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## THESIS

**VIA DIALOGUE OR MESSAGING: HOW AIR FORCE  
PUBLIC AFFAIRS IS LEVERAGING SOCIAL MEDIA**

by

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December 2010

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**VIA DIALOGUE OR MESSAGING: HOW AIR FORCE PUBLIC AFFAIRS IS  
LEVERAGING SOCIAL MEDIA**

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## **ABSTRACT**

U.S. military public affairs (PA) policy has witnessed a comprehensive evolution in trust and transparency since the Vietnam War. This evolution continues to this day as Internet-based social media have drastically changed the way information is shared between individuals, groups and organizations.

As a result of this huge paradigm shift, the military PA professional must grapple with these emerging communication platforms not only to advise military commanders, but also to build trust and maintain relationships with key stakeholders. More than traditional PA practices and procedures, social media offer an interactive approach that encourages dialogue and two-way communication. This study found that most of the Air Force PA professionals who participated in this survey ( $n=126$ ) reported that although they frequently use social media, very few report that they use social media to build relationships, engage in conversations, participate in discussions or to monitor the needs and interests of stakeholders.

Based on theoretical concepts of public relations, the survey respondents are not fully leveraging the interactive and dialogic nature of social media.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

*Today, more video is uploaded to YouTube in 60 days than all three U.S. television networks have created in 60 years.*

Laura Fitzpatrick  
*Time Magazine*, p. 17  
May 31, 2010

### A. THE GROWING INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Internet-based social media platforms continue to flourish at astonishing and exponential rates. As of October 2010, Facebook claimed to have more than 500 million active users—a dramatic increase from 12 million users in December 2006 (Facebook, 2010). Today, the world’s largest social networking website boasts an average growth rate of more than 11 million users per month (Facebook, 2010b). The popularity of YouTube has also exploded. According to their fact sheet, “people are watching two billion videos a day on YouTube and uploading hundreds of thousands of videos daily. In fact, every minute, 24 hours of video [are] uploaded to YouTube” (YouTube, 2010). Additionally, according to the Pew Internet & American Life Project, “Twitter traffic exploded over the last year, going from about 2 million unique visitors per month in December 2008 to over 17 million in May 2009” (Fox, Zickuhr, & Smith, 2009). In an attempt to characterize the revolutionary power of social media, Edelman (2010) went as far as to conclude that “we’re in the biggest fundamental change since the advent of the printing press” (p. 14).

Perhaps one of the most critical factors contributing to the social media phenomenon is how they have essentially created a wholesale paradigm shift in the way information is passed between and among organizations and individuals. The long-standing “mass media” model—complete with mega-media conglomerates, newspapers and magazines, cable television and broadcast networks, ad agencies and PR firms—is rapidly losing its stranglehold on the

once-precious and elite commodity of information. Furthermore, not only are people no longer reliant on the mass media as the primary source of the information they desire, but as Wright and Hinson (2009b) point out, “social media technologies basically give anyone with access to a computer the ability to reach a potentially global audience at little or no cost” (p. 3). We now live in a world where Facebook, YouTube and Twitter are largely ubiquitous, household terms. It is these and other web-based platforms that are presenting new opportunities, yet daunting challenges for the official communicators of private companies and government organizations alike, including the United States military.

## **B. SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE U.S. MILITARY**

It is becoming increasingly apparent that social media are changing the communication landscape not only within military ranks, but also between its external audiences, stakeholders and the population at large. For example, less than six months ago (on February 25, 2010), the U.S. Department of Defense issued a new directive regarding the “Responsible and Effective Use of Internet based capabilities,” granting all unclassified DoD computers unfettered access to Internet-based social media services, which includes Facebook, YouTube, MySpace and several other collaboration-based websites.

Price Floyd, the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs at the time, boldly stated that “the default switch on access is to be open...we shouldn’t be so dogmatic about this stuff...I would encourage people to open a Twitter account, create a Facebook page, and see what works for them and their audience (U.S. Department of Defense, 2010b). In addition, the U.S. Navy (2010) just released the *Navy Command Social Media Handbook* in response to what Rear Admiral Dennis Moynihan, the service’s Chief of Information, characterizes as the “rapid growth of social media platforms and technologies (which) have flattened and democratized communication in ways we are just beginning to comprehend” (p. 2).

For the U.S. military to maintain the public trust and support of the American taxpayer, its public interface must remain relevant and continue to provide open lines of communication. As such, it is vital for the Department of Defense to adapt to the current social media trends that are widespread in today's society. It is also important for the U.S. military to continue to develop and maintain the capability to reach the prospective men and women required to fill the ranks of its all-volunteer force. Social media will naturally continue to be an integral part of such recruiting efforts.

While not a focus of this study, another critical factor involving social media and the military is security. As Drapeau and Wells (2009) point out, "the proliferation of social software has ramifications for U.S. national security, spanning future operating challenges of a traditional, irregular, catastrophic, or disruptive nature (p. v). However, they also highlight the positive aspects of social media: "Failure to adopt these tools may reduce an organization's relative capabilities over time. Globally, social software is being used effectively by businesses, individuals, activists, criminals, and terrorists. Governments that harness its potential power can interact better with citizens and anticipate emerging issues" (p. v). It is from this perspective that this thesis examines social media and the U.S. military.

### **C. OBJECTIVES AND FINDINGS**

The study reported in this thesis had two primary objectives: (1) to explore how military Public Affairs (PA) professionals are using social media as part of their daily communication activities and operations; and (2) to determine whether there are any theoretical correlations that inform or explain these current applications and their corresponding levels of effectiveness, trust and overall strategic means of interacting with publics. To maintain feasibility, the study focused specifically on U.S. Air Force PA professionals and their efforts involving social media.

The key findings of the research were that most of the Air Force PA professionals who participated in this study are not fully leveraging the interactive nature of social media. Also, while most respondents reported that these new communication platforms have helped them become more effective on the job, the majority also report they are not using social media to build or strengthen relationships, engage in conversations, participate in discussions or to monitor the needs and interests of their stakeholders.

The findings of this study not only shed light on how the Air Force is leveraging social media, but also contribute to the growing body of knowledge of how social media are affecting the public relations profession. Moreover, the timing of this study could not be more appropriate. While the broader implications of DoD's new social media policy remain to be seen, let alone quantified, it is the military PA professionals who will most likely find themselves at the crux of this rapid change towards openness and transparency. However, the findings of this research can be used to inform other military, governmental and private sector communication efforts.

#### **D. OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH METHOD**

To closely examine the specific topics at hand, an online questionnaire (see Appendix A) was created using Survey Monkey, a popular web-based survey host and software provider. A non-coercive, recruitment e-mail including a link to the web-based survey (see Appendix B) was distributed from the Air Force Public Affairs Agency to each of the six Air Force Major Command PA directors. The directors then distributed a secondary recruitment e-mail (see Appendix C) to the PA professionals assigned under their respective commands. All recruitment letters clearly stated that participation is voluntary, identity would remain confidential and that all responses would be kept anonymous. To further increase participation in the study, the survey link was also posted on the Air Force Public Affairs Professionals Facebook page (see Appendix D).

The 30-question survey consisted of 22 multiple-choice questions inquiring about the participants' average usage of social media, in terms of both

frequency and function, as well as their perceptions of how social media contribute to their effectiveness as the Air Force's official communicators. One open-ended question solicited participants to describe any significant observations or experiences with social media that have affected their work as Air Force PA professionals. The remaining seven questions gathered demographic data in order to identify trends related to the data collected.

## **E. OUTLINE OF THESIS**

This thesis consists of six chapters, including this introduction. Chapter II describes the evolution of trust and transparency in U.S. military public affairs policy. This includes a retrospective analysis of the Vietnam War, Gulf War (Desert Storm), Iraqi Freedom and DoD's embedded media policy, as well as DoD's newest policy regarding social media. This chapter also provides an overview of the U.S. Air Force's current on-line social media presence and discusses the various public relations literature that inform and apply to this research. Chapter III provides a detailed look at the research method and describes the design of the on-line survey instrument and the participant recruitment methods used for gathering the data. Chapter IV describes the survey results and provides detailed figures depicting the data that was recorded. The fifth chapter discusses the significant findings of the study, key theoretical correlations as well as practical applications. It also addresses the limitations of the research and offers suggestions for further research on the topic of social media and Air Force public affairs. The sixth and final chapter offers concluding thoughts and practical training recommendations.

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## **II. THE EVOLUTION OF TRUST AND TRANSPARENCY IN MILITARY PUBLIC AFFAIRS**

### **A. THE ROLE OF THE MILITARY PA PROFESSIONAL**

The military public affairs profession is built upon multiple dimensions of trust. However, as the public representative for the military organization, the public affairs officer's (PAO) primary dimension is based on institutional trust. As Sztompka (1999) claimed, "...all institutions are visible through their agents, their employees, but particularly those who have direct contact with clients, patrons, or customers"—essentially those who "work at the gates of the institution" (p. 80) need to be trusted. As such, the PAO has traditionally been considered a "gatekeeper" of sorts for military organizations. Sztompka further suggests "it is not by accident that such institutions place great importance to the dress, uniforms, neatness, civility, comportment, [and] politeness of their representatives. Through such external cues they can enhance trust, so crucial for their operations" (p. 80). As the "face" of a military organization, the PAO must elicit these characteristics not only to begin establishing rapport with external publics, but to first to earn the trust of the commander before he or she is put into a high-visibility situation.

According to U.S. Department of Defense (2008) DoD Instruction 5400.13 *Public Affairs Operations*, "PA activities and capabilities shall be developed and employed to support the command operations to assure the trust and confidence of the U.S. population, friends and allies; deter and dissuade adversaries; and counter misinformation and disinformation" (p. 2).

In today's military, the PAO is largely responsible for managing the official communication and interactions between the organization and its various publics. These publics may include local citizens, enemy populations, media representatives, government and community officials, online stakeholders, as well as the members within the military unit. As a result, the ongoing interactions

run the gamut of engaging with those who take a supportive, unbiased or adversarial role toward the organization. While operating in such dynamic and unpredictable environments, the PAO must remain flexible, exercise judgment and common sense, and exhibit loyalty to the organization while also fostering trust among the external publics. To do this effectively, military PAOs must not only adhere to the external cues that enhance primary public trust, but they also must adhere to the expectations associated with being the “honest broker” for the military organization. Darley (2005) categorically describes the importance of such honesty:

The foremost role of public affairs is to protect the integrity of the military as an institution overall by ensuring that it is recognized as the most reliable source for official military information among all other competing sources...To accomplish its mission, the only arrows in the public affairs quiver are exercising the simple virtues of telling the truth and facilitating access by outside observers to confirm the truth of what is elsewhere officially asserted. Where neither access nor truth is appropriate, public affairs is not appropriate. (p. 2)

Over the course of the past four decades, there has been a marked evolution of trust and transparency in U.S. military public affairs policy. This evolution has not only paralleled the technological advances associated with the digital information age, but also corresponds with society’s ever-increasing demand for truthfulness and transparency.

## **B. VIETNAM EFFECT ON MILITARY-MEDIA RELATIONS**

It is well documented that during the Vietnam War, when media coverage turned critical of the war effort, the White House and the Department of Defense restricted reporters’ access to commanders and the front lines “in an attempt to stem the tide of negative reporting” (Davidson, 2003, p. 3). This change in military-media relations policy spawned suspicion and mistrust that eventually developed into a highly contentious relationship. At the core of the contention between these two institutions was information, an “organic factor” fundamental

to the nature of both the military and the media. As Dugan (1991) explains, “each has a right and a duty to protect and proclaim certain information. Intelligence information and information on operations are unquestionably the stuff of military secrets, but they are also the makings for great stories of human endeavor, intrigue and struggle” (p. A31).

The controversy continues to this day. On one hand, the American media rely upon the First Amendment to keep the people informed of what their government is doing. On the other hand, the military emphatically demands the need for operational security to protect its people, resources and strategic advantage, and that sensitive information be carefully guarded.

DeFrank (1996) suggests that the tension between the media and the military reached a crescendo during and immediately following the Vietnam War. In fact, he concludes that it had a lasting effect, up to and including the Gulf War, when he astutely points out that Vietnam was a “formative period for a crop of senior officers who conducted the Gulf War...their influence and attitudes to a large extent colored the opinions toward the media of their subordinates” (p. 11). Venable (2002) also observes that the military’s “post-Vietnam blame the media attitude...fostered mistrust, which unfortunately many Army leaders still harbor” (p. 70).

Whether substantiated or not, this lingering attitude of mistrust definitively shaped U.S. military public affairs’ policy during Operation Desert Storm. Nearly two decades after the end of the Vietnam War, the U.S. military kept the media at arm’s length, hindering their access and stifling their ability to cover the events of the war. As a result, news coverage was largely relegated to imagery filmed at a distance (such as the grainy, night-vision footage of anti-aircraft artillery over the skies of Iraq) or polished press briefings with senior military officials at the coalition headquarters in Saudi Arabia. This was a striking contrast to the close-up images broadcast during Vietnam, which ushered the war into America’s living rooms. Such distance, literally and figuratively, enabled the U.S. military to control the flow of information, whereas the press had little to no editorial control.

Small (1994) provides an unabashed example of the discontent that existed between the military and the media in the opening comments of a senior Air Force officer during a Gulf War press briefing: “Let me say up front that I don’t like the press. Your presence here can’t possibly do me any good, and it can hurt me and my people...that’s just so you’ll know where we stand with each other” (p. 5).

In response to the U.S. military’s excessively restrictive public affairs policies during the Gulf War, Small offers the following observation: while “the big loser was Saddam Hussein . . . the other loser was traditional American journalism, which . . . while not surrendering its First Amendment function, independent reporting, found that function seriously compromised” (1994, p. 3).

The ensuing and mounting criticisms from news organization leaders about how the military handled the media during the Gulf War prompted the Department of Defense to make a conscious effort to improve the situation. In the months following the Gulf War, Pentagon officials convened with news organizations to establish an agreeable solution that addressed the concerns of both parties. Consequently, they worked together to produce an updated version of the DoD Principles for News Media. The rewritten principles focus on three basic concepts: (1) open and independent reporting would be the standard for combat coverage in the future; (2) media pools would be the exception rather than the rule; and (3) voluntary compliance with security guidelines was a condition of access to U.S. military forces (U.S. Department of Defense as cited in Venable, 2002). With the collaboration of these new guidelines, the U.S. military and the media had notionally evolved to a new level of cooperation.

### **C. DOD’S EMBEDDED MEDIA POLICY**

However, it was nearly a decade later before these newly crafted principles were actually put to the test on a large scale, when Operation Iraqi Freedom commenced. Katovsky and Carlson (2003) describe this new dawning in military public affairs policy:

This journalistic invasion marked a significant turnaround from the first Gulf War, when a wary military, still trying to shake the Vietnam monkey off its back, micro-managed battlefield news by limiting press access. In the buildup to the new Iraqi campaign, war planners tossed aside any lingering doubts they had about the media by presenting a slick new public relations concept known as embedding. (p. xi)

While it appeared that this leap of faith by the DoD mended a long-standing breach of trust that existed between the military and the media, there were several limitations journalists were quick to point out. Katovsky and Carlson (2003) explain that “once embedded, ease of movement was drastically curtailed and unfettered mobility denied. The trade-off existed between generous access and narrow-aperture coverage” (p. xvi).

Furthermore, the issue of objectivity quickly emerged as a concern as journalist integrity came under fire. Reporters were accused of forming friendships and building emotional bonds with the soldiers and Marines they were supposed to be covering without partiality. There was a natural inclination for reporters to be less critical of those military units and individuals who were providing protection, food and transportation to the frontlines of the war. Despite the widespread claims of biased reporting, Katovsky and Carlson (2003) keenly offer the following observation: “From both the Pentagon and press’s perspective, the embedding experiment was a gamble worth taking. On the surface, it was a demonstration of democratic values and freedom of speech in action, in contrast to the dark tyranny and disinformation of Saddam’s government” (p. xix). Although DoD’s media embed policy was not impeccable, it unquestionably evoked a renewed sense of trust and strengthened relations between the military and the media (Westover & Lamme, 2004).

