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## **ABSTRACT**

Although the American public has readily accepted New Media technologies, such as social networking sites, into the daily fabric of their lives both at home and at work, the U.S. military has lagged behind the public and private sectors with integrating those services as a main form of communications and exchange of information tool. Due to the serious business the U.S. military is confronted with, there are legitimate concerns and risks associated with allowing and advocating for using social media as a staple communications platform. However, the advantages it provides; to military members, their families, their units, and the American public outweigh those concerns. To change the military culture in accepting social media, it must start at the top with the senior leadership, with each service looked at independently. As social media promotes a more democratic leadership philosophy, a fundamental change needs to occur within the U.S. military where the rise of transformational type leaders, who listen to the ideas of their subordinates, is encouraged and rewarded. Social media is not a phenomenon that will go away in the near future, thus if implemented correctly, it can be a force multiplier for the U.S. military. Therefore, if the U.S. military truly wants to integrate social media into its day-to-day functions, its use must be fully embraced and utilized by senior military leadership.

## Introduction

The widespread use of New Media technologies and social media platforms have infiltrated homes, the media, and work environments of millions of people since their inception. With the advance of social media, networking no longer just involves attending meetings in person. Social networking, defined, “as a new means of communicating and sharing information online either between two or more individuals or organizations”, has literally opened the world up for people to discuss opinions and share ideas with one another.<sup>1</sup> The desire to communicate with others is evident by a 2012 Pew research study, which stated that 67 percent of adults online participate in social networking.<sup>2</sup> Accessing social networking sites is now the single most popular online activity, with more than 1.4 billion users worldwide spending 25 percent of their time online using these sites in one form or another.<sup>3</sup> As the use of social media expanded rapidly in the private homes of individuals using it to talk to family and friends or meet new people, public organizations and structures began to take notice and looked for ways its use could help spread the word about their products, as well as, obtain new ideas in order to grow their businesses.

One of the organizations that looked into integrating the use of social media into its day-to-day functions was the Department of Defense (DOD), including the U.S. military. As technology continues to develop, and online communication becomes more prevalent worldwide, the U.S. military believes that the foundation of their future relevant communication interactions will occur by leveraging New Media technologies and infusing the technology into their military culture. Since the inception of New Media platforms use in the military, there have been widespread debates on its usefulness and viability. Though there are many benefits for service members, their families, the American public, and the U.S. military as a whole, there are also

inherit risks that its use perpetuates. In the business that the U.S. military is in, these risks can lead to grave consequences.

The debate on social media viability in the military is perplexing. The concept of social media is one of communication between people who have the same interests, thus it seems social media use is inherently a force multiplier for the military. It provides military members the capacity to seek out people who may have the answers to problems they come across, meet other people in the military they may not have come across in any other format, or for military leaders to get their information out to the masses in a fraction of the time it takes through face-to-face meetings or email. Although most people have phones capable of social media technologies in today's environment, many do not have daily access to check their email on work computers. The fact that social media use has skyrocketed in the private sector both for personal use at home and at their place of business, proves it is a useful tool. People are social beings, and the desire to communicate with others has only been enhanced through the development of social networking applications. Though the U.S. military has shown that, in general, it is slow to adapt to new ideas and innovations, social media as a communications and information sharing tool is something that the military should be embracing, not condoning. But why is the U.S. military lagging in the universal implementation of social media? I believe it starts at the top, and is a problem inherent with the hierarchal structure of leadership; one that fears change and things it cannot control with impunity. Social media encourages open dialogue and discussions among all people, and in the military context, all ranks, something which inherently goes against the foundation of a hierarchal structure. There are operational and security risks in regards to open Internet mediums, but they are risks that can be minimized through proper education and enforcement with policies that fully lay out the dos and don'ts for military members to follow.

Every operation or job decision has risk and one just needs to determine how to mitigate the risk properly and effectively to ensure mission success. Social media use is no different. People say that social media empowers the youth, provides them an avenue to speak their mind; that it is a generational thing. This is only true because the younger generation figured out how to use social media capabilities correctly first, but that does not mean that older generations of people cannot learn it just as fast. This thought, the one where social media users are more democratic in their convictions, ideals, and actions is what scares the hierarchal leadership of the military the most from adapting social media platforms. The thought that the younger generation can be the ones to come up with the best ideas and ways forward is one that goes against a top-down culture, where only important decisions can come from those with experience and years of service. However, as history has shown, experience from the past may have no bearing on the decisions of the future. It is not that the culture of top-down command and control in the military must change, because the military needs experienced strategic thinking leadership. However, military leadership should embrace the use of social media, the opportunity for new ideas and innovations, and a new way of looking at things. It may be time for the U.S. military to move away from its strict hierarchal leadership philosophy, where ideas must start at the top and filter down, and embrace what the rest of the United States has for hundreds of years, a more democratic outlook at solving problems, and a culture that promotes transformation type leaders. Social media use should not be a debate within military circles, but something that is sought after and harnessed for the benefits it can provide the military as a whole. However, for this to occur a monumental shift in the military culture must happen. Although the benefits derived from instituting social media platforms within military culture, including the rise of transformational leaders due to its conceptions, outweigh the multitude of inherit risks concerning the use of



