of the White House. Furthermore, it has a tab labeled "Live," where users can watch live webcasts. They can also join in a dialogue and chat with others who are viewing the webcast. Next, it has a "Discussion" tab. This is similar to a message

board, where users post topics and other users discuss the topic. There were 4,949 topics at the time of my review. There was a significant amount of both positive and negative discussion here about a range of topics. Finally, there is an “Events” tab where users are invited to different events the Administration holds. Users are able to RSVP to these events on this page.

In addition, the White House also has tabs that are conventions of a personal Facebook page. For example, there is a “Photo” tab. Here, there were nine albums uploaded by the White House and 15,304 photos uploaded by other users. However, the White House does not comment on its own pictures or others’ pictures. The next tab, “Notes,” is where snippets of current announcements are posted and users are allowed to comment on the notes. This feature looks like it has not been used since August 2009. Moreover, the White House does not respond to comments. The last tab, “Links,” is a place where users can copy and paste a link to a website and then other users can comment on it. It does not appear that the White House comments on links.

Other notable features of the page include its profile picture, which is the same logo that is on its blog, and the “About Me” box. The following figure is a screen shot from the White House’s Facebook page.

Figure 14: Excerpt of Screen Shot from the White House's Facebook Page.

Traditionally, the profile picture is a user's photo, but instead the White House uses its logo as the profile picture. In addition, for personal Facebook pages, the "About Me" box generally is text about the person or a quote, but the White House has posted this disclaimer: "This is the White House page on Facebook. Comments posted on and messages received through White House pages are subject to the Presidential Records Act and may be archived. Learn more at WhiteHouse.gov/privacy." This is not what a user would traditionally expect in this section.

Detailed Analysis: Fatherhood Efforts Program

The first topic that I reviewed is the program called Fatherhood Efforts. Overall, the language on all three platforms was identical and did not facilitate a public sphere. As the analyses from the White House's official press release, blog, and Facebook will show, the use of formal language and jargon inhibited users from participating in rational-

critical debate. The following table provides a high-level comparison of the language from the aforementioned platforms.

Table 10: Comparison of Analysis for Fatherhood Efforts Program Communications

	Official Press Release	Blog Post	Facebook Post
Use of informal language	●	●	●
Use of jargon	●	●	●
Use of technical language	○	●	○
Use of persuasive images	○	●	○
Use of intentional vagueness	●	●	●
Use of specific, detailed examples	ϴ	○	○
Use of direct quotes	●	○	○
Use of rhetorical questions	○	○	ϴ
Use of language that appeals to emotion	ϴ	●	●
Use of appropriate subjects	ϴ	ϴ	●
Use of authoritative author	●	○	○
Use of commenting	n/a	n/a	●

Key:
● Greatly used
ϴ Moderately used
○ Not used at all

Official Press Release

The title of the press release is "President Obama Launches Next Phase in Fatherhood Efforts with The President's Fatherhood and Mentoring Initiative." The press release uses formal language throughout and also discusses abstract concepts. For example, one section says that the President has said that no government program can remedy that problem of father absence, but "it must do its part to help fathers facing challenges." Instead of providing specific facts, the larger problem is discussed. In addition, the reader learns that Obama has proposed a new Fatherhood, Marriage and Families Innovation Fund, which is described in formal, vague terms: it will "scale up

effective fatherhood and family-strengthening programs across the county." Furthermore, the release says that the Department of Labor has been given extra funding for "transitional jobs programs for noncustodial parents facing barriers to employment." Finally, the author emphasizes that there is a need to start a "national conversation on fatherhood and personal responsibility."

To its credit, the press release does give some specific information, but it uses formal language to do so. Specifically, one section outlines the three steps to address "fatherlessness" in America: (1) the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships and the Office of Public Engagement will host community forums, (2) organizations supporting the initiative will reach out to communities around the country and people can sign up for a newsletter, and (3) organizations such as the National Parent Teachers Association and the National Fatherhood Leaders Groups will work in specific ways to have an impact on responsible fatherhood. While it is positive that the release included these three specific details, the last two could have provided more information (such as how to sign up for the newsletter and what the organizations will do to have an impact).

Blog Post

The blog post concerning this subject is titled "President Obama Promotes Responsible Fatherhood: "No Excuses"" and was written by Jesse Lee. There is no biographical information given about the author. Much of the language in the post is verbatim from the press release, so it includes formal language and vague information. In addition, the blog post contains numerous images that are not found in the press release.

Specifically, after a brief introduction, the information in the post is identical to the press release. However, there is one other phrase in the blog post which breaks up the text from the press release: “The President gave a nod to the single mothers picking up the slack.” This is followed by additional material from the press release. The words in this original phrase are very informal which may be an attempt to connect with readers. However, this is not effective since the overwhelming majority of the communication is found in the press release.

As mentioned, the blog post has an abundance of graphics. For example, under the title, there is a large photo of President Obama speaking at a podium and in another section there is a picture of President Obama waving to people on a stage who listened to his speech. In addition, the post ends with two pictures: The first is of President Obama on the South Lawn speaking to a crowd and the second is of him greeting guests, mostly children. (See the following figures.)

President Barack Obama addresses the Father's Day mentoring barbeque on the South Lawn of the White House, June 21, 2010. (Official White House Photo by Pete Souza)

President Barack Obama greets guests attending a Father's Day mentoring barbeque on the South Lawn of the White House, June 21, 2010. (Official White House Photo by Lawrence Jackson)

Figure 15: Images from the White House Blog Post on Fatherhood Efforts.

The images are given so much space on the blog post that they become the focus and the reader may overlook that fact that the post is essentially reiterated from the press release.

Facebook Post

The post on Facebook states "President Barack Obama speaks out on the importance of responsible fatherhood and mentoring to building healthy families and communities" and includes a line from the blog about how the President was "reflecting on fatherhood, how it shapes our kids, and the responsibilities fathers face." This language is the same as the language on the blog and the official press release, and the issue is stated as a fact rather than posed as an issue or topic for conversation. In addition, there was also a link to the aforementioned blog post.

At the time of my review 1,172 people "liked" the comment and there were 216 comments. Overall, the comments were both positive and negative. The negative comments mostly criticized the President in general (but did not refute the message) and the positive comments supported his message. Some of the negative comments stated that the Administration should not mandate what citizens do (for example, one said to stay out of citizens' homes) and many of them resembled ranting (for example, "haha this is funny coming from the bastard who cant tell the truth about anything and cant remember where he grew up"). None of the comments provided criticism or prompted further discussion of the topic.

As previously mentioned, the language was extremely similar in all three communications. The expectation was that it would become progressively less formal in the blog and that the Facebook page would have posed the topic in such a way that provoked thought and conversation. Instead, it used the same language as the press release and posted a link back to the blog. As a result, the comments on the Facebook only serve to antagonize other users rather than engage citizens in a rational conversation about the effort. Indeed, the White House missed an opportunity to receive ideas about how to further advance the fatherhood initiative.