#### **D. MILITARY POLICY REGARDING SOCIAL MEDIA**

As the United States enters its ninth year of combat operations since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, military public affairs policy has evolved at an astounding rate in an attempt to keep up with the explosion of social media. One could argue that DoD senior leaders, military commanders and strategic communicators have shifted a healthy portion of their attention and resources to understanding (if not leveraging) social media, the now-ubiquitous Internet-based platforms directly impacting all facets of organizational, interpersonal and corporate communications. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the DoD instated a new social media policy in February 2010, which grants all unclassified computers access to Facebook, YouTube, MySpace and other collaboration-based websites. While the benefits and repercussions of this brazen new policy are yet to be realized, the DoD's willingness to openly embrace the use of these collaborative, communication platforms suggests an even deeper level of trust than it provided to the embedded reporters in Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003. This trust expands not only to the U.S. military's external publics by encouraging openness and transparency, but it also extends an unprecedented level of trust to the men and women serving in the DoD.

While basic guidelines have been set forth that emphasize the need to protect sensitive or classified information and the importance of operational security, the intrinsic levels of trust granted with this policy directive used to be reserved largely for the military PAO (and the senior commanders who were "prepped and readied" before any communication with external audiences). Prior to this pro-social media policy change, it was solely the PAO's responsibility to represent the military organization and to provide truthful and accurate information, while interacting with external publics. In fact, a long-standing tenant of traditional military public affairs policy was that all public inquiries from the press or citizens at large had to be directed to and coordinated or answered by the public affairs staff.

Interestingly, the caveat that underlies DoD's new social media policy is that the ultimate trust rests with the commander, who has the decisive authority to "take immediate and commensurate actions, as required, to safeguard missions (e.g., temporarily limiting access to the Internet to preserve operations security or to address bandwidth constraints" (U.S. Department of Defense, 2010). However, the harsh reality is that, until a commander makes a determination and takes any such action, the trust ultimately lies with each and every member assigned to the unit. Moreover, perhaps the most daunting challenge of the new social media policy is the fact that all members of the DoD (officers, enlisted members, civilians and even contractors) have, by default, been granted the role of public spokesman in the social media environment. The crux of the concern is that PAOs have been professionally trained in engaging the public and representing the military organization, whereas the rest of the organization has not.

Trust and transparency has truly evolved to all-time heights in military public affairs policy. Whether this policy change will enhance or detract from the U.S. military mission remains to be seen.

## **E. SOCIAL MEDIA DEFINED**

Before venturing any further into this study, it is important to review a sample of some recent academic definitions of social media. Sweetser and Lariscy (2008) define social media as being "centered around the concept of a read-write web, where the online audience moves beyond passive viewing of web content to actually contributing to the content" (p. 179). Wright and Hinson (2009a) similarly claim that "in some circles what most people call social media are referred to by others as 'consumer-generated media' or as 'user-generated content'" (p. 3). According to Lingley-Larson (2009), "social media is essentially a new format of word of-mouth marketing" (p. 7). Moreover, Huang (2010) defines social media as "web-based services that allow individuals and organizations to share and exchange information and connect with others" (p. 4). Interestingly,

Kelleher (2010) concludes that “definitions of social media vary, but most focus on terms like engagement, participation, two-way communication, and interactivity—much like the field of public relations itself” (p. 239). For the purposes of this study, then, social media is defined as encompassing the tools that an organization uses to establish a web-based community of people with common interests and the means to foster open communication between and among the organization and its community.

## **F. PUBLIC RELATIONS THEORY AND SOCIAL MEDIA**

In order to critically examine how U.S. Air Force public affairs professionals can most effectively leverage social media, I will first describe some of the key historical and conceptual theories that have informed public relations (PR) research over the past several years. I will then review some of the current perspectives and the latest empirical research that explore how social media have affected the roles and responsibilities of PR practitioners and journalists.

### **1. Conceptual Literature**

Dating back to the first theoretical approach to the modern practice of public relations, Grunig and Hunt (1984) initially offered the following four models of PR practice: (1) Press agency/publicity model: one-way communication that uses persuasion and manipulation to influence audiences to behave as the organization desires; (2) Public Information model: one-way communication that uses press releases and other one-way communication techniques to distribute organizational information. In this model, the PR practitioner is often referred to as the “journalist in residence.” This model is common among government organizations; (3) Two-way asymmetrical model: PR practitioners incorporate behavioral and social sciences. They use research to “get inside the heads of consumers” to help them identify messages most likely to motivate or persuade. This model is mostly concerned with using scientific persuasion in order to

change the message of practitioners to their publics; and (4) Two-way symmetrical model—two-way communication that uses communication to negotiate with publics, resolve conflict, and promote mutual understanding and respect between the organization and its publics. With this model, PR practitioners ideally find the middle ground between opposing interests of the organization's dominant coalition and the public.

J. Grunig and L. Grunig (1992) later concluded that “two-way symmetrical public relations epitomizes professional public relations and reflects the growing body of knowledge in the field” (p. 320). However, they also concluded that organizations often do not use this model because authoritarian dominant coalitions see it as a threat to their power. The rapid emergence of social media has certainly called into question the relevance of Grunig and Hunt's first three models, however one could argue that social media epitomizes two-way symmetrical communication.

## **2. Relationship-Based Theory**

Charting a new direction for PR theory, Ferguson (1984) called for placing the research focus on the relationship itself, rather than on the organization or the public. She concluded that, “a relationship-centric model has the assumption that the relationship is the prime issue of concern, not the parties” (p. 20). Ehling (1992) later suggested that the relationship management perspective shifts the practice of public relations away from the manipulation of public opinion and towards a focus on building, nurturing and maintaining organization-public relationships.

Further advancing this theory, L. Grunig, J. Grunig and Ehling (1992) suggested that the most important measures in determining the quality of organization-public relationships are “reciprocity, trust, credibility, mutual legitimacy, openness, mutual satisfaction and mutual understanding” (p. 83). Ledingham and Bruning (1998) later drew a correlation between the five

operational dimensions of openness, trust, involvement, commitment and investment and the attitudes of consumers toward an organization.

Broom, Casey and Ritchey (2001) then concluded that “organization-public relationships are represented by the patterns of interactions, transaction, exchange, and linkage between an organization and its publics. These relationships have properties that are distinct from the identities, attributes, and perceptions of the individuals and the social collectivities in the relationships. Though dynamic in nature, organization-public relationships can be described at a single point in time and tracked over time” (p. 18).

Today, relationship-based theory continues to represent one of the primary theories examined in academic PR research.

### **3. Dialogic Theory of PR**

Currently, among the most pervasive of PR theories to inform the social media phenomenon is that of dialogic theory. Kent and Taylor (1998) first identified the following five principles for integrating dialogic public relations and the World Wide Web: (1) Dialogic loop, which “allows publics to query organizations and more importantly, it offers organizations the opportunity to respond to questions, concerns and problems” (p. 326); (2) Usefulness of information—“sites should make an effort to include information of general value to all publics” (p. 327). (3) Generation of return visits—“sites should contain features that make them attractive for repeat visits such as updated information, changing issues ... and on-line question and answer sessions” (p. 329); (4) Intuitive/ease to use, navigate, “figure out and understand” (p. 329); and (5) Rule of conservation of visitors—in which web designers should minimize “links that can lead visitors astray” (p. 330). Kent and Taylor (1998) further concluded that “if for no other reason than the WWW’s omnipresence, public relations practitioners must become skilled in its use” (p. 331).

Taylor, Kent and White (2001) later emphasized the importance of the dialogic loop. In fact, they found that even if the other four principles are present on an organizational website, it is “not considered fully dialogic if it does not offer, and follow through on, two-way communication” (as cited in Bailey, 2007, p. 2).

Although rooted in relationship theory, Kent and Taylor (2002) further delineated the unique nature of dialogic theory. “What dialogue *does* is change the nature of the organization–public relationship by placing emphasis on the relationship. What dialogue *cannot do* is make an organization behave morally or force organizations to respond to publics. Organizations must willingly make dialogic commitments to publics” (p. 24). In fact, Kent and Taylor (2002) foretell of the paradigm shift to the collaborative-based Internet, years before Facebook, YouTube and Twitter were conceived:

The Web incorporates text, sound, image, movement, and the potential for real-time interaction all in one package. Books, magazines, and newspapers cannot do this, they have no capacity for sound, movement, or real-time interaction. Similarly, neither radio nor television possess (sic) the capacity for real-time interaction. With the possible exception of call-in shows, radio and television are not “interactive,” in the sense that face-to-face or webbed dialogue can be. The Web can be used to communicate directly with publics by offering real time discussions, feedback loops, places to post-comments, sources for organizational information, and postings of organizational member biographies and contact information. Through the commitment of organizational resources and training, the Web can function dialogically rather than monologically (p. 31).

Bruning, Dials and Shirka (2008) further endorse the positive effects of dialogue on organizational-public relationships. They asserted that “the practice of public relations needs to continue exploring techniques for personalizing organization-public interactions,” and observed that “far too often relationship building activity has adopted a ‘one size fits all’ strategy. A relational approach, grounded in dialogic principles, requires that the organization tailor communication and organizational to specific recipients based upon relational needs” (p. 29).

Given its intrinsic focus on interactivity, dialogic theory may very well represent the requisite PR theory most suited to examine the wide reaching effects of social media on organizational communication.

#### **4. PR as a Strategic Management Function**

More than two decades after presenting his simple, yet seminal, four models of public relations, Grunig (2006) offered a comprehensive summation of his (and his colleagues') academic work, in what he creatively described as a "theoretical edifice." Grunig claimed this edifice has not only "played a central role in the development of public relations theory and research during the last 40 years" but it has informed what he characterizes as the "strategic management role of public relations" (p. 153). He found that the PR function is widely viewed as either a buffering activity, which uses "messages and symbolism to create images and reputations that justify the organization as it is," or as a bridging activity in which "organizations build linkages with stakeholders in their environment to transform and constitute the organization in new ways" (p. 171). Grunig concluded that "public relations as a bridging activity seems to be equivalent to our theoretical edifice of public relations as a strategic management function" (p. 171).

Grunig (2009) further elaborated on what he described as two competing approaches to public relations: the symbolic, interpretive paradigm and the strategic management, behavioral paradigm. He explained that "practitioners who follow the interpretive paradigm emphasize messages, publicity, media relations and media effects," whereas the "strategic management paradigm emphasizes two-way communication of many kinds to provide publics a voice in management decisions and to facilitate dialogue between management and publics before and after decisions are made" (p. 9). Grunig (2009) further expounded on this perceived dichotomy when he offered the following observation: "I believe that the interpretive paradigm has been institutionalized in the way most journalists and people in general think about public relations...thus,

I believe it will be necessary to re-institutionalize public relations as a strategic management discipline before it can reach its full potential as a profession that serves the interests of society as well as organizations” (p. 10). In light of the rapid growth of social media, Grunig continued, “I believe digital media will not be used to their full potential without this re-institutionalization” (p.10).

## **5. Empirical Research on PR and Social Media**

Wright and Hinson (2009) examined actual social media use by individual PR practitioners. Their results suggest that meaningful and statistically significant gaps exist between what practitioners say is happening in terms of social media use and what they say should be happening. Also, differences based upon demographics found younger respondents were more likely to use social media and other internet-based technologies in their daily pursuit of news and information.

Lariscy et al. (2009) suggest that “journalists embrace the concept of social media more than they enact the practices” (p. 316). In addition, they found that “while it appears that journalists are not using social media in droves yet...they do not appear opposed to it. And given their desire to work with practitioners using social media, it behooves PR practitioners to begin engaging social media in preparation for the day social media may contribute to agenda building” (p. 316). While Diga and Kelleher’s (2009) study found that PR practitioners who were more frequent users of social media reported greater perceptions of their own structural, expert and prestige power, this study supports Porter and Sallot’s (2005) findings that PR practitioners perceive that web use in general has enhanced their power in their organizations.

## **6. PR 2.0**

In reaction to this rapid shift towards social media and the emergence of the “Web 2.0,” public relations experts have responded with “PR 2.0.” This new version of PR moves beyond good communication to “finding the path to the

conversations” (Breakenridge, 2008, p. 261). According to PR 2.0, conversations enable individuals to “directly reach and communicate with the people who will influence decisions and ultimately help carry the brand forward.” PR 2.0 takes the focus away from disseminating messages through mass media platforms to “discovering the people that matter, where they go for information and why what you represent matters to them specifically” (Breakenridge, 2008, p. 263). PR 2.0 is no longer about controlling communications, but rather a new opportunity to “interact and build relationships with journalists, bloggers and customers” (p. 273). Solis and Breakenridge (2009) conclude that PR 2.0 is the “industry’s renaissance, so it is our chance to reinvigorate PR, to boost its valuation with marketing communications, and more important, to instill trust and respect among the influencers who lost faith in our profession long ago” (p. 282).

#### **G. ARE SOCIAL MEDIA OVERRATED?**

Interestingly, some of the same scholars who offered the dialogic theory of PR recently presented an opposing perspective to the widely perceived power of social media as a communication tool. Taylor and Kent (2010) suggest that “given all the claims about the power of social media made by the profession, what types of evidence can quantitatively support these claims? The answer is none. Very little evidence exists to date” (p. 209). Gladwell (2010) took on a similar critique of social media and asserted that “the platforms of social media are built around weak ties. Twitter is a way of following (or being followed by) people you may never have met. Facebook is a tool for efficiently managing your acquaintances, for keeping up with the people you would not otherwise be able to stay in touch with. That’s why you can have a thousand ‘friends’ on Facebook, as you never could in real life.”

## H. OVERVIEW OF THE U.S. AIR FORCE'S SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE

In the U.S. Air Force, the public affairs mission has traditionally manifested itself in the form of media relations, community relations and internal/command information programs. However, with rapidly emerging web-based, social media platforms, PAOs must not only consider the implications and effects of social media, but they must understand and embrace these new modes of communication to remain relevant among their colleagues and peers both in and out of uniform.

It appears that the U.S. Air Force has not only acknowledged the importance of social media, but it has corporately recognized its potential benefits. As stated in the United States Air Force's (2010) educational pamphlet, *Social Media and the Air Force*:

Public Affairs (PA) professionals are responsible for researching, preparing, conducting and assessing communication operations in the information battlespace and they must use all available communications means to fulfill this dynamic role. Social media allows messages to potentially spread far greater than initially intended, and tools like blogs, *YouTube*, *Twitter* and *Facebook* provide instantaneous communication with vast audiences. Understanding and incorporating these tools will allow Public Affairs to provide a broader range of converged products and become better communicators. We now fight wars on multiple fronts; one of which is the information front. (p. 2)

To that end, U.S. Air Force Public Affairs created an Emerging Technology division in late 2008, which is “responsible for developing strategy, policy and plans for an ever-changing communication landscape for (its) communicators worldwide” (Mishra, 2008). According to Capt. David Faggard, the service's first appointed division chief, the focus is on “direct action with social media (blogging, counter-blogging, posting products to YouTube, etc.); monitoring and analysis of the social media landscape—relating to Air Force and Airmen; and policy and education—educating all public affairs practitioners and the bigger Air Force on social media” (Mishra, 2008). Figure 1 depicts the Air

Force's current social media presence on the Internet. While the sites listed may primarily attract an internal Air Force audience, they are accessible to the general public and serve as a means to tell the Air Force story. It is also worth noting that there are several other Internet websites and forums that specifically cater to Air Force spouses, retirees and other unit alumni and organizational groups; however, the sites listed below are all officially operated by Air Force Public Affairs, except for [airforce.com](http://airforce.com), which is operated by the Air Force Recruiting Service.

Site	Current Use/Description	November 2010 statistics
U.S. Air Force Facebook page <a href="http://www.facebook.com/USairforce">http://www.facebook.com/USairforce</a>	USAF's official Facebook fan page. It will post the most recent news, videos, photos and blog posts from our Airmen throughout the world.	239,514 friends
U.S. Air Force Twitter site <a href="http://twitter.com/usairforce">http://twitter.com/usairforce</a>	Official USAF news, images, video about our Airmen around the world.	9,807 followers 2,425 tweets
Air Force Blue Tube <a href="http://www.youtube.com/afbluetube">http://www.youtube.com/afbluetube</a>	AF BlueTube is a channel for everything Air Force. Hosted by the Air Force Public Affairs Agency, it contains news and information from the US Air Force. It is also a place for Airmen to share their videos and stories. It is looking for all types of material, from funny, to poignant, and everything in between.	3,071 subscribers 1,332,201 total upload views 146,016 channel views
U.S. Air Force's Photostream <a href="http://www.flickr.com/photos/usairforce">http://www.flickr.com/photos/usairforce</a>	The official USAF flickr page. On this site, it will showcase the talent of the men and women who are part of our photojournalist field.	2,173 images uploaded
U.S. Air Force Live (official blog) <a href="http://airforcelive.dodlive.mil/">http://airforcelive.dodlive.mil/</a>	The official blog of the USAF, US Air Force Live, is a blog maintained by the Air Force Public Affairs Agency. The site is intended to be used as a conduit between the Airmen of the Air Force and online readers. The site is a reflection of the men and women serving in the Air Force.	319 total blog entries 315 total comments First blog entry: Sept 5, 2008
U.S. Air Force official website <a href="http://www.af.mil">http://www.af.mil</a>	AF.mil is provided as a public service by the Office of the Secretary of Air Force (Public Affairs). Information presented on AF.mil is considered public information and may be distributed or copied. Use of appropriate byline/photo/image credits is requested.	Average visits: 57,000 visits per day 3.1 M visits per week
U.S. Air Force Official Recruiting website <a href="http://www.airforce.com">http://www.airforce.com</a>	AirForce.com serves as the primary website to recruit prospective men and women to join the Air Force. The site includes an interactive format that lists career opportunities, describes the Air Force mission, values and heritage, and provides a live chat function to interact with an Air Force representative.	Average visits: 839,365 visits per month 27,978 visits per day

Figure 1. Official U.S. Air Force social media platforms

## **I. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The purpose of this study, then, is to investigate the following questions:

RQ1. To what extent do Air Force PA professionals use social media as part of their official job duties and responsibilities?

RQ2. To what extent do Air Force PA professionals report that social media add to their ability to build relationships?

RQ3. To what extent do Air Force PA professionals report that social media have been integrated with their traditional PA practices, programs and activities?

RQ4: To what extent do Air Force PA professionals report that social media enhance their overall job effectiveness?

### III. RESEARCH METHOD

An online questionnaire (see Appendix A) was created using Survey Monkey, a popular web-based survey host and software provider, to investigate how Air Force Public Affairs professionals are using and perceive the value of social media in effectively performing their jobs.

Since I did not have access to every PA professional serving across the Air Force, I relied on a non-scientific research method; in this case, nonprobability, volunteer sampling (Stacks, 2002). “There are many instances when you must resort to nonprobability sampling, for instance: when you must rely on volunteers instead of randomly selected people...or when your access (to a population) is limited” (Stacks, 2002, p. 155). Based on this approach, a non-coercive, recruitment e-mail including a link to the web-based survey (see Appendix B) was distributed from the Air Force Public Affairs Agency to each of the Air Force Major Command PA directors. The directors then distributed a secondary recruitment e-mail (see Appendix C) to the PA professionals assigned under their respective commands. The survey link was also posted on the Air Force Public Affairs Professionals Facebook page (see Appendix D), and a hard copy version of the survey was distributed at the Air Force Communicators’ Workshop in San Antonio, Texas on November 4, 2010. In compliance with IRB standards, all recruitment letters clearly stated that participation is voluntary, identity would remain confidential and that all responses would be kept anonymous.

The web-based survey was available online for three weeks from October 21–November 10, 2010. The 30-question survey was divided into three distinct sections: social media usage, perceptions of social media and demographic information. The basic design of the survey was adapted from recently published studies also involving social media and public relations (Wright & Hinson, 2009a, 2009b, Huang, 2010). To help ensure participant responses were indicative of

their official job-related duties and responsibilities, the following statement was prominently placed at the top of each of the first two sections of the survey: “IMPORTANT: Responses should indicate your average usage and reflect your professional, work-related use only—NOT your personal use.”

The first section included 13 multiple-choice questions that measured participants’ actual use of social media to fulfill their job requirements. The opening questions measured participants’ frequency of use of popular, commercial-based social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, YouTube, Twitter), as well as official DoD or Air Force sponsored social media sites (e.g., AF Twitter page, AF Blue Tube, DoD/Air Force Live, AF Photostream, Wing/Unit Facebook page). Questions then focused specifically on how participants used social media, to include disseminating Air Force messages, building and strengthening relationships, engaging in conversations, and monitoring the needs and interests of various stakeholders. Next, participants were asked how often they used social media to complement their use of traditional PA practices (e.g., press releases, TV/radio broadcasts, community relations programs and events). They were then asked how often they used social media in place of these same traditional practices.

Based on Huang (2010), survey participants were then asked how often they posted information and how often they retrieved information from each of the following four categories of social media: (1) Web logs, or “blogs”; (2) content-sharing sites (e.g., YouTube, Flickr, Wikis); (3) Micro-blogs (Twitter, Google Buzz); and (4) Social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn). For this question, there was also an optional fifth “other” category, which gave participants an opportunity to annotate other specific social media platforms they utilized such as social bookmarking or text messaging. The final question of this section asked participants how often they “ghostwrite” (or “write for the boss”) when using each of the four categories of social media.

Ghostwriting is a fairly common practice for PA professionals, especially while generating traditional PA products such as opinion-editorial (Op-Ed) pieces or responses to media inquiries.

In this first section measuring social media usage, respondents selected from the following five-point scale: 1 = “Never”; 2 = “Every few months”; 3 = “Few times per month”; 4 = “Few times per week”; or 5 = “On a daily basis.” These five categories represented a wide-ranging, yet realistic distribution of frequencies used by survey participants.

The second section of the survey included 10 questions that elicited participants’ perceptions of social media. These questions sought their opinions on how social media contributed to their overall effectiveness as Air Force PA professionals. Questions then looked specifically at whether social media helped improve their effectiveness in each of the three primary functional areas of PA: media relations, community relations and command/internal information. Participants were also asked whether social media helped them become more effective at engaging with key stakeholders, whether social media platforms have become essential to accomplishing their duties as PA professionals, and whether the senior leaders in their organization fully endorsed the use of social media to help accomplish the PA mission. For each of these questions, respondents selected from the following five-point scale: 1 = “Strongly Disagree”; 2 = “Disagree”; 3 = “Unsure”; 4 = “Agree”; or 5 = “Strongly Agree.” This scale, based on Wright & Hinson (2009a), represented an equitable distribution of survey participant perceptions toward various aspects of social media.

The next two questions directly compared respondents’ perceptions of how important each of the aforementioned categories of social media (blogs, content sharing, micro-blogs, social networking sites, and the optional “other”) are to the overall PA efforts of their organization as to how important they *should* be. For these two questions, respondents selected from the following scale: 1 = “Very Unimportant”; 2 = “Unimportant”; 3 = “Unsure”; 4 = “Somewhat Important”; or 5 = “Very Important,” which was based on Wright and Hinson,

2009b.” This section of the survey concluded with an optional, open-ended question that solicited participants to describe any significant observations or experiences with social media that have affected their work as Air Force PA professionals. These responses provided an added bonus from the qualitative perspective to be included in the study.

The third and final section of the survey included seven questions that gathered a variety of demographic information. This data included age, years as a military PA professional, gender, current military rank/status (civilian or retired), current assignment location, type of organization they are assigned to, and the specific categories that describe their job responsibilities. This data was gathered with the purpose of identifying trends among the various demographics and work-related experiences of the survey participants.

## IV. RESULTS

### A. RESPONDENTS

A total of 126 Air Force PA professionals participated in the survey. Despite the non-scientific and volunteer sampling methods, the respondents represented an accurate cross-section of the Air Force PA career field. Participants included 44% ( $n=56$ ) enlisted PA professionals, 17% ( $n=22$ ) PA officers, and 33% ( $n=42$ ) civilians, 10 of which indicated they were also retired from the military. Six participants did not answer this question. This sample was relatively consistent with the Air Force’s PA career field demographics (see Figure 2).

	<b>Enlisted</b>	<b>Officer</b>	<b>Civilian</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Air Force Public Affairs career field</b>	1281 (50%)	308 (12%)	956 (38%)	2545 (100%)
<b>Survey sample (<math>n</math>)</b> **6 respondents (5%) did not report rank/status	56 (47%)	22 (18%)	42 (35%)	120 (95%)

Figure 2. Comparison of AF PA career field demographics vs. survey sample

In addition, although 61% ( $n=74$ ) of respondents were male and only 39% ( $n=47$ ) were female, this also adequately represents the gender mix of the Air Force PA career field as a whole (see Figure 3).

	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Air Force Public Affairs career field</b> (Includes enlisted, officers and civilians)	1543 (61%)	1002 (39%)	2545 (100%)
<b>Survey sample (<math>n</math>)</b> **5 respondents (4%) did not report gender	74 (61%)	47 (39%)	121 (96%)

Figure 3. Comparison of AF PA career field gender vs. survey sample

While most of the participants (84%) were located in the Continental U.S., the types of organizations they were assigned represented a realistic distribution of Air Force PA professionals stationed across the globe. This distribution included the following: Wing: 39%; Major Command: 26%; Squadron/Detachment: 25%; Air Staff/AF Public Affairs Agency: 7%; and all other responses: 3%. Responses were also nicely distributed across the age categories. Nearly 34% of participants were between the ages 30–39, 24% were between 23–29, 22% were between 40–49, and 10% were between 50–59. The remaining 10% of the respondents were either between the ages of 18–22 (6%), or were 60 years or older (4%). Participants' years of military PA experience also spanned a wide range to include the following: 38% had 0–4 years of experience, 22% had 5–10 years, 12% had 11–15 years of experience, 11% had 16–20 years, 9% had 21–25 years, and lastly 7% had more than 25 years of PA experience.

## **B. SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE**

The first research question inquired as to how much Air Force PA professionals are using social media as part of their official job duties and responsibilities. Respondents were asked how often they used non-military social media platforms as part of their regular work routine. As Figure 4.1 indicates, more than two-thirds of the respondents reported using these sites “on a daily basis” (43%,  $n=54$ ) or a “few times per week” (25%,  $n=31$ ), while only 16% ( $n=20$ ) reported they never use them at all (see Figure 4).

How often do you use NON-MILITARY sponsored social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, blog) as part of your regular work routine?

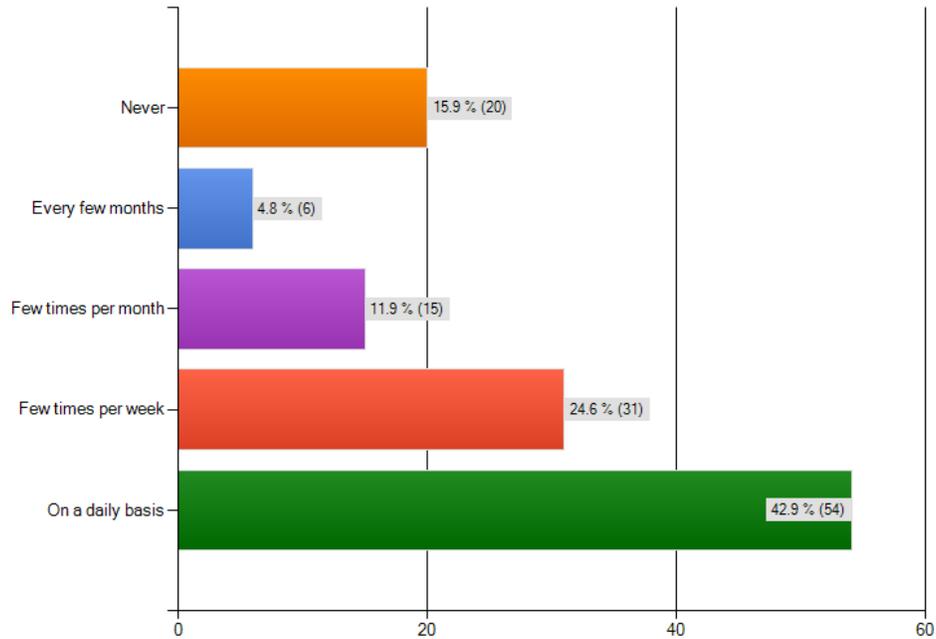


Figure 4. Social media usage of *non-military* sites

On the other hand, when asked how often they use DoD or Air Force-sponsored social media platforms, more than half of the respondents indicated little to no usage; 27% reported “never,” 22% reported “every few months,” and 14% reported “few times per month” (see Figure 5).

How often do you use OFFICIAL DoD or Air Force sponsored social media platforms (e.g., AF Twitter page, AF Blue Tube, DoD/Air Force Live, AF Photostream (Flickr site), Wing/Unit Facebook page)?

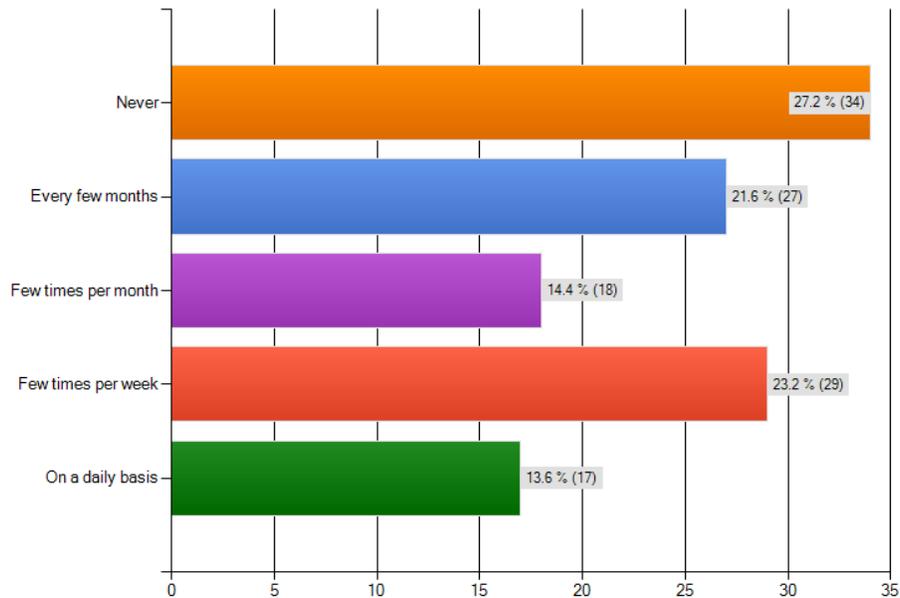


Figure 5. Social media usage of DoD/AF-sponsored websites

The survey also inquired as to what categories of social media were most commonly used among respondents. The results indicate that social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn) were clearly the most utilized by respondents, in terms of posting and accessing information (see Figures 6 and 7). More than half of all respondents (52%,  $n=65$ ) reported that they posted information either on a daily basis ( $n=37$ ) or a few times per week ( $n=28$ ). In addition, 57% ( $n=72$ ) reported that they accessed information from social networking sites either on a daily basis ( $n=45$ ) or a few times per week ( $n=27$ ).

As for the other categories of social media measured in this study, respondents reported that blogs are the least utilized with 80% ( $n=101$ ) never posting information and 59% ( $n=74$ ) never accessing information. Micro-blogs (e.g., Twitter, Google Buzz) also indicate little to no usage among respondents with 67% ( $n=84$ ) reporting never posting information and 59% ( $n=73$ ) never accessing information. Although content sharing sites (e.g., YouTube, Flickr,

Wikis) were second (albeit, a distant second) to social networking sites, 53% of respondents ( $n=67$ ) reported never posting information and 29% ( $n=36$ ) reported never accessing information from these sites (see Figure 6).