Detailed Analysis: Health Care Reform

The next set of communications deal with the 90 day anniversary of health care reform. Overall, the information presented on all three platforms (official press release, blog, and Facebook) differed in several important ways and this approach served the White House better than just repeating the press release on the blog. However, the press

release and blog post did not conform to expectations of those genres. For example, the press release gave personal accounts and was intended to invoke emotions. The blog entry was far terser and was structured with one line entries, something that I commonly found in press releases. In addition, the related Facebook post rounded out the treatment of the topic by offering a very brief "update" informing users that Obama was speaking about health care reform. While the White House did vary how it constructed the language in all three platforms, the following analysis will show that it has not fully demonstrated that it can create an environment conducive to rational-critical debate. See the table for a comparison of the communications.

Table 11: Comparison of Analysis for Health Care Reform Communications

	Official Press Release	**Blog Post**	**Facebook Post**
Use of informal language	ϴ	ϴ	○
Use of jargon	ϴ	ϴ	○
Use of technical language	ϴ	ϴ	○
Use of persuasive images	○	○	○
Use of intentional vagueness	●	●	○
Use of specific, detailed examples	○	●	○
Use of direct quotes	ϴ	ϴ	○
Use of rhetorical questions	○	○	○
Use of language that appeals to emotion	●	ϴ	○
Use of appropriate subjects	ϴ	ϴ	○
Use of authoritative author	○	●	○
Use of commenting	n/a	n/a	●

Key:
● Greatly used
ϴ Moderately used
○ Not used at all

Official Press Release

The title of the official press release is “Background and Fact Sheet on the President’s Event Today on the Affordable Care Act and the New Patient’s Bill of Rights” and it came from the Office of the Press Secretary. The release announces that the President will speak one day after the 90 day anniversary and talk about the ongoing effort to implement the new law and announce the release of new regulations. The release has two unique features. First, it states that the audience will include Americans who are already benefiting from the new law and gives the biographies and stories of six Americans who will be in the audience. This is a departure from the press releases I reviewed as it gives personal details and is extremely targeted toward emotions. It also says the President will be introduced by one of the “Americans.” Describing them as Americans helps the reader identify with these people. The biographies are all told in third person and are different lengths. In addition, each scenario explains how the new bill will help the Americans’ problems. For example, one talks about the “donut hole” in Medicare Part D for prescriptions and how a woman will receive a check now to cover some of her drug costs. The tone of the stories is sentimental and emotional and the language is informal. The stories are seen as triumphant because they each contain a positive outcome.

Furthermore, the release contains both a list of legislators and business representatives who will also be attending as well as an attached fact sheet. These more concrete elements add formality to the release and balance to the personal stories.

Blog Post

The title of the blog post is “Bringing Relief to Americans” and it was written by the Secretary of Labor, Hilda Solis. The format of the post is very different from the press release. It is far more succinct, and the structure is mostly one line entries. This entry was posted on the same day the President gave his remarks about 90 day anniversary whereas the press release was before the speech. Overall, the post is personal like the press release. It is also directed to the “regular” people, making it more relatable to readers. The combination of the personal and relatable language makes the post extremely sentimental.

The post uses phrases and words to capture the reader’s attention and relate to the information. For example, it begins by saying the President “ushered in a new day for every American family that has seen its wages and dreams eroded by a health care system that worked for insurance companies.” This reform was for every family, not just those that are wealthy and in power. It also pits families against companies. Next, it says the erosion happened at the expense of “regular people,” which is another ploy to coerce the reader to take the government’s side. The next section begins with a personal statement by the Secretary: “To me, the system has always been about re-empowering America’s workers and putting consumers in charge of their health care.” This also helps the reader see the issue from her point of view and relate to what she has to say.

In addition, toward the end of the post, the Secretary discusses the new patient’s bill of rights that will bring “immediate relief to many Americans and provide peace of mind to millions more who are only one illness or accident away from medical and

financial chaos." This sentence contains words such as "relief" and "peace" so that the reader attaches positive connotations to the reform bill.

Finally, the blog post also contains specific examples which help the reader understand the effects of the reform. For example, it notes that there will be an end to the most "egregious" practices—and provides a bulleted list, with each phrase beginning with a verb that describes what will happen. While this list is sufficiently detailed, this information would have more useful if it was provided upfront.

Facebook Post

The post on Facebook reads: "Happening Now: President Obama speaks on the implementation of health insurance reform." On the day I reviewed the post, 261 people "liked" it and there were 190 comments. Again, there were both positive and negative comments, but an overwhelming number of comments were off topic and nonsensical. Overall, they did not contribute to a rational-critical debate about health care, even though some comments discussed legitimate concerns with the reform (such as pre existing conditions).

Tom Tom Slocum
This is great news
about an hour ago · LikeUnlike · Flag

Cecilia Rueda-Dessingue
we'll need more than healthcare if the oil keeps spilling into the ocean...
about an hour ago · LikeUnlike · Flag

Gary Corshia
Obamacare still sucks socialism realy sucks get ready obots your wish came true now your gonna see the change in your paycheck and it's the democrats who will be booted come november
about an hour ago · LikeUnlike · 1 person · Flag

DeeAnna Roberts
I would like to see Congress up the date of banning denial of coverage based on pre-existing conditions to include all Americans immediately. Not just the little ones. ;p
about an hour ago · LikeUnlike · Flag

Kimberlie Fielding
what about adults with pre existing conditions????
about an hour ago · LikeUnlike · Flag

Rania Brooks Cullum
@Andrew - you need to play the Obama BullSh!t drinking game...you'll be passed out before the end of the speech. lol
I'll send you the link.

Figure 16: Comments from the White House's Facebook Post on Health Care Reform.

There was some debate going back and forth, but few people provided evidence or presented facts and there were many instances of name-calling.

Dan Erwin
I wonder if he'll tell more lies. Oh wait - that's silly - of course he will. That way he can continue to dupe those that don't do any research or reading on their own. Obama is a Marxist traitor to this country - hands down, case closed.
39 minutes ago · LikeUnlike · Flag

Bill Cowan
This to PASTOR Stanley ... This is the first time that we have EVER been "DUPED" by a fraud, usurper, con-artist, COMMUNIST/MARXIST with the hlp of a LEFT-WING MSM, and IGNORANT voters who only voted for an INELGIBLE black man !!! GIVE ME J.C. WATTS ANY DAY OVER THIS "black" man !!! J.C. HAS COMMON SENSE AND INTELLIGENCE !!!! THIS BOOB HAS NEITHER !!! Lenin called people like the DEMONcrats, "USEFUL IDIOTS" and I rest my case ....!!!
about an hour ago · LikeUnlike · Flag

Andrew Zimmerman
If you people actually listen to his speech. I mean ACTUALLY LISTEN to what he says then how can you disagree with him? You people who disagree are just plain stupid. Literally stupid cause you either A: Don't listen to what he says" or B: Listen to what he says and say "AWW naw that just one them big political types lieing to me der der der". Shut up. Listen. Help.
about an hour ago · LikeUnlike · 52 people · Flag

Figure 17: Comments from the White House's Facebook Post on Health Care Reform.

In addition, even some of the users commented that the discussion was inappropriate and not helpful.