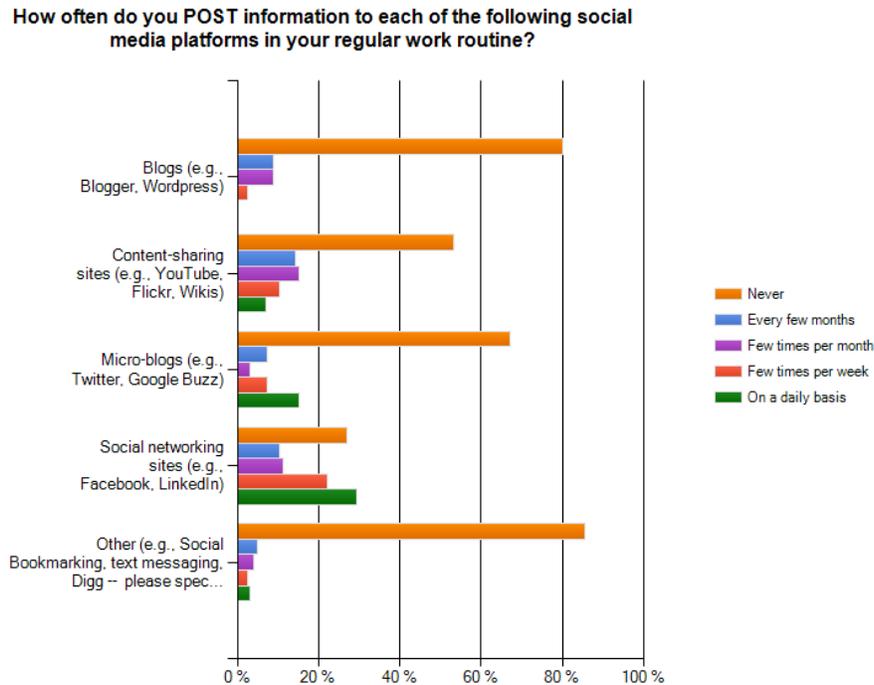


Figure 6. Social media usage (posting information) per category

However, 60% ( $n=75$ ) of respondents did report that they accessed content sharing sites on a fairly regular basis with 18% reporting on a daily basis, 22% reporting a few times per week, and 21% reporting a few times per month (see Figure 7).

**How often do you ACCESS information from each of the following social media platforms in your regular work routine?**

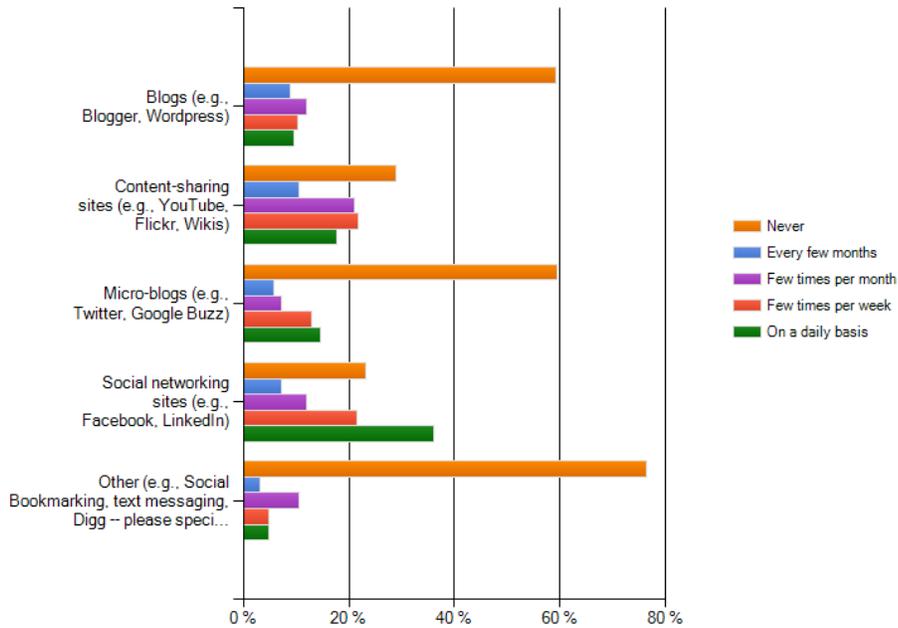


Figure 7. Social media usage (accessing information) per category

A related finding showed that for the few respondents who reported they ghostwrite or “write for the boss,” social networking sites were the only significant category they used. Although 77% of respondents ( $n=95$ ) reported they never ghostwrite, almost a quarter (23%,  $n=29$ ) reported they utilized social networking sites when they did. These respondents’ reports were evenly distributed: 6% on a daily basis, 6.5% few times per week, 5% few times per month, and 6.5% every few months (see Figure 8).

**How often do you ghostwrite or "write for the boss" when posting information to the following social media platforms?**

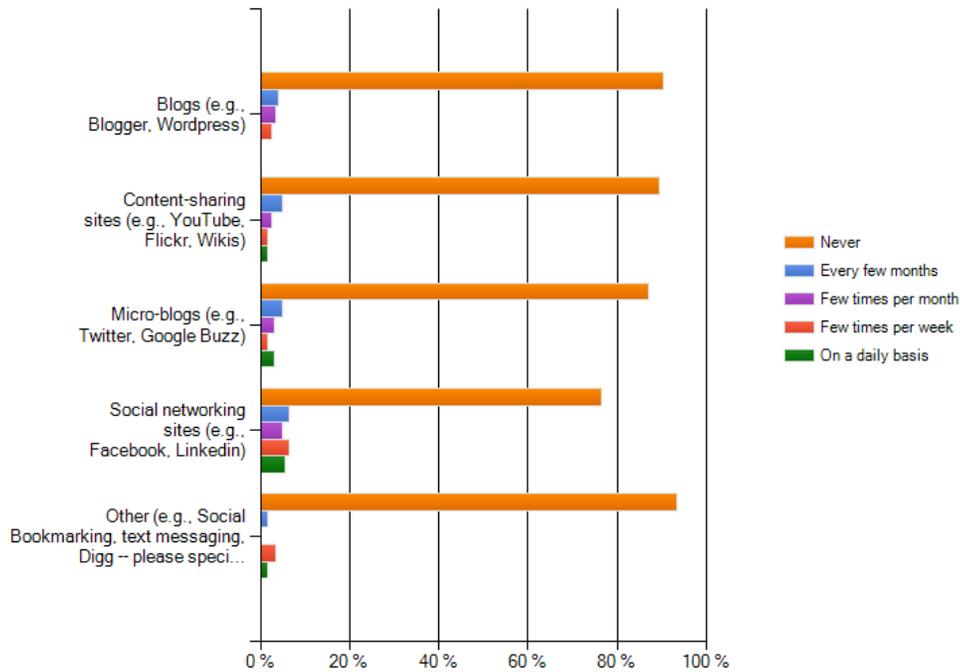


Figure 8. Frequency of ghostwriting per social media category

In addition to measuring the frequency of various types and categories of social media used by Air Force PA professionals, the survey also attempted to measure the various functionalities that social media afford the PA community. Given that building, nurturing and maintaining organization-public relationships are critical to public relations practitioners (Ferguson, 1984; Ehling, 1992, and L. Grunig, et. al, 1992), the second research question investigated the extent to which Air Force PA professionals report that social media add to their ability to build relationships. Respondents were asked a variety of questions that measured factors pertaining to building and maintaining relationships. When asked how often they used social media to build new relationships with key stakeholders, only 7% of respondents ( $n=9$ ) reported “on a daily basis,” while a resounding 40% ( $n=50$ ) reported that they never did (see Figure 9).

How often do you use social media to build new relationships with key stakeholders?

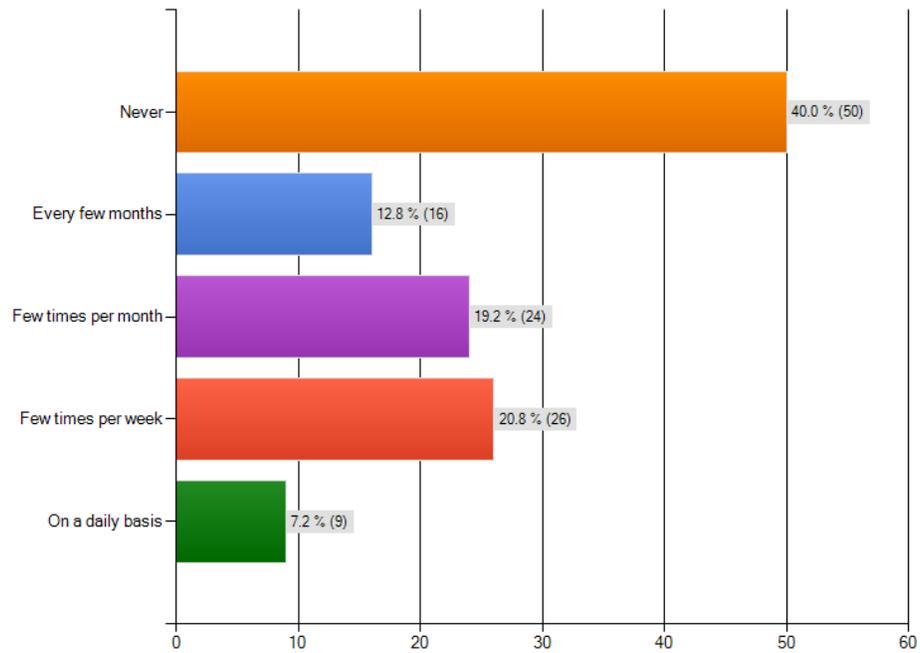


Figure 9. Frequency of building new relationships through social media

Moreover, when asked how often they used social media to *strengthen existing relationships*, a meager 11% of respondents ( $n=14$ ) reported “on a daily basis,” while “never” was again the most reported response by 38% ( $n=47$ ) (see Figure 10).

How often do you use social media to strengthen existing relationships with key stakeholders?

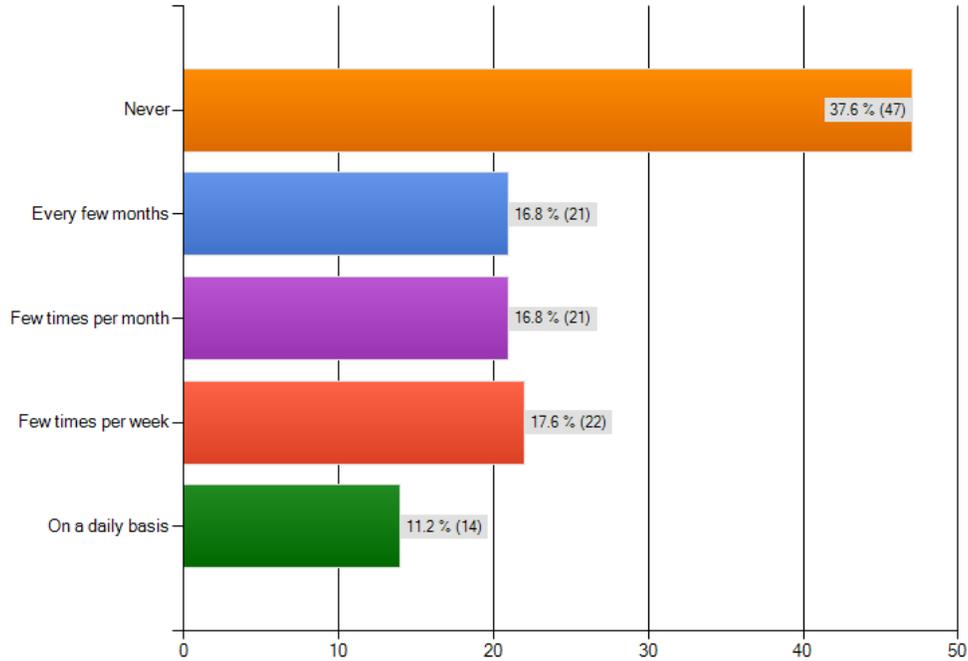


Figure 10. Frequency of strengthening existing relationship with social media

When asked how often they use social media to monitor the needs and interests of the on-line stakeholder community, respondents were fairly evenly divided. While 44% of respondents (n=54) reported “never,” the remaining 56% (n=70) indicated they do, but not very frequently. In fact, only 11% (n=14) reported monitoring the needs and interests of on-line stakeholders on a daily basis. The other 45% were divided as follows: 23% (n=28) reported “few times per week,” 13% indicated “few times per month,” and 10% reported “every few months” (see Figure 11).

How often do you use social media to monitor the needs and interests of the on-line stakeholder community?

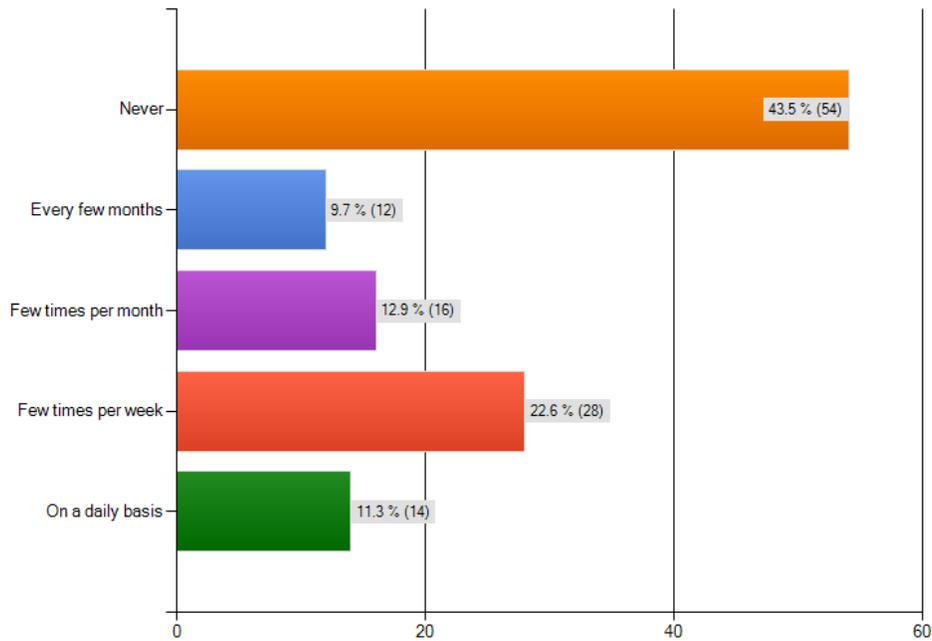


Figure 11. Frequency of monitoring needs and interests of on-line stakeholders

Next, the survey instrument inquired as to how often respondents use social media to engage in conversations or participate in discussions. Interestingly, 39% of the respondents ( $n=48$ ) reported that they never engage in conversation or participate in discussion when using social media, while only 12% ( $n=15$ ) reported they did so on a daily basis. The remaining respondents reported as follows: 20% ( $n=25$ ) indicated “few times per week,” 16% ( $n=20$ ) reported “few times per month,” and 12% ( $n=15$ ) selected “every few months” (see Figure 12).

How often do you use social media to engage in conversations or participate in discussions as part of your regular work routine?

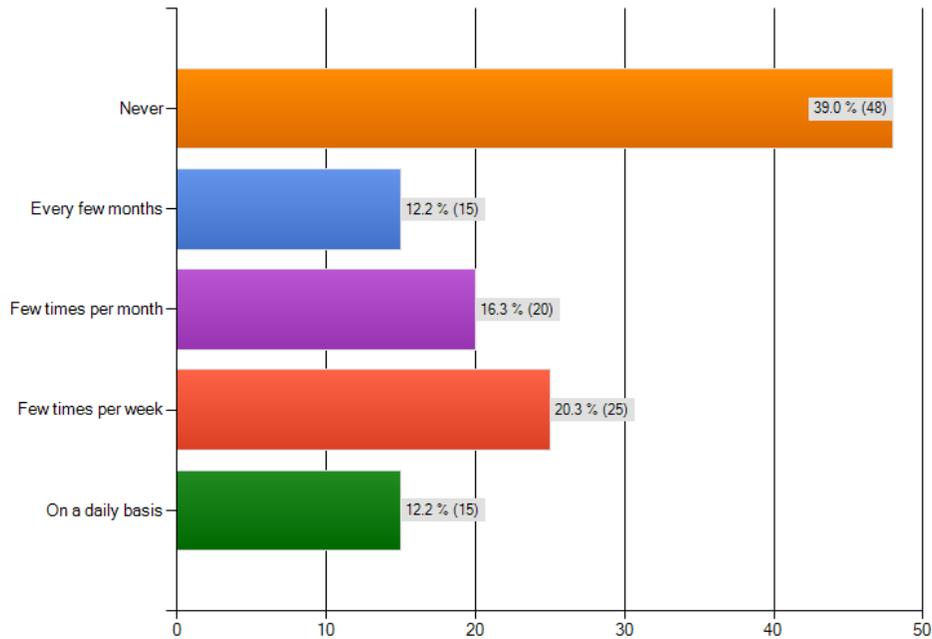


Figure 12. Frequency of engaging in conversations/participating in discussions with social media

On a related topic, participants were asked about frequencies of follow-up upon posting information. Although 36% of respondents ( $n=44$ ) reported “on a daily basis,” another 21% ( $n=26$ ) reported that they never follow up. Of the remaining participants, 24% ( $n=29$ ) reported “few times per week,” 5% ( $n=6$ ) indicated “few times per month,” 10% ( $n=12$ ) reported “every few months,” while 4% ( $n=5$ ) reported “not applicable—I don’t use social media” (see Figure 13).

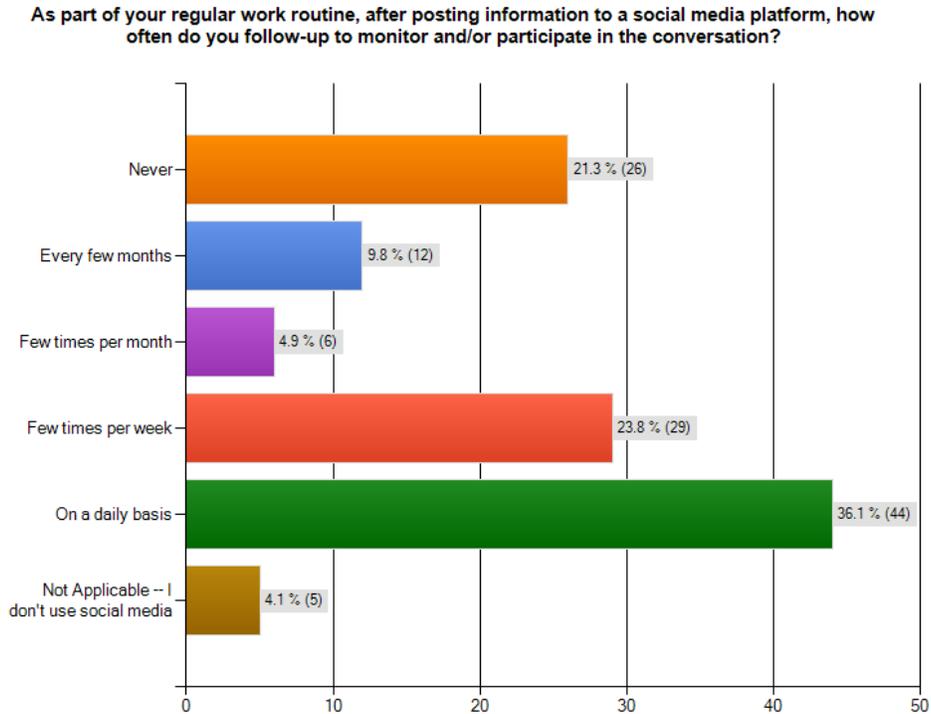


Figure 13. Frequency of following-up after posting information via social media

The survey also measured how often participants disseminated Air Force messages via social media. Respondents were evenly distributed as follows: 24% ( $n=30$ ) reported “never,” 22% ( $n=28$ ) reported “few times per week,” another 22% reported “few times per month,” 20% ( $n=25$ ) reported “on a daily basis,” while 12% ( $n=15$ ) reported “every few months” (see Figure 14).

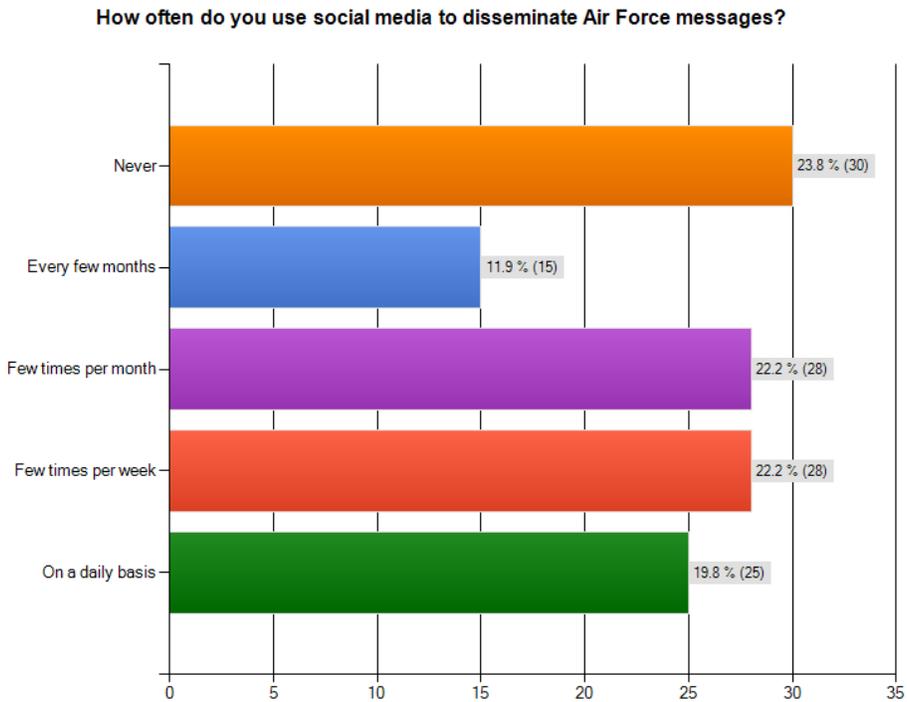


Figure 14. Frequency of disseminating Air Force messages via social media

The third research question sought to determine the extent to which Air Force PA professionals report that social media have been integrated with their traditional PA practices, programs and activities. Responses concerning social media use as a *complement to* traditional outreach tools were fairly evenly distributed. While 25% of respondents ( $n=31$ ) reported “few times per week,” another 23% ( $n=28$ ) reported they never do. Nineteen percent ( $n=23$ ) reported “few times per month,” 18% ( $n=22$ ) reported “every few months,” while only 15% ( $n=19$ ) reported “on a daily basis” (see Figure 15).

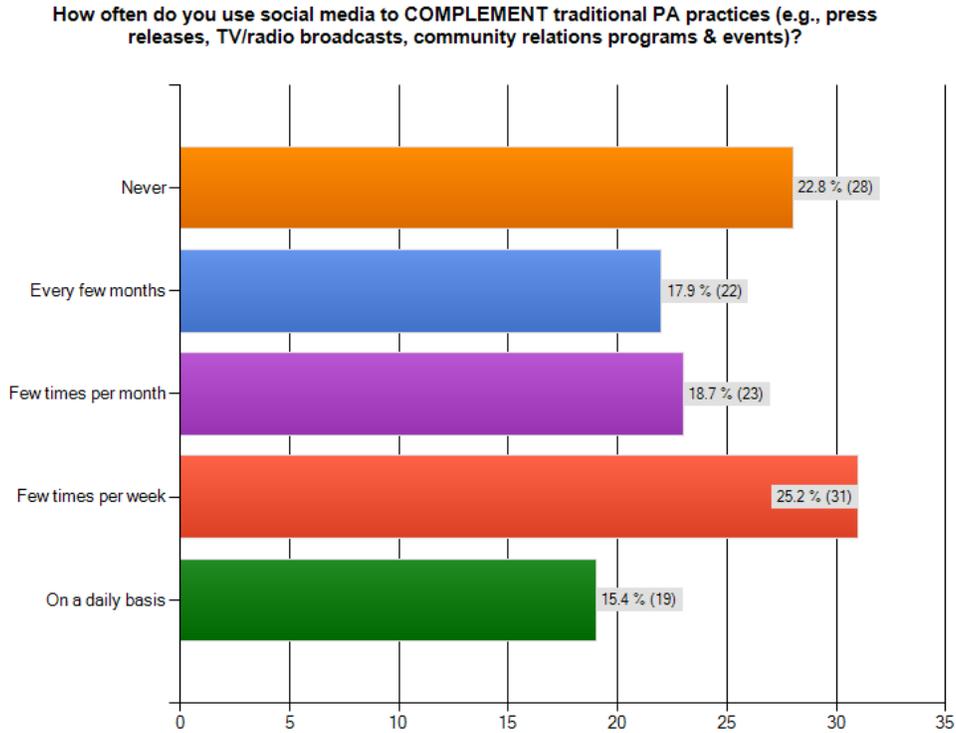


Figure 15. Frequency of using social media to complement traditional public affairs practices

Responses concerning social media use as a *substitute for* traditional outreach tools revealed that a 60% of participants ( $n=74$ ) reported they never do. Meanwhile, only 7% ( $n=9$ ) reported “on a daily basis,” 13% ( $n=16$ ) indicated “few times per week,” 10% ( $n=13$ ) reported “few times per month,” and another 10% ( $n=12$ ) reported “every few months” (see Figure 16).

How often do you use social media IN PLACE OF traditional PA practices (e.g., press releases, TV/radio broadcasts, community relations programs & events)?

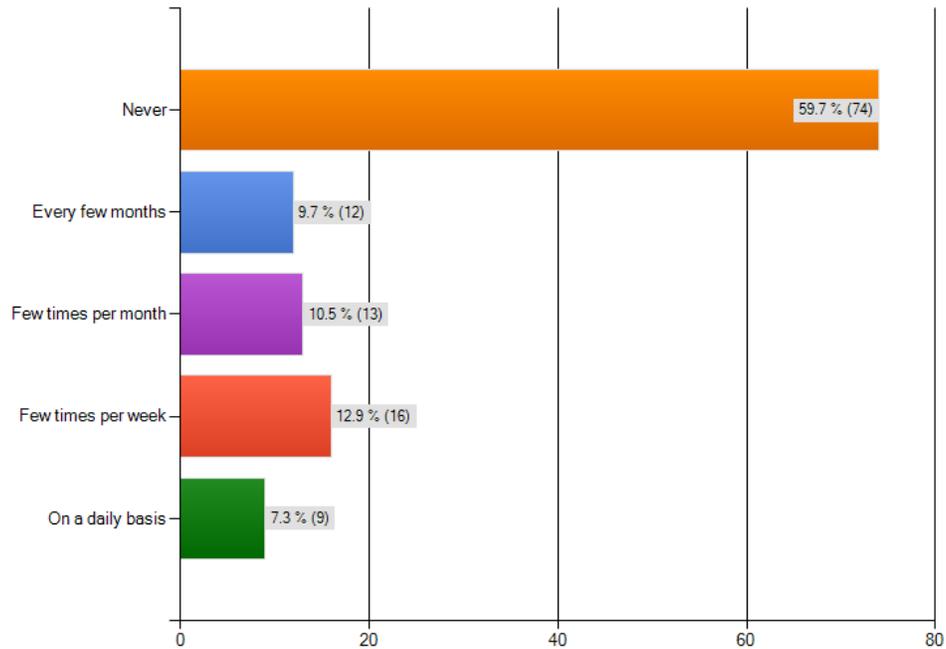


Figure 16. Frequency of using social media in place of traditional public affairs practices

### C. PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The next part of the survey measured various perceptions regarding social media and Air Force Public Affairs. The initial questions of this section directly addressed the fourth research question, concerning the extent to which Air Force PA professionals find that social media enhance their overall job effectiveness. In terms of overall effectiveness, 60% of participants positively responded. In fact, respondents were evenly split with 30% ( $n=36$ ) reporting “strongly agree” and 30% reporting “agree.” Meanwhile, 16% ( $n=20$ ) indicated that they were “unsure” and 13% ( $n=16$ ) selected “not applicable—I don’t use social media.” Only the remaining 11% reported a negative perception, with 7% ( $n=8$ ) reporting “strongly disagree” and 5% ( $n=6$ ) reporting “disagree” (see Figure 17).

**Social media platforms have increased my overall effectiveness as an Air Force public affairs professional.**

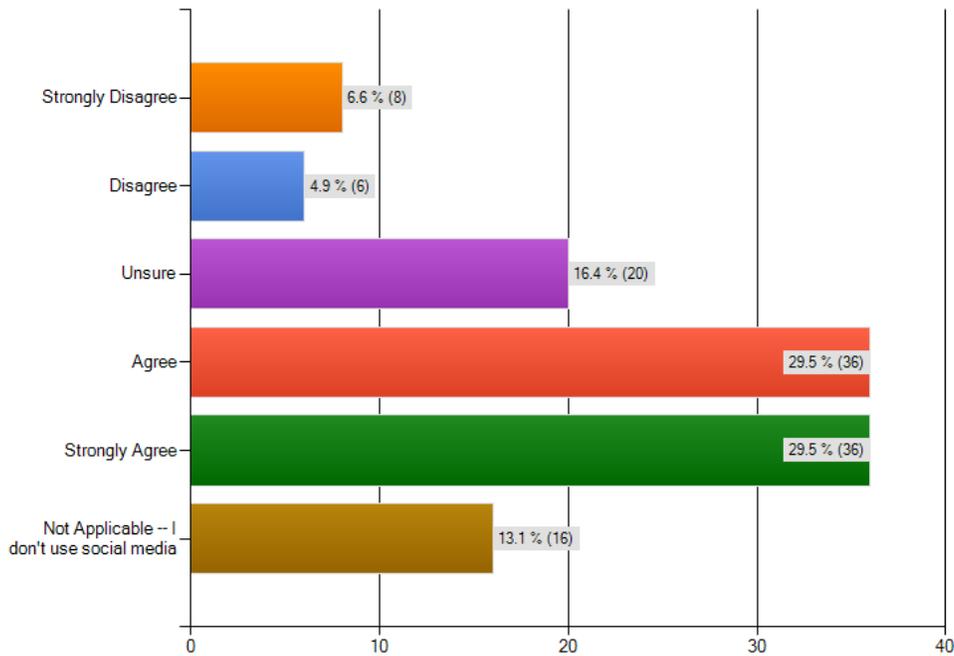


Figure 17. Perceptions of social media increasing overall effectiveness as PA professional

In terms of the extent to which Air Force PA professionals considered social media platforms to be essential to their jobs, a majority of participants positively responded to this statement. In fact, 28% ( $n=33$ ) reported that they “agree” and 23% ( $n=27$ ) indicated they “strongly agree.” On the other hand, only 10% of respondents ( $n=12$ ) reported they “strongly disagree,” while 18% ( $n=22$ ) indicated they “disagree.” The remaining 21% of respondents ( $n=25$ ) reported they were “unsure” as to whether social media have become essential to accomplishing their PA duties (see Figure 18).