Jim Ritchie
Holy crap. The race card? America being run by big corporations for THOUSANDS of years? Followed by calling people idiots....Really?????? I have to stop reading the posts here because it makes me lose hope in humanity. Is the public school system in America really this bad?
24 minutes ago · LikeUnlike · Flag

Mark Welker
well the speech just ended----so everything on this board previous to this -no one actually listened to the speech.
about an hour ago · LikeUnlike · Flag

Figure 18: Comments from the White House's Facebook Post on Health Care Reform.

However, it should be noted that there were several comments in which people were compelled to share their personal stories about health insurance. These were the perhaps the most informative and useful comments.

The press release broke convention and was a more personal treatment of the subject whereas the blog post's treatment provided more specific examples and complimented the press release. However, again, the White House missed opportunities with its Facebook post to truly start a dialogue. It could have taken an angle that would have prompted more personal stories or even suggestions about what additional heath care changes were needed. Instead, the post on Facebook was a straightforward statement about the President's speech and in turn most of the users took that as an opportunity to discuss the President and his Administration. Posting a question or thought-provoking challenge would have worked better to inspire a conversation about health care in general with the public.

Detailed Analysis: Improper Payments Elimination and Recovery Act

The next issue that was reviewed was the Improper Payments Elimination and Recovery Act. The communications come from an official press release, blog post, and Facebook post. Overall, the Facebook post is the White House's best example of using the social media tool to collaborate with citizens. As an analysis of the communications will show, the language was similar in all three platforms, but the excerpt that was chosen for the Facebook post was most relatable for the public and inspired some useful discussion. The following table compares the language about the act from the different communications.

Table 12: Comparison of Analysis for Improper Payments Elimination and Recovery Act Communications

	Official Press Release	Blog Post	Facebook Post
Use of informal language	ϴ	ϴ	●
Use of jargon	●	●	○
Use of technical language	○	○	○
Use of persuasive images	○	●	○
Use of intentional vagueness	ϴ	○	●
Use of specific, detailed examples	ϴ	○	○
Use of direct quotes	ϴ	●	○
Use of rhetorical questions	○	○	○
Use of language that appeals to emotion	●	●	●
Use of appropriate subjects	ϴ	ϴ	●
Use of authoritative author	●	○	○
Use of commenting	n/a	n/a	●

Key:
● Greatly used
ϴ Moderately used
○ Not used at all

Press Release

The title of the press release was "Remarks by the President at Signing of the Improper Payments Elimination and Recovery Act." The press release was a speech given by President Obama. Overall, it provides basic information about the act, although this information is six paragraphs into the release. The press release gives both vague information and some specific details. For example, in the opening he states that "translated into English the bill means cutting down on waste, fraud and abuse, and ensuring that our government serves as a responsible steward for the tax dollars of the American people," so instead of actually describing the act, the President uses jargon and catch phrases. In addition, he goes on to say that this aligns with his campaign for

President and that he is “changing the way Washington works.” This is a large claim and no additional information is given to support it.

However, in one section, the President discusses freezing government spending outside of national security for three years and says “This isn’t talked about a lot so I’m going to repeat it: Our budget would take non security defense spending to its lowest level since JFK.” This is a very direct statement, which is rare in most of these communications. The way in which it is set up cannot be confused or inferred in any other way. In addition, toward the end of the speech, the focus moves to the improper payments and he says they are “the purpose of the bill that I’m signing into law today.” He says payments go to the wrong people, and that they total about $110 billion. To which he states, “I wanted everybody to understand—just get some perspective on that.” Again, this commentary emphasizes and draws attention to these facts in a way that cannot be mistaken.

Blog Post

The title of the blog, “Improper Payments Elimination and Recovery Act: Cutting Waste and Fraud in Government” was written by Katelyn Sabochik. The post does not discuss who Sabochik is or her position. The introduction varies greatly from the press release. It paraphrases succinctly what happened: the President signed the Improper Payments Elimination and Recovery Act bill, it was passed unanimously by both the House and Senate, and it is designed to cut waste, fraud, and abuse. It also includes a section about how this will affect contractor payments and gives the specific numbers and

goal. The direct opening and inclusion of concrete facts in the blog and not in the press release does not align with the conceptions of either of those genres.

In addition, the post then presents two paragraphs from the speech and quotes President Obama as to establish credibility. It also includes an image of the President at a podium with Congress members surrounding him during his speech. However, the image does not necessarily convey positive or negative connotations since it just an active photo (see fig 19).

President Barack Obama delivers remarks before signing the Improper Payments Elimination and Recovery Act in the State Dining Room of the White House. July 22, 2010. (Official White House Photo by Pete Souza)

Figure 19: Image from the White House Blog Post on Recovery Act.

Facebook Post

The post on Facebook states "Today President Obama signed the Improper Payments Elimination and Recovery Act which the President explained, "translated into English, means cutting down on waste, fraud and abuse, and ensuring that our government serves as a responsible steward for the tax dollars of the American people."" This phrase was lifted from the blog post and as the comments will show, the White House chose an appropriate mix of formal and informal language which users responded to. In addition, the Facebook post provides a link to the official press release and also the

same picture that was on the blog. At the time of my review, 1,497 people "liked" the post and there were 527 comments

Overall, there were four different types of responses to this Facebook post. A sampling of the comments shows that the majority of the users agreed that the act is a positive step or simply said "thank you." However, some stated that it will probably not be enforced. In addition, those who had negative comments mostly criticized other actions of the Administration and therefore strayed off topic. There was also name calling and the use of profanity. Importantly, defenders of the Administration actively engaged in a back and forth discussion with those that criticized the Administration and offered valid points and provided links which supported the claims. Users also used Facebook to express their ideas about the topic, but these comments did not receive a response from the White House.

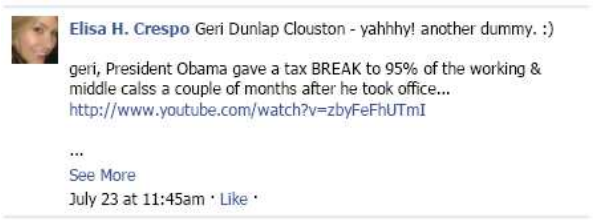


Figure 20: Comments from the White House's Facebook Post on the Recovery Act.

Thus far, this Facebook post was the only place where any discussion between citizens occurred. While there were also insulting and distracting comments, there were some worthwhile comments that represented interesting and differing opinions. However, as with all of the other communications, the White House did not interact with the users nor is it possible to know if any of the discussions led to action.

Detailed Analysis: White House Response to Oil Spill

The final set of communications from the White House are about the President's reaction to the BP oil spill. The communications are from an official press release, a blog post, and a Facebook post. This was perhaps the White House's most significant missed opportunity to interact with the public. As the following discussion will demonstrate, this was a topic that did not have a ready solution and where contributions from the public may have assisted the White House in its decision making. However, the language on the blog post incorporated quotes from the press release so that the users were not encouraged to discuss the topic. Furthermore, Facebook could have been used to pose a question to users, but instead the White House used it as another venue for marketing the speech that the President made. Please refer to the following table that compares the three communications.