**Social media platforms have become essential to accomplishing my duties as an Air Force PA professional.**

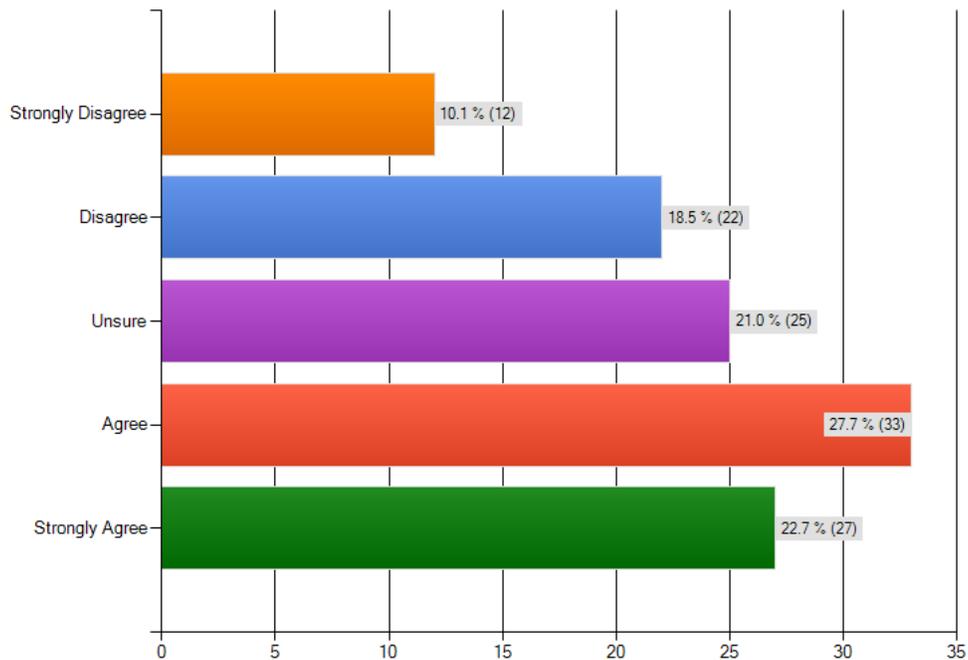


Figure 18. Perceptions of social media becoming essential to accomplishing PA duties

In an attempt to measure whether social media are having more of an impact on certain PA functions, the survey inquired specifically about each of Air Force PA’s three primary functional areas—media relations, community relations and command/internal information. The survey results indicate that participants responded positively and in a similar fashion across each of these functional areas. As such, more than 45% reported that they either agree or strongly agree that social media has helped them become more effective in media relations. Also, 49% of respondents reported they either strongly agreed or agreed that these same platforms have helped them become more effective in community relations. Lastly, more than 52% of respondents reported that they either agreed or strongly agreed that social media platforms have helped them become more effective with command/internal information.”

In contrast, for each of the three PA functional areas, participants collectively responded negatively at a rate of 20% or less. In regards to media relations, only 20% of respondents reported either strongly disagree or disagree. As for community relations and internal/command information, only 15% and 18%, respectively, reported that they strongly disagree or disagree that social media platforms have helped them become more efficient in these areas (see Figures 19, 20 and 21).

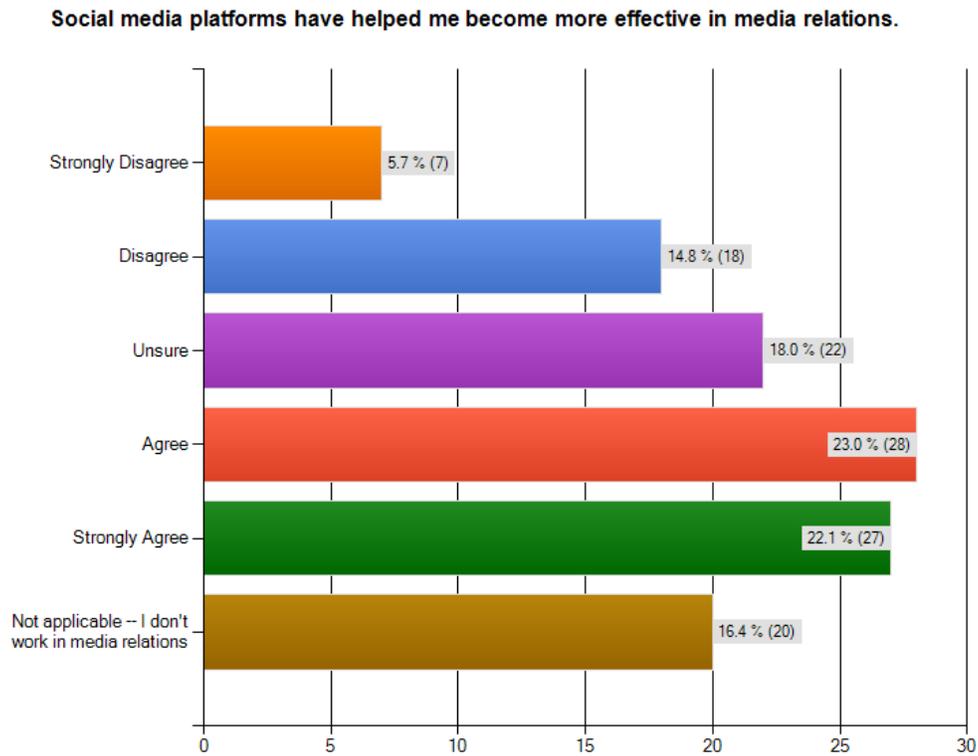


Figure 19. Perceptions of social media increasing effectiveness in media relations

**Social media platforms have helped me become more effective in community relations.**

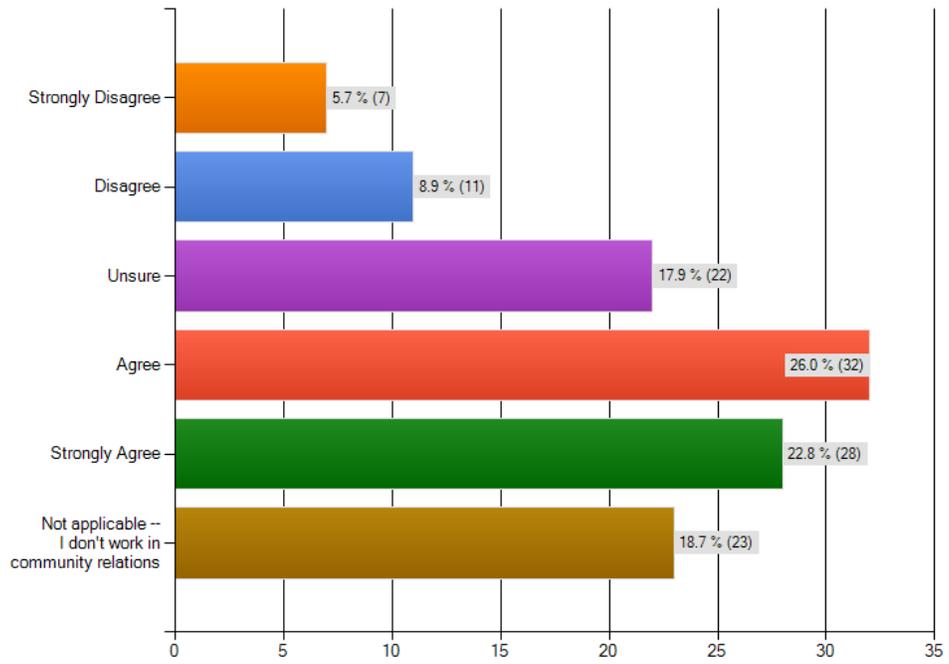


Figure 20. Perceptions of social media increasing effectiveness in community relations

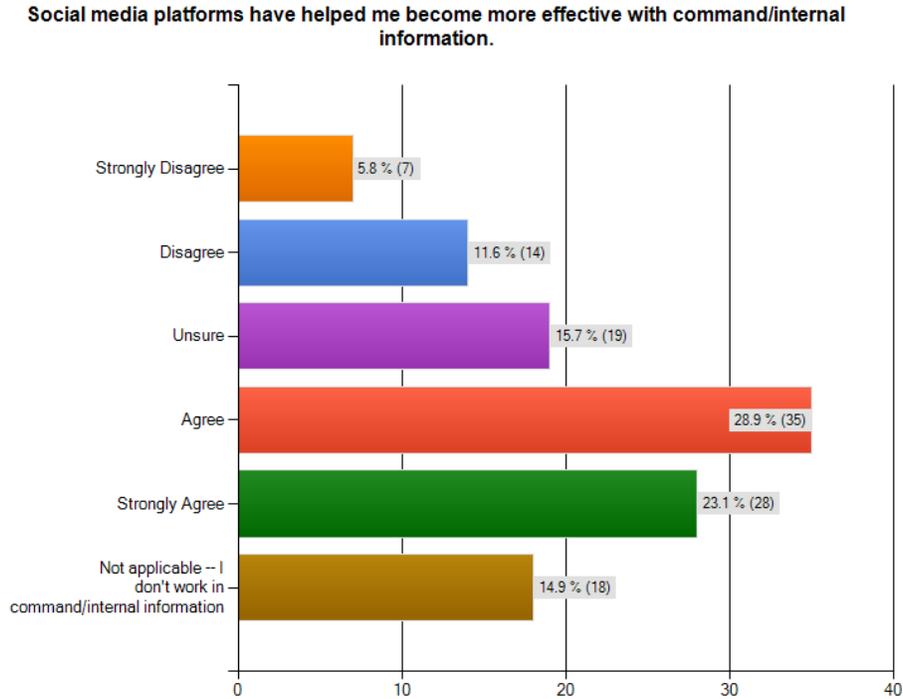


Figure 21. Perceptions of social media increasing effectiveness in command/internal information

When asked whether social media platforms enhanced their effectiveness at engaging with key stakeholders, respondents tended to be either unsure (24%,  $n=29$ ) or reported “non-applicable—I don’t monitor stakeholder concerns or interests” (20%,  $n=24$ ), or they responded positively. In fact, 23% ( $n=28$ ) reported they agree and 17% ( $n=21$ ) strongly agree with this statement. Only 10% ( $n=12$ ) reported they disagree and only 6% ( $n=7$ ) strongly disagreed (see Figure 22).

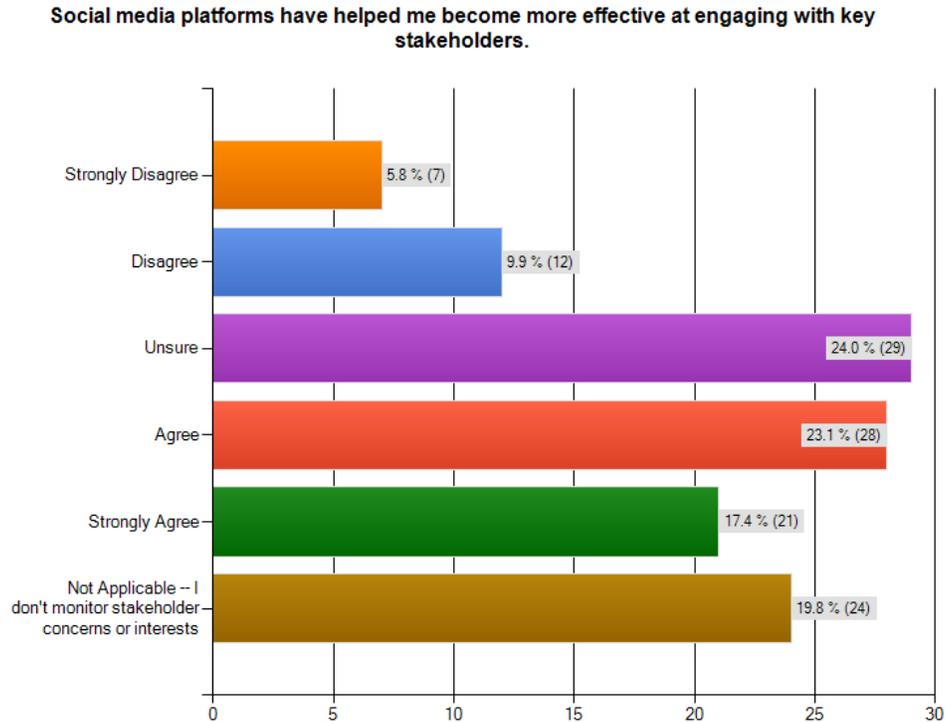


Figure 22. Perceptions of social media increasing effectiveness at engaging with key stakeholders

The survey also attempted to measure participants' perceptions of how important each of the previously specified categories of social media currently *are* as opposed to how important they *should* be. When asked how important social media *are*, more than 50% of the respondents ( $n=59$ ) reported that social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn) are very important. Additionally, 31% ( $n=37$ ) of respondents reported that content-sharing sites (e.g., YouTube, Flickr, Wikis) are also very important. As for the other two categories of social media, blogs (e.g., Blogger, Word Press) and micro-blogs (e.g., Twitter, Google Buzz), responses spanned the gamut, to include 32% and 26% of respondents respectively reporting "unsure"; to 26% and 18% of respondents respectively reporting "very unimportant." However, 42% of respondents did report that micro-blogs are either "somewhat important" (22%,  $n =26$ ) or "very important" (20%,  $n =24$ ). Blogs, on the other hand, garnered the widest range of perceptions with

26% of respondents ( $n=31$ ) reporting “very unimportant,” 14% ( $n=17$ ) reporting them to be “somewhat unimportant,” while another 20% ( $n=24$ ) reported blogs to be “somewhat important” (see Figure 23).

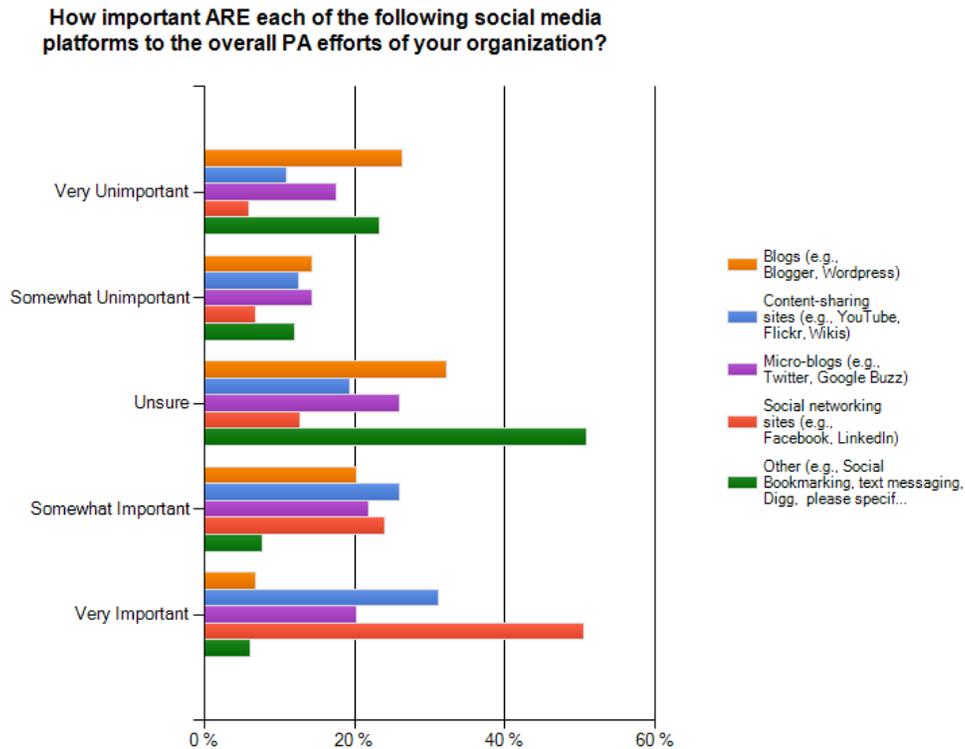


Figure 23. Perceptions of how important social media *are* to PA efforts

When asked how important social media *should* be, more than 83% of respondents ( $n=99$ ) reported that social networking sites should be either “very important” (56%,  $n=66$ ) or “somewhat important” (28%,  $n=33$ ). In addition, 75% of respondents ( $n=89$ ) reported that content-sharing sites should be either “very important” (49%,  $n=58$ ) or “somewhat important” (26%,  $n=31$ ). Also, the majority of respondents (61%,  $n=72$ ) reported that micro-blogs should either be “very important” (34%,  $n=40$ ) or “somewhat important” (27%,  $n=32$ ). And lastly, the majority of respondents (52%,  $n=62$ ) reported that blogs should be either “very important” (23%,  $n=28$ ) or “somewhat important” (29%,  $n=34$ ) (see Figure 24).