Table 13: Comparison of Analysis for White House Response to Oil Spill Communications

	Official Press Release	Blog Post	Facebook Past
Use of informal language	○	○	●
Use of jargon	●	●	○
Use of technical language	○	○	○

	Official Press Release	Blog Post	Facebook Past
Use of persuasive images	○	●	○
Use of intentional vagueness	ϴ	ϴ	●
Use of specific, detailed examples	ϴ	ϴ	○
Use of direct quotes	ϴ	●	○
Use of rhetorical questions	○	○	○
Use of language that appeals to emotion	●	●	○
Use of appropriate subjects	ϴ	ϴ	●
Use of authoritative author	●	○	○
Use of commenting	n/a	n/a	●

Key:
● Greatly used
ϴ Moderately used
○ Not used at all

Press Release

The press release is titled "Statement by the President After Meeting with BP Executives." It is a short release compared to the others reviewed; however, it is longer than the blog post and the Facebook post. It begins with discussing the meeting with BP and calls it "constructive" and states that the President raised two issues: the containment of the oil and claims. He said that "my administration" directed BP to mobilize equipment and technology that should capture "up to 90 percent of the oil leaking." It is clear that he is taking responsibility for the positive outcomes. However, he states "Now, that's not good enough" and he will use the "best minds and resources until the relief well is finished later in the summer." First, this is a rather informal response, but it is more effective than using language that is more abstract. In addition, it is not a very specific—it would have been better to provide specific individuals or a clear timeframe instead of hedging.

He added that he went to the Gulf coast and heard frustration about the claims which makes the discussion "essential." This appeals to readers because they feel he sympathizes with him and he is an advocate for them. The piece ends with President Obama stating that he is "pleased" to announce that BP has agreed to set aside $20 billion for claims. This is an important take away and the figure stays with the reader, especially since it is at the end.

Blog Post

The blog post is titled "The President's Meeting with BP Executives: "An Important Step Towards Making the People of the Gulf Coast Whole Again"" and was posted by Katelyn Sabochik. As previously mentioned, the blog post reiterates much of the press release with only several additions from the author. The new information and language in the post included the fact that the Administration appointed an independent claims examiner (the same individual who administered the claims process victims of 9/11). In addition, the blog post invoked the people of the Gulf Coast by saying "that they are still recovering from Hurricane Katrina and Rita." The final statement encourages users to learn more about the claims process by clicking on a provided link.

Moreover, the blog post contains two images that are meant to demonstrate the Administration's commitment to this issue. The first is a large picture of the President at a podium in an extravagant room within the White House giving a speech, presumably about the oil spill. The last image is of the meeting that took place with the BP executives and depicts White House officials, including the President, interacting with BP employees with serious dispositions.

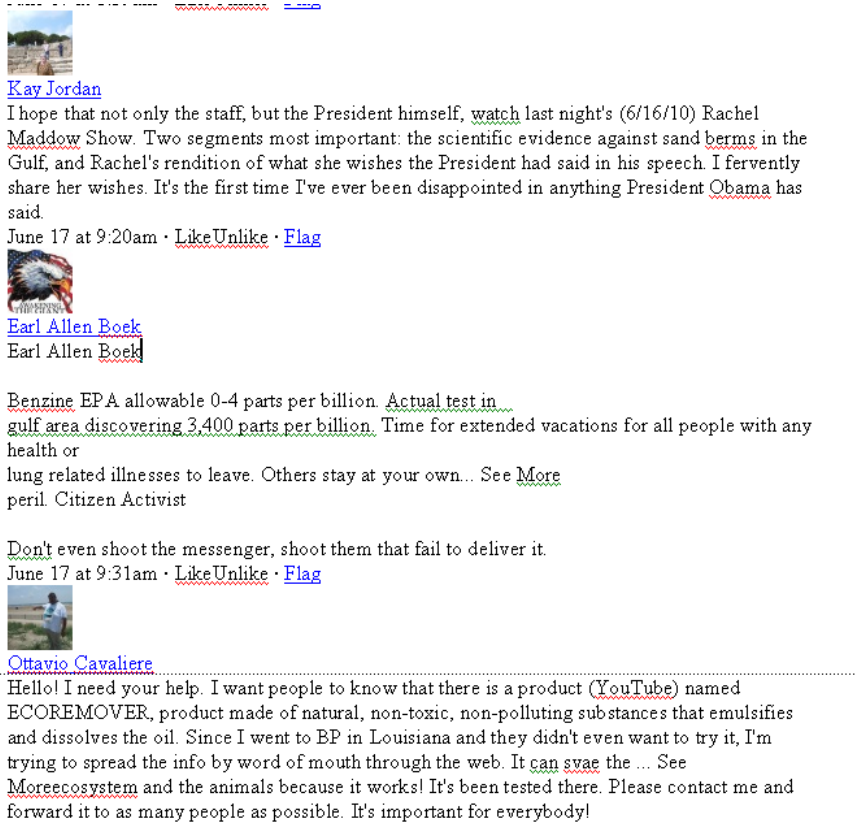
President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden meet with BP executives in the Roosevelt Room of the White House, June 16, 2010, to discuss the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. Pictured, from left, are BP CEO Tony Hayward, BP Chairman Carl-Henric Svanberg, BP General Counsel Rupert Bondy, BP Managing Director Robert Dudley, Senior Advisor Valerie Jarrett, Labor Secretary Hilda Solis, Attorney General Eric Holder, and Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano. (Official White House Photo by Pete Souza)

Figure 21: Image from the White House's Blog Post on the BP Oil Spill.

Facebook Post

The post on Facebook says "The President addressed the American people from the Oval Office last night on the ongoing Administration-wide response to the BP oil spill and America's clean energy future." At the time of my review, 980 people "liked" this post and there were 446 comments. Again, both positive and negative viewpoints were represented in the comments. Most of the negative comments condemned the President for not taking action quickly enough or thought his speech was ineffective. There was also some name calling and overall dislike for the Administration without specific reasons. The positive comments mostly thanked and congratulated the President's efforts and tried to put the focus of blame on BP. These comments were general and did not point to specific actions.

Several of the comments gave what appeared to be legitimate suggestions and scientific information about how to stop the spill. Whether or not these suggestions were applicable is unknown. Nonetheless, it is unlikely they were seen by the White House.



Kay Jordan
I hope that not only the staff, but the President himself, watch last night's (6/16/10) Rachel Maddow Show. Two segments most important: the scientific evidence against sand berms in the Gulf, and Rachel's rendition of what she wishes the President had said in his speech. I fervently share her wishes. It's the first time I've ever been disappointed in anything President Obama has said.
June 17 at 9:20am · LikeUnlike · Flag

Earl Allen Boek
Earl Allen Boek

Benzine EPA allowable 0-4 parts per billion. Actual test in gulf area discovering 3,400 parts per billion. Time for extended vacations for all people with any health or
lung related illnesses to leave. Others stay at your own... See More
peril. Citizen Activist

Don't even shoot the messenger, shoot them that fail to deliver it.
June 17 at 9:31am · LikeUnlike · Flag

Ottavio Cavaliere
Hello! I need your help. I want people to know that there is a product (YouTube) named ECOREMOVER, product made of natural, non-toxic, non-polluting substances that emulsifies and dissolves the oil. Since I went to BP in Louisiana and they didn't even want to try it, I'm trying to spread the info by word of mouth through the web. It can svae the ... See Moreecosystem and the animals because it works! It's been tested there. Please contact me and forward it to as many people as possible. It's important for everybody!

Figure 22: Comments from the White House's Facebook Post on the BP Oil Spill.

This subject offered the most opportunity for collaboration with citizens. The new forms of social media would have allowed real-time collection and distribution of ideas from the American people. However, since users could not comment on the blog and they were not prompted to offer their ideas on the Facebook page a discussion about actionable items did not take place, but instead people gave their opinions about the reaction to the oil spill. While it is important to give citizens an opportunity to provide

feedback, there were also ways in which the ideas of the people could have been harnessed. The real tragedy is that some of the comments by users may have helped the response or have inspired further brainstorming of ideas if noticed and taken under consideration.

CHAPTER 9: DEPARTMENT OF STATE'S USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The Department of State's (State) use of its blog and Facebook page is the best example of an agency appropriately using social media tools to collaborate with its citizens. Specifically, State has used several devices in its Facebook posts that have generated the beginnings of rational-critical debate. Furthermore, as the following examples will show, State has even begun to interact and engage in a dialogue with its Facebook users. The topics on State's blog and Facebook generally allowed for more discussion since they were not entirely policy related or discussing events that occurred in the past. Indeed, some of the ideas had an abstract component that could be used to start a larger discussion about the issue. This may be because State's mission involves communicating its diplomacy actions throughout the world and it sees interaction as an important component in communicating this message. While State seems to be heading in a positive direction with its Facebook page, it is not yet fully encouraging civic participation in its blog. This chapter provides an analysis of State's social media sites (its blog and Facebook page), as a way to understand which features are barriers toward creating a public sphere. In addition, it provides analyses of four sets of communications coming from those social media sites and compares them to analyses of press releases.

Analysis of States Social Media Sites

Blog

State's blog, DipNote, is very traditional. For example, it uses the traditional color scheme of red, white, and blue, and the header contains the official seal. In addition, the site has a traditional background design that is meant to resemble paper and a map. Specifically, there is a blue boarder with a map of the world and the rest of the page is contained in a white square in the middle.

Figure 23: Screen Shot of State's Blog Homepage.

As shown in the image, the blog posts are on the left and additional information runs along the right side. The column with the blog posts is wider than the right column. The entries are posted by many people (the authors' names are hyperlinked and the user can click the links to learn who they are). The posts are posted chronologically, with the newest first. This is keeping with a traditional blog and is also user friendly. In addition, the navigation bar is straightforward and does not overwhelm the user. However, there are two tabs on the left side of the blog, "topics" (which lists elements such as "Africa" or

"policy") and "channels" (which includes elements such as "Afghanistan-Pakistan," "Global Women's Issues," and "Sudan"). When a user clicks on a channel, he or she is presented with different topics in the topic tab. This is a very complicated way to navigate the site and is not user-friendly.

State also makes multiple posts in a day, so it is upholding the convention of a typical blog. For example, when I visited the blog there were five posts from the current day on the homepage and three posts from the previous day. The number of comments varied; most had zero and a few had as many as five. The highest number of comments for an entry on this particular day was nine. There is also a "blog roll" and it includes linka to other blogs, including both public and private sector blogs. For example, not only does it include blogs from other federal agencies, it also includes blogs from think tanks (such as realclearworld.com and whirledview.com). This is a feature commonly found on blogs and it works on State's blog to create a sense of community.

Facebook Page

State also has a Facebook page. Like the White House, it has several features that vary from a personal Facebook page. For example, State's profile picture is a combination of three items: (1) the logo of State, (2) a banner with State's official title, and (3) a picture of the Secretary. In addition, its "About Me" section tells users that if they want an official source of information they must go to the website.

Figure 24: Screen Shot of State's Facebook.

Like personal pages, State has numerous tabs. For example, it has a "Wall" tab, which is the default. However, unlike personal pages and the White House page, "Others" cannot post on State's wall and can only comment on the posts that State makes. State must originate the post. In addition, it has a tab for "US Embassies" which gives specific information for each embassy. This is a feature unique to State. It also has a discussion board, which at the time of my review, had 306 topics on it and constant activity. However, some issues on the board were related to State's mission, but some were not.

The Facebook page has regular posting by State, about every 20 minutes during the work week. On the day I reviewed the page, the maximum amount of comments for one post was 12. Moreover, not every post had comments. There was an average of 18 "likes" for one entry.

Detailed Analysis: World Press Freedom Day

The first set of communications from State are about World Press Freedom Day. This example of communications from State (coming from the official press release, blog post, and Facebook post) is an interesting case. Where it failed to incite useful or thoughtful commentary on its blog, State skillfully used Facebook to begin a dialogue about the topic. By posting a question related to World Press Freedom Day, it took the subject a step beyond just a statement of facts and gave citizens something to consider and ultimately offer their opinion about. The table compares the language in the communications.

Table 14: Comparison of Analysis for World Press Freedom Day Communications

	Official Press Release	**Blog Post**	**Facebook Post**
Use of informal language	○	○	●
Use of jargon	●	●	○
Use of technical language	○	●	○
Use of persuasive images	○	●	○
Use of intentional vagueness	●	●	○
Use of specific, detailed examples	ϴ	○	○
Use of direct quotes	●	○	○
Use of rhetorical questions	○	○	●
Use of language that appeals to emotion	●	●	●
Use of appropriate subjects	ϴ	ϴ	●
Use of authoritative author	●	○	○
Use of commenting	n/a	ϴ	●

Key:
● Greatly used
ϴ Moderately used
○ Not used at all

Official Press Release

The official press release is the statement of Secretary Clinton and is titled "World Press Freedom Day." Initially, the release uses phrases that are vague. For example, when World Press Freedom Day is introduced in the first paragraph, the release states that the "U.S. joins the international community in celebrating World Press Freedom Day" and says that it is important, but never defines "free press" for the reader. It goes on to say that "Wherever independent media are under threat, accountable governance and human freedom are undermined." This section ends with an impact, but again uses vague words that do not truly describe the consequence of the lack of a free press.

However, the next section invokes "courageous journalists" and talks about those who have risked their freedom and lives to report independent information and it provides more concrete examples and uses less pretentious words. For example, Secretary Clinton says that journalists and bloggers are sometimes targeted and gave three examples from foreign countries (Cuba, Burma, and Russia). Furthermore, claims are backed up with facts, such as when the release states that 71 journalists were murdered last year. Nonetheless, this is followed by several broad statements, such as "Governments in every region of the world" suppress media freedom and that State has reported on this.

Blog Post

The title of the blog post is "Secretary Clinton Recognizes World Press Freedom Day" and the author is "Dip Note bloggers." The blog post does not give any information about the blogger, which has the effect of an anonymous post. The blog post is a

complete recitation of the press release. Interestingly, in addition to the text, there is a picture of two Asian women with microphones and papers.

Figure 25: Image from State's Blog Post on World Press Freedom Day.

The reader is to assume the women are journalists and possibly representative of journalists who work in countries that does not always allow a free press. However, there is no accompanying caption that directly describes the picture, so users are left to interpret it for themselves.