**How important SHOULD each of the following social media platforms be to the overall PA efforts of your organization?**

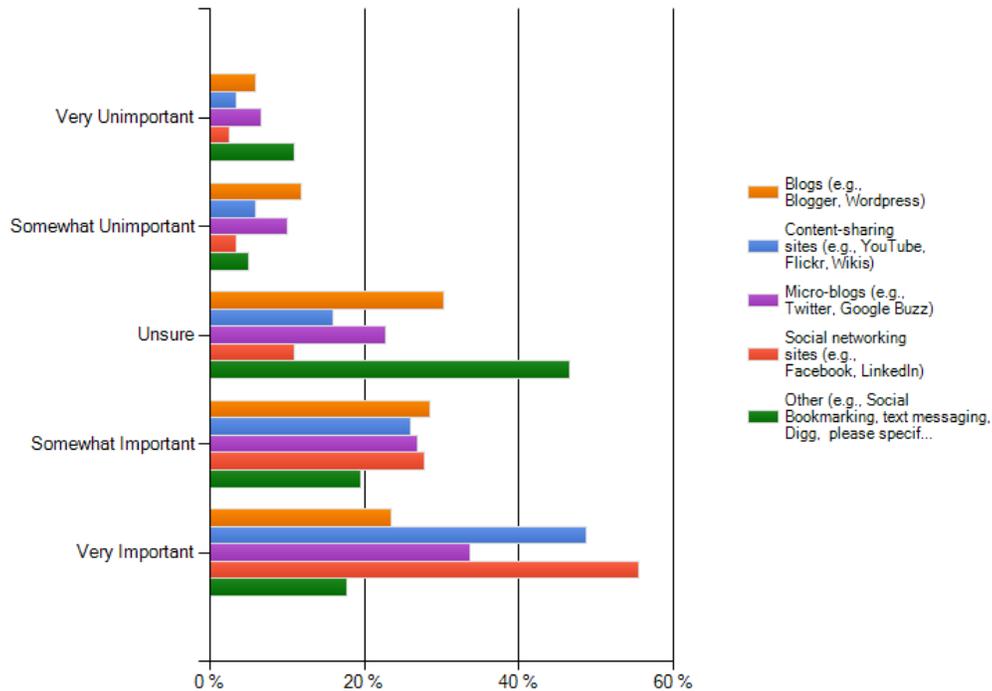


Figure 24. Perceptions of how important social media *should be* to PA efforts

The survey also attempted to measure Air Force PA professionals' perceptions of how the leaders of their respective organizations view the role of social media. When presented the statement "senior leaders in my organization fully endorse using social media platforms to help accomplish the PA mission," 62% of respondents ( $n=76$ ) reported that they either agree (35%,  $n=43$ ) or strongly agree (27%,  $n=33$ ). Only 9% ( $n=11$ ) disagreed and a mere 6% ( $n=8$ ) strongly disagreed that senior leaders in their organizations endorse the use of social media to help accomplish the PA mission. Approximately 23% of respondents ( $n=28$ ) reported they were unsure (see Figure 25).

**Senior leaders in my organization fully endorse using social media platforms to help accomplish the PA mission.**

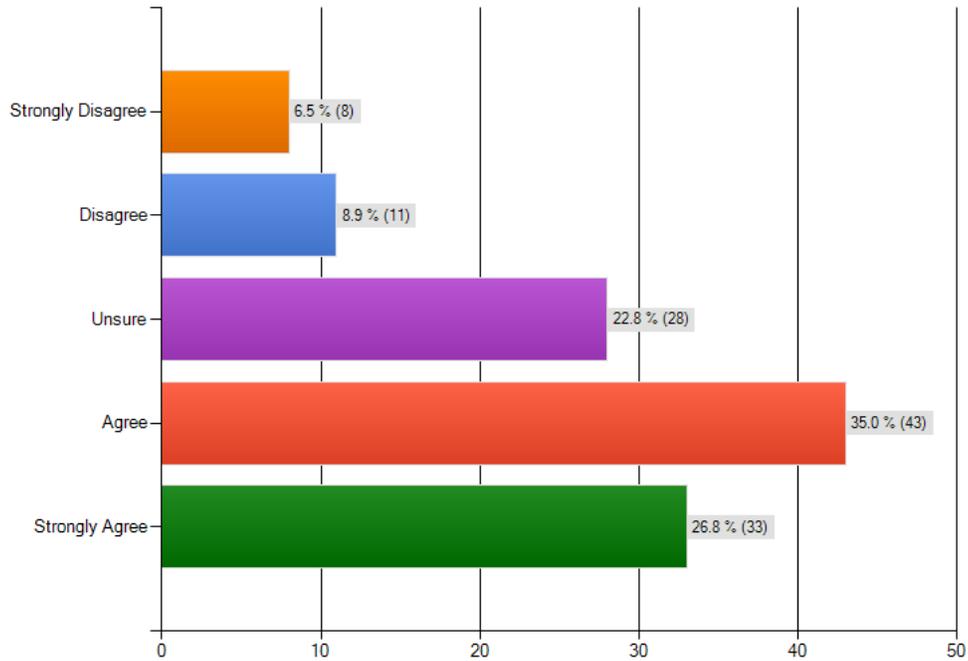


Figure 25. Perceptions of how senior leaders view the role of social media

This section of the survey concluded with an open-ended question, which afforded an opportunity for respondents to describe significant observations or experiences with social media that have affected their work as Air Force PA professionals. Of the 126 total respondents, 21% ( $n=26$ ) annotated personal comments that described a wide range of observations regarding social media and Air Force Public Affairs. Of the 26 open-ended comments, four were positive observations, seven were neutral, and 15 were negative in nature. Despite the positive perceptions reported in regards to how senior leaders view the role of social media (see Figure 25), the most common theme to emerge was how these same leaders are hesitant to use social media. For example, one respondent observed that “our wing commander is still dragging his feet,” while another reported, “command is very hesitant to implement social media...resulting in behind the curve presence in this new media format.” There were a total of six

comments that concurred with this negative perception. Another common theme was the lack of resources. This included limited manpower, lack of funding and headquarters support to adequately execute social media programs. One respondent observed, “due to high turnover rates, driven by ops tempo, it is getting more and more difficult to sustain program continuity.” Another claimed, “I still have a base paper...speaking engagements...and now I have social media...but I didn’t get any extra bodies to do it.” Of the four positive comments submitted, the most common theme to emerge was how social media have become an invaluable tool in sharing information, in terms of speed and ease of communicating.

#### **D. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

In addition to the survey respondents’ representative cross-section of the Air Force PA career field mentioned at the outset of this chapter, a diverse range of PA functional area specialties were also represented in this study. When respondents were asked to annotate each of their functional areas of responsibility, media relations (30%,  $n=36$ ), internal/command information (27%,  $n=33$ ) and community relations (18%,  $n=22$ ) were naturally, among the most commonly reported areas. In addition, editor/staff writer (25%,  $n=30$ ), videographer (22%,  $n=26$ ), and broadcaster (18%,  $n=22$ ) were also among the most commonly reported job categories, all of which typically support the internal/command information category. Finally, respondents also commonly reported chief/director (19%,  $n=23$ ) who typically supervises or manages operations in each of the three primary PA functional areas (see Figure 26).

**What categories best describe your current job responsibilities? (Please select all that apply)**

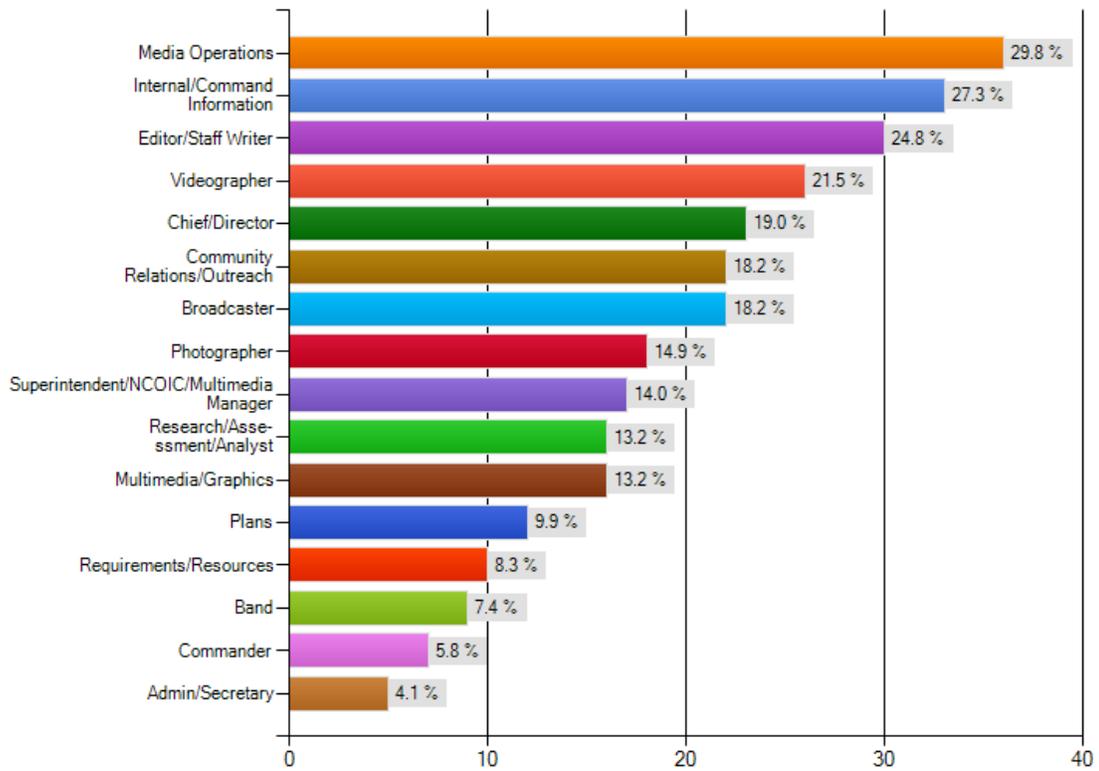


Figure 26. Respondents' description of current job responsibilities

## V. DISCUSSION

### A. REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study sought to examine how Air Force PA professionals are using social media and whether they are leveraging these new communication platforms in their official capacity as the organization's professional communicators. The findings of this study address the four research questions that guided it.

RQ1. *To what extent do Air Force PA professionals use social media as part of their official job duties and responsibilities?* As anticipated, a majority of the respondents who participated in this study not only reported they regularly use social media on the job, they also agreed that social media should become even more important to the overall PA efforts of their organizations than they currently are. As one respondent aptly explained, "We have found that social media has (sic) been an extremely valuable tool, and we are projecting that the vast majority of feedback and communication will be handled through social media." These findings were not at all surprising as they emulate the propagation of social media across all facets of organizational, interpersonal and corporate communication in today's information-saturated environment.

RQ2. *To what extent do Air Force PA professionals report that social media add to their ability to build relationships?* The findings reported in this study indicate that a large majority of respondents do not use social media to build new relationships, nor to strengthen existing relationships with key stakeholders. Furthermore, the study showed that participants rarely use social media to engage in conversations, participate in discussions, or to monitor the needs and interests of its on-line stakeholders. These findings present an interesting dilemma, as they are counterintuitive to the interactive and collaborative benefits associated with utilizing social media. Moreover, these

findings are not consistent with any of the key PR theories that inform this study, to include relationship theory, dialogic theory or PR as a strategic management function.

RQ3. *To what extent do Air Force PA professionals report that social media have been integrated with their traditional PA practices, programs and activities?* While many of the respondents reported they are using social media to complement their traditional PA practices, very few reported that they have completely replaced their customary practices and programs with social media. One respondent captured this sentiment when he suggested that, “For some of us social media is (sic) not yet the most natural communication channel.” Another participant offered, “I think there is a place for social media, but right now it seems like it’s the blind leading the blind.” Much like the findings of the first two RQs, where the majority of respondents reported a shift towards using social media, there is an underlying reticence against fully embracing these new communication platforms. One respondent went as far as to claim, “To think social media will be of any real consequence to what AF-PA does in the near future is wishful thinking for probably another decade at least.”

RQ4. *To what extent do Air Force PA professionals report that social media enhance their overall job effectiveness?* The majority of respondents in this study reported that social media not only enhance their overall job effectiveness, but most of them agreed that social media have become essential to accomplishing their job duties. Furthermore, a majority of participants also reported that social media platforms have helped them become more effective in all three primary PA functional areas—media relations, community relations and internal/command information. One could argue that genuinely implementing an interactive or dialogic approach to social media could potentially generate even higher, unrealized levels of effectiveness.

## **B. MORE MESSAGING THAN DIALOGUE**

The emergent outcome is that the Air Force PA professionals who participated in this study are not fully leveraging the interactive nature of social media. The irony is that while most respondents report that these new communication platforms have helped them become more effective on the job, the majority also report they are not using social media to build or strengthen relationships, engage in conversations, participate in discussions or to monitor the needs and interests of their stakeholders. These findings support Solis and Breakenridge's (2009) claim that organizations "are merely experimenting with social media...(while) some are doing a great job...others, unfortunately, are underestimating it and applying the same old-school approach of "marketing at" people instead of engaging in conversations that will enhance the brand and customer relationships" (p. xviii).

Solis and Breakenridge further suggest that "social media requires one-on-one conversations and unfortunately many marketers and PR "pros," until recently, have cowered in the shadows, hurling messages in bulk at people, hoping that some would stick" (2009, p. xix). Revisiting Grunig's (2009) dichotomy between the interpretive (messaging, publicity-based) and the strategic management (two-way, dialogue-based) paradigms of public relations, the participants of this study clearly favored the interpretive paradigm. In fact, more than 75% of respondents reported they disseminate Air Force messages via social media (albeit only 20% reported they did so on a daily basis). Whereas, even more convincingly, 39% of respondents reported they never use social media to engage in conversations or participate in discussions, and only a scant 12% reported they did so on a daily basis.

And while Grunig (2009) reiterated that "new digital media have dialogical, interactive, relational, and global properties that make them perfectly suited for a strategic management paradigm of public relations—properties that one would think would force public relations practitioners to abandon their traditional one-

way, message-oriented, asymmetrical and ethnocentric paradigm of practice” (p. 6), the respondents in this study largely clung to the interpretive paradigm and abandoned the notion of using social media to foster dialogue or build relationships with stakeholders. The findings of this study also support Grunig’s claim that “when new media are introduced communicators tend to use them in the same way that they used the old media” (p. 6). In fact, one respondent precisely observed that, “Too many people use their social media sites as an avenue to simply regurgitate the news on their web sites—zero conversation...(and) tons of AF organizations have Facebook pages with zero content. What’s the point?”

### **C. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PA CAREER FIELD**

Based on the theoretical constructs that guided this study, the Air Force PA professionals that participated in this survey are clearly not leveraging social media to their fullest potential. A primary take-away from this study is that dialogue, conversation and two-way communication must be an integral part of all social media efforts. Just as Taylor, Kent and White (2001) stressed the importance of maintaining the dialogic loop, Air Force PA professionals must always follow through on two-way communications and conversations when employing social media. If they do not, these new communication platforms offer no added value to the traditional, one-way PA practices of “speaking in messages,” “pitching story ideas” or “spamming out press releases”—all of which are quickly becoming obsolete. Moreover, to truly become effective in the social media realm, Air Force communicators should heed the advice of Solis and Breakenridge (2009), who further assert: “it’s important to humanize the story and become a part of the conversation instead of just trying to sell your way into it...the process shift from pitching to conversation-based interaction cultivates relationships, strengthens customer service, and increases brand resonance and loyalty” (p. 92).

The study also reveals the need for PA professionals to become educators and advocates for social media. This not only includes educating military colleagues, peers and subordinates, but includes the challenge of educating senior leaders and commanders about the value of social media. The following section addresses these nuances in detail.

#### **D. SENIOR LEADER IMPACT ON PUBLIC AFFAIRS**

It is important to note that in many cases, PA efforts and programs are tied directly to the senior leadership of the organization. Interestingly, although the study suggests that most senior leaders endorse using social media to accomplish the PA mission, several of the open-ended responses described the participants' frustration associated with not embracing these new communication platforms. For example, one respondent claimed, "Our wing commander WILL NOT endorse an official Facebook or Twitter page for our wing, even though our MAJCOM has one. He does not agree that it is necessary and we're beating our heads against the wall. We have 5 examples a day as to how Micro-blogs and SNS (social network sites) can help us, as PAs, get the word out and we're getting nowhere. I feel as if we're riding along in a horse and buggy while Camaros are flying past us at 90 MPH!"