There were four comments on the blog post. The first comment repeated a quote from the blog and did not offer further commentary. One comment criticized the U.S. government by stating "You get scorned and persecuted in America if you speak the truth. This is an issue of honesty. Is there true honesty in our government?" and one said that State's blog offers an alternative to mainstream media for information about U.S. foreign policy. While these two comments have some relation to the post, neither of them speak to the issue of a free press. Finally, the last commenter stated that journalists do not get paid adequately, although this comment was not entirely straightforward and not

pertinent to the conversation. While some differing ideas were presented, no one actually debated the value or relevance of a free press.

Facebook Page

The Facebook post gives the fact that it was World Press Freedom Day and offers a quote, “Freedom of press declined in almost every region of the world in 2009.” It then asks users if they agree or disagree with the statement and if they are surprised by it. Finally, it offers a link to an article that goes into greater detail about the fact that freedom of press is in decline. At the time of my review, there were 16 comments and 36 “likes.” Overall, the comments were highly relevant; in fact, as previously mentioned, this was the best example of rational-critical debate thus far. For example, one user pointed other users to read works by a particular political scientist and another discussed the flow of information in our society today. Indeed, a few of the users were participating in a dialogue that was civil and informed. Others users answered if they agreed or disagreed and then related the answer to their own experience.

State used two of the platforms (the press release and Facebook) in dynamic ways to explore a single issue. Furthermore, it posted the Facebook comment the day the press release came out. Instead of reposting the press release, State took the issue one step further. In addition, the issue of the decline of the free press and also the discussion from the others shows why World Free Press Day should be considered important in a way that the press release (and by extension the blog) did not capture.

Detailed Analysis: Increase Aid to Gaza

The next set of communications concern the effort to increase humanitarian aid to Gaza. State did not use its social tools to encourage participation for this topic. Specifically, there were minimal comments on the blog and no rational-debate occurred. In addition, the Facebook post repeated a quote from the press release and did not ask users to consider another perspective on the topic or did not pose a question for their consideration. The following table gives a high-level comparison of the communications coming from the press release, blog post, and Facebook post.

Table 15: Comparison of Analysis for Increase Aid to Gaza Communications

	Official Press Release	Blog Post	Facebook Post
Use of informal language	○	○	●
Use of jargon	●	●	○
Use of technical language	○	○	○
Use of persuasive images	○	●	○
Use of intentional vagueness	●	●	●
Use of specific, detailed examples	○	○	○
Use of direct quotes	ϴ	○	●
Use of rhetorical questions	○	○	○
Use of language that appeals to emotion	●	●	●
Use of appropriate subjects	ϴ	ϴ	●
Use of authoritative author	●	○	○
Use of commenting	n/a	ϴ	●

Key:
● Greatly used
ϴ Moderately used
○ Not used at all

Official Press Release

The title of the press release is "Free Gaza Flotilla" and it is written by Philip J. Crowley who is the Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Public Affairs. Overall, the press

release is very vague. It begins by saying that the U.S. “regrets the tragedy that occurred on the Gaza bound ships and trusts that the Israeli government will work hard to gather the facts,” but does not specifically state what happened, assuming the reader has learned about this event elsewhere. In addition, the author states that there is concern about the suffering of the civilians in Gaza so the U.S. will make efforts to continue to bring aid to the area. However, Hamas’s “interference with these efforts and their endorsement of violence complicates efforts.” The press release is unclear about what happened and what the steps forward will be, instead it just states that the “incident underscores the need to move forward to negotiations so that there may be peace in the region.” To be sure, this press release is marketing the message that moving forward is the best option but not giving any reasons why this is so.

Blog Post

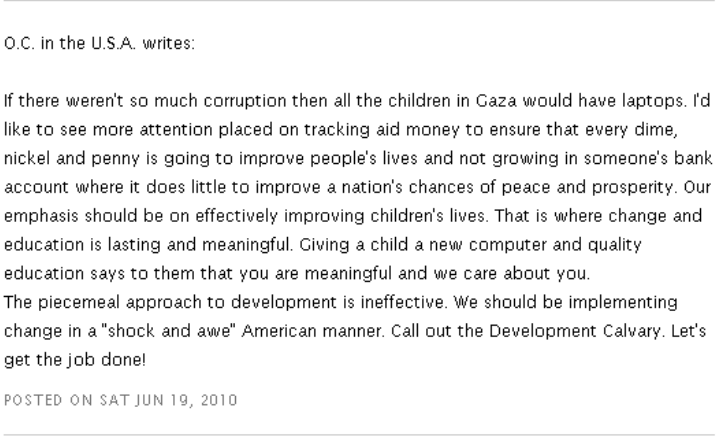
The blog post, titled “U.S. Will Contribute $60 Million to United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees,” was also written by Dip Notes bloggers. The blog post is an extension from the press release, giving some of the same information but also more details. It says that that the United States will be making an additional contribution of $60.3 million to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to support special projects in the West Bank, Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. The post was made a few days after the press release and the information presented is a follow-on to the press release.

Additional information provided tells the reader what the contribution will go toward. Among other things, the reader learns that it will be used for nine special projects

for children because there is an extreme shortfall in funding for education for refugee children. However, the post does not describe other funding shortfalls and therefore this statement has more of an impact. This also is tied into the image on the page, which is a picture of four young girls dressed in uniforms using laptop computers. It seems the picture is intended to help the reader visualize how the contributions help the refugees.

Furthermore, the post states the total amount that the U.S. has given to the relief fund. However, this information is out of context and the reader is not sure to consider this positive or negative and the post does not give other numbers for comparison. Finally, the post offers yet another number when it says that the U.S. commitment is "underscored by the announcement the President made that said the US will give $200 M to UNRWA" and that the U.S. is the largest donor.

There were four comments on the blog, two of which were related to the topic. One comment praised the effort and another comment offered a suggestion.



O.C. in the U.S.A. writes:

If there weren't so much corruption then all the children in Gaza would have laptops. I'd like to see more attention placed on tracking aid money to ensure that every dime, nickel and penny is going to improve people's lives and not growing in someone's bank account where it does little to improve a nation's chances of peace and prosperity. Our emphasis should be on effectively improving children's lives. That is where change and education is lasting and meaningful. Giving a child a new computer and quality education says to them that you are meaningful and we care about you.
The piecemeal approach to development is ineffective. We should be implementing change in a "shock and awe" American manner. Call out the Development Calvary. Let's get the job done!

POSTED ON SAT JUN 19, 2010

Figure 26: Comment from State's Blog Post on Gaza Aid.

While this comment begins to initiate the conversation between citizens, there were no other users that responded and therefore a consensus was never reached.

Facebook Post

The post on Facebook aligns more with the press release than the blog post. It states “Secretary Clinton said Thursday that the U.S. is discussing possible ways to increase the flow of humanitarian goods to the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip. “We have to deal with the situation in Gaza in a way that both protects Israel’s legitimate security interests and fulfills the needs of the people of Gaza.”” Then it provides a link to the full transcript to the press release. There were 62 comments on the post at the time of my review and 39 people “liked” it.

Approximately one-third of the comments were on topic and provided some debate about the topic. They mostly stated that it was a positive move for the U.S. to increase aid. However, a significant portion of the comments were focused on religion and argued with one another about irrelevant issues.

A unique element in this post was that State responded and participated in the discussion. In fact, State tried to correct what appeared to be mistaken facts and even posted links to a website with additional information. A user in turn responded with a link and commentary, and yet again State responded. This was the first instance in my review where I found representatives from an agency participating in a debate.

While it is an important that State interacted with users on Facebook, the interaction was not collaboration. It is a step forward, but nonetheless State again missed an opportunity to collect ideas from the public. In addition, this particular issue was more

open-ended (the post said that the Secretary was discussing possible ways to get the aid into Gaza) and State could have posed this as a challenge for citizens to discuss.

Detailed Analysis: Opportunity in the Americas

The following set of communications discuss the issue of opportunity in the Americas. This example of State's communications created the least amount of collaboration. Yet again, the blog post reiterated the press release and the Facebook post merely gave information to users about the Secretary's speech on the topic. By not establishing an environment where users could discuss this open-ended topic, State missed an opportunity to capitalize on its social media tools. The table compares the communications from all three platforms.

Table 16: Comparison of Analysis for Opportunity in the Americas Communications

	Official Press Release	Blog Post	Facebook Post
Use of informal language	○	○	●
Use of jargon	●	●	○
Use of technical language	○	○	○
Use of persuasive images	○	○	○
Use of intentional vagueness	●	●	○
Use of specific, detailed examples	○	○	○
Use of direct quotes	ϴ	ϴ	○
Use of rhetorical questions	○	○	○
Use of language that appeals to emotion	●	●	○
Use of appropriate subjects	ϴ	ϴ	●
Use of authoritative author	●	○	○
Use of commenting	n/a	ϴ	●

Key:
● Greatly used
ϴ Moderately used
○ Not used at all

Official Press Release

The press release is titled “Policy Address on Opportunity in the Americas” and it is the statement of Secretary Clinton. Specifically, it is an address that was delivered in Quito, Ecuador. It begins with the Secretary complimenting the country by calling it “one of the cultural wonders of our world” and a “beautiful country.” The use of these words establishes an inviting tone. In addition, she also uses detailed examples. For example, when she discusses that there is a goal of a shared partnership for the “peoples of the Americas,” this statement is backed up with facts, such as when President Obama announced his pledge at the Summit of the Americas. The Secretary goes on to say that the U.S. and Latin America have had a “contentious history” and she would “never deny that.” However, she says she is “here with a very clear message” of commitment to improving the material conditions of people’s lives. This is effective because instead of glossing over the history or by simply ignoring it she may have alienated her audience. Instead she recognized it and it made her argument stronger.

Nonetheless, Secretary Clinton also includes several vague phrases that contain jargon. For example, she notes that people have “embraced the value of tolerance and openness,” the region has “navigated steadily and responsibly through the global economic crisis” and that war is “thankfully, is rare.” Although she uses these specific examples, she does not point directly to any one nation or country. It seems like hedging and the statements fall flat because they are so vague. In addition, the release ends with Clinton invoking “four pillars of our vision for the Americas,” but she does not give concrete information about the pillars.

Blog Post

The title of the blog entry is "Travel Diary: Opportunity in the Americas" and it was posted by DipNote Bloggers. Again, there were no specifics given about the author. The blog post consists of four paragraphs taken from Clinton's remarks in the press release with some additional information. First, the quotes selected focus on two things: the vision and strategy of this effort. For example, one section discusses the common vision and how important it is to the effort and quotes the Secretary: "It is not only a moral imperative; it is also a strategic one." In addition, the next section discusses that this is an historic time to pursue the effort. It also focuses on the fact that it needs to be a "shared commitment." The section ends by discussing that Obama and Cinton share a "strategic vision" and that they will do what they can to give the people the "reality of a better life." While these words connote a positive image, they do not really allow the reader to understand what the goal of this effort is.

There were five comments on the blog post. Three of the comments praised Clinton and the speech. One suggested that is was "nice" that State was trying to join the Americas as a "unified force" and wished Europe would follow suit. Finally, the last comment discussed and praised State and then offered a solution for the oil spill. (To the user's credit, it did seem like a well-informed response, but it was not the appropriate topic.) There was no discussion about the implications of this effort or additional ideas to further the effort.

Facebook Post

The Facebook post about this topic stated: “View a live broadcast of Secretary Clinton today as she discusses “Opportunity in the Americas” from Quito, Ecuador, at 4:30 p.m. EDT, 3:30 local time.” There were four comments and 35 people “liked” the post. One user suggested including the number of hours that the event would be taking place from the time of the posting so that users in other countries could easily convert the time. Interestingly, State responded and thanked him for the good suggestion as well as for his “perceptive comments during the many months you have been a member of our community.” The other two comments were not fully related as they discussed that they want Secretary Clinton to pressure Belize during her trip there to not drill for oil.

It is unfortunate that State did not take the opportunity to use all three platforms in dynamic ways. Indeed, since the blog post just reiterated the speech (and only a portion of it at that) there was very little debate that occurred. If there would have been some personal reflections or informal language to establish a tone of openness and encouragement then the post may have generate more thoughtful comments. This topic was open-ended so that the addition of commentary from the blogger would have amplified the post. Instead, it reiterated sections of the press release and did not provide the entire release which took many of the concepts out of context so that they did not seem relatable. In addition, while the Facebook post also did not create much discussion, it is very telling that State remembered a user and praised him for commenting in that forum. This is a positive step that informs users the department values their responses.

Detailed Analysis: World Food Prize Laureate

The final set of communications is about the 2010 World Food Prize Laureate announcement. This is the best example of how an agency can use three different platforms in complimentary ways to inspire public debate about a topic. The press release, blog post, and Facebook post all presented a different angle on the topic and therefore posed the issue to citizens in several different ways that started to enable collaboration. A comparison of the language from the press release, blog post, and Facebook post can be found in the following table.

Table 17: Comparison of Analysis for World Food Prize Laureate Communications

	Official Press Release	Blog Post	Facebook Post
Use of informal language	ϴ	ϴ	●
Use of jargon	●	●	○
Use of technical language	○	○	○
Use of persuasive images	○	○	○
Use of intentional vagueness	ϴ	ϴ	○
Use of specific, detailed examples	ϴ	ϴ	○
Use of direct quotes	●	○	●
Use of rhetorical questions	○	○	●
Use of language that appeals to emotion	●	●	●
Use of appropriate subjects	ϴ	ϴ	●
Use of authoritative author	●	ϴ	○
Use of commenting	n/a	●	●

Key:
● Greatly used
ϴ Moderately used
○ Not used at all

Official Press Release

The press release is the statement of Secretary Clinton, who hosted the announcement. The release mixes both formal and informal language as well invokes

several abstract ideas. For example, the section that discusses the two winners says that Secretary is “personally delighted” they are the winners because she has worked with both of them. She also tells a few personal stories about the winners and mixes informal language and formal language in doing so. When she talks about how she knows them, the language is more informal (for example, “…is a friend of many years”) but when she talks about what each has accomplished the language is more formal (for example, “improve coordination” and “target our investments”).

In the next section, the Secretary invokes an abstract idea when she states “We are committed to fight the twin afflictions of hunger and poverty.” She does give some concrete examples of how State will work toward this goal, but overall this idea could have been better developed. The statement is quite elevated, so tangible examples would have been helpful for the reader.