Other respondent observations concurred with this sentiment: The "wing commander has not yet approved an official Facebook page, nor any other social media avenues. However, I believe once approved it will greatly increase our effectiveness in all areas of PA." Also that "command is very hesitant to implement social media use in PA, resulting in behind the curve presence in this new media format." Perhaps the most insightful observation was it "seems like many of our senior leaders are pridefully ignorant about social media - believing it is something their kids use and discounting it instead of realizing "these kids" are our Airmen." On a related note, a different respondent offered the following observation: "the younger Airmen who know it (social media) and understand

how to use it aren't empowered or able to bring their skills because they lack the right amount of stripes or because their ideas aren't "safe" enough.

Another repercussion of senior leaders' widely divergent approaches to social media, matched with the transitory nature of military command assignments, is that the PA staff must continuously adapt to the particular agenda or perhaps, even the personality of the commander. On one hand, the boss may demand a robust PA program, complete with active internal/command information, community and media relations programs, and a dynamic social media presence. Or, the commander may take a more passive approach to PA and limit his or her interaction with the public, whether on-line or in person. Meanwhile, the PA professional must also conform to DoD's top-down policy, which encourages all personnel to embrace social media and to tell their story.

## **E. LIMITATIONS**

There were significant limitations associated with this study. First and foremost, without having direct access to all 2,545 Air Force PA professionals, the study could not be conducted using scientific or probability sampling. Instead, the research was limited to non-probability, volunteer sampling in which "even greater caution must be taken when interpreting results...as there are any number of biases that may account for what they may say or do" (Stacks, 2002, p. 158). For example, since the survey recruitment e-mails were distributed via the chain of command, some PA professionals may have felt compelled to participate—despite the voluntary nature of the research, as presented to and approved by the IRB—while others avoided it all together. Another limitation of the chain of command distribution method was that if a PA chief or director was deployed, on-leave, or otherwise unreachable, the individuals on his or her staff may not have been contacted at all. Given these varied distribution means and methods, the exact response rate could not be computed. Despite the uncanny, representative sample of Air Force PA professionals that did participate in the survey, the non-scientific results herein cannot be generalized to the entire PA

career field. Nevertheless, these findings provide insights into trends and challenges within the PA function now and in looking to the future.

## **F. FUTURE RESEARCH**

To obtain an accurate, scientific assessment of how the Air Force PA career field is leveraging social media, a similar survey could be distributed via the centrally managed Air Force “PA All” e-mail distribution list. In order to utilize this official distribution list, it is highly recommended that the researcher submit a formal request to conduct survey research through the Air Force Survey Office at the Air Force Manpower Agency, Randolph Air Force Base, Texas. In addition, qualitative interviews, focus groups and other research methods examining social media and public affairs could offer more detailed and contextual descriptions of the topics discussed in this study.

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## **VI. CONCLUSION**

Regardless of the limitations associated with this study, military units, government organizations, or perhaps even private sector companies, can use the findings of this research as a starting point to assess whether their public relations professionals are appropriately leveraging social media in dialogic and interactive ways.

Based on the results gathered from the small sample of Air Force PA professionals who participated, it appears that more theoretical grounding is needed and more emphasis should be placed on the conversational nature and dialogic benefits associated with social media. It is likely that traditional PA practices and procedures will remain an integral part of the U.S. military's technical training curriculum at the Defense Information School (DINFOS) at Fort Meade, Maryland. However, DoD's new eye toward social media should prompt a fresh approach in the classroom, to include teaching such theoretical concepts as PR as a strategic management paradigm, dialogic theory of PR, and perhaps even an overview of "PR 2.0."

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# APPENDIX A

## 1. Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in the following research study that examines how Air Force Public Affairs professionals use and perceive social media. Your participation is completely voluntary and your responses will be kept strictly confidential, however there is a minor risk that personal information collected could be lost or mismanaged. This questionnaire should take no more than 10-15 minutes to complete. You may skip any question or discontinue the survey at any time.

If you have questions regarding this research, please contact Dr. Dorothy Denning, Naval Postgraduate School, Department of Defense Analysis, Monterey, California at 831-656-3105 or via e-mail: dedennin@nps.edu. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the Naval Postgraduate School IRB Chair, Dr. Larry Shattuck at 831-656-2473 or via e-mail: lgshattu@nps.edu.

By clicking "Next" you are acknowledging that you have read this disclaimer and are providing consent to participate in this study and to being quoted anonymously.

## 2. Social media usage

**\*\*IMPORTANT:** Responses should indicate your average usage and reflect your professional, work-related use only -- NOT your personal use.

### 1. How often do you use NON-MILITARY sponsored social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, blog) as part of your regular work routine?

Never       Every few months       Few times per month       Few times per week       On a daily basis

### 2. How often do you use OFFICIAL DoD or Air Force sponsored social media platforms (e.g., AF Twitter page, AF Blue Tube, DoD/Air Force Live, AF Photostream (Flickr site), Wing/Unit Facebook page)?

Never       Every few months       Few times per month       Few times per week       On a daily basis

### 3. How often do you use social media to disseminate Air Force messages?

Never       Every few months       Few times per month       Few times per week       On a daily basis

### 4. How often do you use social media to build new relationships with key stakeholders?

Never       Every few months       Few times per month       Few times per week       On a daily basis

### 5. How often do you use social media to strengthen existing relationships with key stakeholders?

Never       Every few months       Few times per month       Few times per week       On a daily basis

6. How often do you use social media to engage in conversations or participate in discussions as part of your regular work routine?

Never
  Every few months
  Few times per month
  Few times per week
  On a daily basis

7. How often do you use social media to monitor the needs and interests of the on-line stakeholder community?

Never
  Every few months
  Few times per month
  Few times per week
  On a daily basis

8. How often do you use social media to COMPLEMENT traditional PA practices (e.g., press releases, TV/radio broadcasts, community relations programs & events)?

Never
  Every few months
  Few times per month
  Few times per week
  On a daily basis

9. How often do you use social media IN PLACE OF traditional PA practices (e.g., press releases, TV/radio broadcasts, community relations programs & events)?

Never
  Every few months
  Few times per month
  Few times per week
  On a daily basis

10. How often do you POST information to each of the following social media platforms in your regular work routine?

	Never	Every few months	Few times per month	Few times per week	On a daily basis
Blogs (e.g., Blogger, Wordpress)	<input type="radio"/>				
Content-sharing sites (e.g., YouTube, Flickr, Wikis)	<input type="radio"/>				
Micro-blogs (e.g., Twitter, Google Buzz)	<input type="radio"/>				
Social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn)	<input type="radio"/>				
Other (e.g., Social Bookmarking, text messaging, Digg -- please specify below if applicable)	<input type="radio"/>				

(Optional):

I

**11. How often do you ACCESS information from each of the following social media platforms in your regular work routine?**

	Never	Every few months	Few times per month	Few times per week	On a daily basis
Blogs (e.g., Blogger, Wordpress)	<input type="radio"/>				
Content-sharing sites (e.g., YouTube, Flickr, Wikis)	<input type="radio"/>				
Micro-blogs (e.g., Twitter, Google Buzz)	<input type="radio"/>				
Social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn)	<input type="radio"/>				
Other (e.g., Social Bookmarking, text messaging, Digg -- please specify below if applicable)	<input type="radio"/>				

(Optional):

**12. As part of your regular work routine, after posting information to a social media platform, how often do you follow-up to monitor and/or participate in the conversation?**

Never     
  Every few months     
  Few times per month     
  Few times per week     
  On a daily basis     
  Not Applicable -- I don't use social media

**13. How often do you ghostwrite or "write for the boss" when posting information to the following social media platforms?**

	Never	Every few months	Few times per month	Few times per week	On a daily basis
Blogs (e.g., Blogger, Wordpress)	<input type="radio"/>				
Content-sharing sites (e.g., YouTube, Flickr, Wikis)	<input type="radio"/>				
Micro-blogs (e.g., Twitter, Google Buzz)	<input type="radio"/>				
Social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn)	<input type="radio"/>				
Other (e.g., Social Bookmarking, text messaging, Digg -- please specify below if applicable)	<input type="radio"/>				

(Optional):

**3. Perceptions of social media**

**\*\*IMPORTANT:** Responses should reflect your professional, work-related use only -- NOT your personal use.

**14. Social media platforms have increased my overall effectiveness as an Air Force public affairs professional.**

Strongly Disagree     
  Disagree     
  Unsure     
  Agree     
  Strongly Agree     
  Not Applicable -- I don't use social media

**15. Social media platforms have helped me become more effective in media relations.**

Strongly Disagree  
  Disagree  
  Unsure  
  Agree  
  Strongly Agree  
  Not applicable  
 -- I don't work in media relations

**16. Social media platforms have helped me become more effective in community relations.**

Strongly Disagree  
  Disagree  
  Unsure  
  Agree  
  Strongly Agree  
  Not applicable  
 -- I don't work in community relations

**17. Social media platforms have helped me become more effective with command/internal information.**

Strongly Disagree  
  Disagree  
  Unsure  
  Agree  
  Strongly Agree  
  Not applicable  
 -- I don't work in command/internal information

**18. Social media platforms have helped me become more effective at engaging with key stakeholders.**

Strongly Disagree  
  Disagree  
  Unsure  
  Agree  
  Strongly Agree  
  Not Applicable  
 -- I don't monitor stakeholder concerns or interests

**19. Senior leaders in my organization fully endorse using social media platforms to help accomplish the PA mission.**

Strongly Disagree  
  Disagree  
  Unsure  
  Agree  
  Strongly Agree

**20. How important ARE each of the following social media platforms to the overall PA efforts of your organization?**

	Very Unimportant	Somewhat Unimportant	Unsure	Somewhat Important	Very Important
Blogs (e.g., Blogger, Wordpress)	<input type="radio"/>				
Content-sharing sites (e.g., YouTube, Flickr, Wikis)	<input type="radio"/>				
Micro-blogs (e.g., Twitter, Google Buzz)	<input type="radio"/>				
Social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn)	<input type="radio"/>				
Other (e.g., Social Bookmarking, text messaging, Digg, please specify below if applicable)	<input type="radio"/>				

(Optional):

**21. How important SHOULD each of the following social media platforms be to the overall PA efforts of your organization?**

	Very Unimportant	Somewhat Unimportant	Unsure	Somewhat Important	Very Important
Blogs (e.g., Blogger, Wordpress)	<input type="radio"/>				
Content-sharing sites (e.g., YouTube, Flickr, Wikis)	<input type="radio"/>				
Micro-blogs (e.g., Twitter, Google Buzz)	<input type="radio"/>				
Social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn)	<input type="radio"/>				
Other (e.g., Social Bookmarking, text messaging, Digg, please specify below if applicable)	<input type="radio"/>				

(Optional):

**22. Social media platforms have become essential to accomplishing my duties as an Air Force PA professional.**

Strongly Disagree  
  Disagree  
  Unsure  
  Agree  
  Strongly Agree

**23. (Optional) Please describe any other significant observations or experiences with social media that have affected your work as an Air Force PA professional.**

**4. Demographic information**

**24. What is your age?**

- 18-22
- 23-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60 and over

**25. How long have you been a military public affairs professional?**

- 0-4 years
- 5-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- 21-25 years
- More than 25 years

**26. What is your gender?**

- Female
- Male

**27. Please select your current rank/status?**

- E-1 to E-4
- E-5 to E-6
- E-7 to E-9
- O-1 to O-3
- O-4 to O-5
- O-6 or higher
- Civilian (not retired from the military)
- Retired military public affairs professional

**28. Where are you currently assigned? If currently deployed, please select "deployed", but please do NOT indicate specific location.**

- CONUS
- Europe
- Pacific (includes Hawaii & Alaska)
- Deployed

Other (please specify)

**29. What type of organization are you currently assigned to?**

- Squadron/Detachment
- Wing
- Numbered Air Force
- Major Command
- Air Staff/AF Public Affairs Agency
- Joint/Unified Command/Sub-Unified Command
- Deployed

Other (please specify)

**30. What categories best describe your current job responsibilities? (Please select all that apply)**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commander                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Requirements/Resources       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community Relations/Outreach            | <input type="checkbox"/> Media Operations             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Editor/Staff Writer                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Broadcaster                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Superintendent/NCOIC/Multimedia Manager | <input type="checkbox"/> Research/Assessment/Analyst  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Photographer                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Internal/Command Information |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Multimedia/Graphics                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Chief/Director               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Plans                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Videographer                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Band                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Admin/Secretary              |

Other (please specify)

**5. You have successfully completed the survey**

Please click "Done" to submit your responses.

Thank you for your participation!

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## APPENDIX B

-----Original Message-----

From: AFPAA Director

Sent: Thursday, October 21, 2010 9:44 AM

Subject: Social Media and AF Public Affairs

PA Directors:

The Air Force Public Affairs Agency has teamed up with Major Dave Westover (currently at the Naval Postgraduate School) to explore how Air Force Public Affairs professionals are using social media as part of their official duties and job responsibilities.

We would greatly appreciate your assistance in sending out the attached e-mail to all PA professionals across your command. The attachment includes a brief description of the study and an invitation to participate in a short, web-based questionnaire that should take no more than 10-15 minutes to complete.

The goal of this study is to better understand how the Air Force is leveraging social media and to what degree these new communications platforms are enhancing our mission as professional communicators.

This questionnaire is open to all PA professionals, to include officers, enlisted and civilian members of the Air Force Public Affairs career field and will be available on-line through 5 November 2010. Participation is completely voluntary and all responses will be kept confidential. To review or participate in the study, please click on the following link:

[http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/usaf\\_pa\\_social\\_media](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/usaf_pa_social_media)

Also, if you are interested, we will be happy to provide you with a summary of the results when the research is complete. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact Maj Dave Westover at (210) 289-5593 or david.westover@us.af.mil.

Thanks in advance -- your help is very much appreciated!

r/

(JOHN L. DOE)

Director, Air Force Public Affairs Agency

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## APPENDIX C

PA Professionals,

The Air Force Public Affairs Agency has teamed up with Major Dave Westover (currently at the Naval Postgraduate School) to explore how you and the Air Force PA team are using social media as part of your official duties and job responsibilities. They would like to invite you to participate in a short, web-based questionnaire that should take no more than 10-15 minutes to complete.

Your responses will help to better understand how the Air Force is leveraging social media and to what degree these new communications platforms are enhancing our mission as professional communicators.

This questionnaire is being offered to all PA professionals, to include officers, enlisted and civilian members of the Air Force PA career field. It will be available on-line through 5 Nov 2010.

Your participation is completely voluntary and your responses will be kept strictly confidential. You may skip any question or discontinue the questionnaire at any time. If you would like to participate, please click on the following link:

[http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/usaf\\_pa\\_social\\_media](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/usaf_pa_social_media)

Also, if you are interested, AFPAA and Major Westover will be happy to provide you with a summary of the results when the research is complete. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Major Westover at david.westover@us.af.mil.

Thanks in advance -- your help is very much appreciated!

(MAJCOM PA DIRECTOR SIGNATURE BLOCK)

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## APPENDIX D



The screenshot shows a Facebook interface. At the top is the Facebook logo and a search bar. Below that is a header for a discussion board titled "Social Media & AF/PA survey" with a "Back to U.S. Air Force Public Affairs Professionals" link. There are two tabs: "Discussion Board" and "Topic View". The topic is "Social Media & AF/PA survey". The post content is as follows:

Displaying the only post.

**Dave Westover**  
Fellow Air Force PA professionals:  
I would like to invite you to participate in a short, web-based questionnaire regarding Social Media and AF Public Affairs for my thesis research at the Naval Postgraduate School. It should take no more than 10-15 minutes to complete and your responses will be kept anonymous. This research was reviewed and approved by the NPS Institutional Review Board and your participation is voluntary. If you are interested, please click here:  
[http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/usaf\\_pa\\_social\\_media](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/usaf_pa_social_media)

Note: Please feel free to pass this on to your fellow Air Force PA staff members and colleagues – officers, NCOs, Airmen, civilians and retired PAs are all invited to participate. Thanks in advance for your help!

about a month ago · [Delete Post](#)

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