The next section is quite a departure from the aforementioned section. Secretary Clinton gives examples of how committed she is to this cause and how much it means to her. For example, she uses phrases like “very, very personal,” “food security is at the top of our agenda,” and “members of the G-8 to join the United States in fighting global hunger.” This section is informal and the tone is sincere, therefore it is rather convincing.

However, the piece ends with a vague quote, that there has been an “extraordinary all-hands-on-deck effort.” The only evidence that is given is that the Secretary has traveled to promote this issue to numerous countries. The ending would have been more effective if it would have just stated the information about the travel and omitted the phrase that sets it up.

Blog Post

The title of the blog post is "Strengthening Every Link in the Fight Against Global Hunger" and was written by William E. Craft, Jr. who is the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Trade Policy and Programs. He notes that State hosted the World Food Prize Laureate announcement and described who presented and the order of events. This is a good example of how a blog post can compliment a press release by offering a different perspective.

The author then discussed the winners and said that they "have proven to be leaders in the fight to end world hunger." The language is slightly pretentious in this section. For example, phrases such as "importance of food security implemented through a whole-of-government approach" and "emphasizing its collaborative nature." The section also contained a quote from the Secretary's speech that was powerful: "We ask ourselves not whether we can end hunger but whether we will because it is truly a matter of political will and capacity." The inclusion of this quote as opposed to others is important because it speaks to the audience by stating that a solution to this problem exists.

The post ends with the author discussing the two other speakers. He says that he "was honored to take part in this event which sought to inspire, unite, and mobilize people from a spectrum of specialties in the collective effort to fight world hunger." This was a powerful way to end the piece and it certainly makes the post more personal and relatable

There were 11 comments on this post and 8 of them were relevant to the topic. Six of the comments generally supported the idea and praised the Secretary and State for making these efforts. Two of the eight comments offered suggestions concerning hunger and a few users interacted with each other about the issue. One comment in particular seemed researched and was well articulated.

> There should be less emphasis on analysis and more emphasis on "Getting the Job Done". We can talk and talk until the cows come home but that does little to immediately affect and improve people's lives. There are many inexpensive, low tech solutions that should be implemented now. Decentralizing the supply chain to a more local model would take some pressure off the existing food supply grid. Preserving agricultural land and water zones from development and increasing markets would also help. Increasing partnerships and restrictions against non endemic,foreign, water sucking ornamentals would increase water supplies for agriculture. Increasing farming skills in rural areas and using available urban land for food production for the poor. Also, micro loans/subsidies for small scale, organic farmers. We need a low tech agricultural revolution that every American can partipate in.
>
> Posted on Thu Jun 17, 2010

Figure 27: Comment from State's Blog Post on World Food Prize Laureate.

Facebook Post

Finally, the Facebook post about this topic stated: "Secretary Clinton: "We are committed to fight the twin afflictions of hunger and poverty."" The post also offered a link to the official press release. Finally, it posed a question, "What innovative food programs are making a difference in your country?" At the time of my review, there were 44 comments and 43 people "liked" the post. There are a few interesting occurrences in the comments. First, there was some back and forth debate with two users that was fairly civil and well-informed. However, it was not about this topic but discussed issues with Palestine and Israel. In addition, no one directly answered the question about food programs. Finally, a representative from State commented three times in this post and directly questioned another user as well as supplied information that was intended to

correct the user. Again, this was not on topic but State interestingly decided to pursue arguments nonetheless.

Overall, the blog post for this topic had the most comments that closely aligned with rational-critical debate than any blog post I reviewed. It seems the topic was one that people could support and that it was not polarizing. In addition, the post clearly conveys the sense that this is an issue that has not been solved; therefore people could contribute their ideas. The language and tone was also appropriate so that citizens could feel both inspired and motivated. In contrast, the Facebook post did not attract any debate about the topic, though there was debate on this post about another topic. It is interesting to note that the question posed here did not create the same response as the other Facebook post. A key element that was missing from both platforms was an understanding if action would occur from any of the users' comments.

CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSIONS

While the communications I reviewed demonstrated that agencies are not using social media for collaboration, it is important to note that there are some government social media sites (and even some posts on the platforms I reviewed) that are beginning to achieve public spheres that foster rational-critical debate as well as civic participation. For example, one new and innovative site, www.Challenge.gov, aggregates and poses challenges from around the federal government in an effort to tap into citizens' knowledge. The site is administered by the General Service Administration and was created in accordance with OMB's March 2010 memorandum on the use of challenges/contests and prizes to improve government and encourage innovation. However, any federal government agency can post a challenge on the site and then citizens can join the challenge to propose a solution, discuss the challenge, and show support. In addition, the site usually offers monetary or recognition incentives.

According to the site, "challenges can range from fairly simple (idea suggestions, creation of logos, videos, digital games and mobile applications) to proofs of concept, designs, or finished products that solve the grand challenges of the 21st century." An example of a challenge is the "Health 2.0 Developer Challenge" from the Department of Health and Human Services, which is a request to create applications for consumer visualization and mobile health applications. In addition to posting solutions, the website

encourages users to come together and discuss ways to address the challenge and work collaboratively toward a goal.

In addition, there were blogs that were not in my review that were taking measures to serve as a place where citizens could discuss topics. For example, the Chief Information Officer for the Navy has had a successful blog with many followers who comment and have discussions. His posts are very personal and not always tied to issues that are in the media. He does not repeat press releases or copy material from other sources; his material is original and the ideas are not found in other places. Furthermore, he usually ends his post with a question that opens up the floor for discussion. In some posts he will discuss user comments and offer feedback. In addition, he often takes time to acknowledge his community. He even created a post called "Expanding the Dialogue" that discussed ways he would try to get more participation from users. The posts are genuine and the effort is real—and users have responded to that and have established a true community.

Finally, it also should be addressed that certain Facebook posts that were not in my review engaged citizens more fully than some of the posts I discussed. For example, in many instances, the Department of State (State) used a technique of polling users to find out what issues were most important to them which also prompted discussion. State has also recently been successful with posing questions at the end of the Facebook post to engage users and spark debate.

To this end, it is clear that social media provides opportunities for government agencies to collaborate with its citizens. However, because an agency has adopted this

new technology does necessarily mean that it has adopted the spirit of participation that embodies Web 2.0 principles. In this regard, it may be dangerous for a user to expect these sites to always function as a collaborative space because he or she may ultimately become further indoctrinated. In addition, the agencies may be using these tools to only further promote their message or agenda under the guise of seeking input from citizens. Perhaps citizens should not look to agencies to maintain their social media sites as public spheres and instead forge ahead by participating in public spheres that are not government sanctioned.

APPENDIX: RUBRIC FOR DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF COMMUNICATIONS

Discourse Analysis	Official Press Release	Official Website	Blog Post	Facebook Post
Use of informal language				
Use of jargon				
Use of technical language				
Use of persuasive images				
Use of hedging				
Use of intentional vagueness				
Use of specific, detailed examples				
Use of direct quotes				
Use of rhetorical questions				
Use of language that appeals to emotion				
Use of appropriate subjects				
Use of ambiguous or conflicting information				
Use of authoritative author				
Use of commenting				

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