social media platforms within the U.S military, social media will only truly transform and integrate into the military culture, when the barriers caused by hierarchal leadership are eliminated, and it is initiated and utilized to the fullest extent by senior military leadership.

I began this research project because I never found a useful history detailing how and when the U.S. military officially began employing New Media overtly in its day-to-day business. This paper begins with a description of New Media and the main reasons why people try, adopt, and use it. Even though there are many different mediums to New Media, this paper focuses predominantly on social media and blogs. Though the majority of this paper revolves around the U.S. Army and Air Force, most of the research is valid for other branches of the military as well.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. The next two sections give an overall history of social media, and the policies put in place governing its use by the DOD. The following sections go into detail concentrating on the benefits and concerns of propagating social media within the military system. The paper ends with descriptions of how the U.S. military's leadership philosophy, and the historical culture of the different military branches, may enhance or inhibit the integration of social media in the fabric of military life.

## **New Media**

New Media is theorized “as an umbrella class of information and communication technologies (ICTs) that are intended to connect individuals in novel and meaningful ways.”<sup>4</sup> Contemporary ICTs that make up New Media include items such as weblogs (blogs, or online journals), social networking sites (e.g. “My Space” or “Facebook”), and online forums.<sup>5</sup> The key to understanding New Media revolves around defining why people try, adopt, and use them. The Content Acceptance Model (or CAM, see Figure 1), developed in 2009, through a grounded

theory approach analyzing the interviews of 80 individuals does just that, as it forms a sequence of behaviors by individuals.<sup>6</sup> The deductions of the study that led to the development of the CAM, show that people try New Media because they were introduced to it by an acquaintance or saw an advertisement in mass media, adopted it because people were influenced by its ease of use or cost, and continue to use it because of its entertainment, informational or communication value.<sup>7</sup> The CAM “demonstrates that individuals pay attention to different factors as their behaviors and associations with content change over time.”<sup>8</sup> The research on CAM also provides evidence that “individuals may not always be focused solely on the technology but rather on the content the technologies placed at their disposal.”<sup>9</sup> Individuals and organizations that intend to use New Media technologies to further their causes, or attempt to gain support and followership, need to understand that it is the content they place in these mediums that will draw people to their domains, as technology itself will continue to advance and change over time.

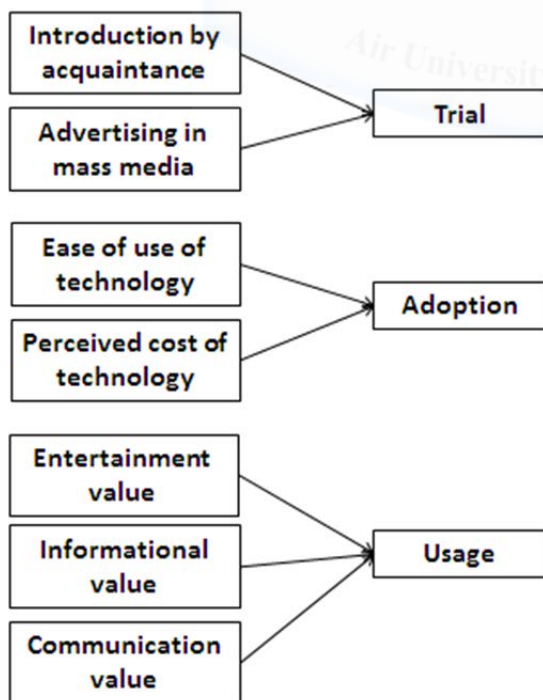


FIGURE 1. Content Acceptance Model

## History of Social Media

The digital age of technology may have led to today's use of New Media as a social interaction tool to communicate with others on a global scale, but one can argue that the concept of social media has been around for thousands of years. In his book, *Writing in the Wall: Social Media the First 2,000 years*, Tom Standage argues that prior to the dawn of New Media, "old" media and "really old" media existed and that "the media environment, based on distribution of information from person to person along social networks, has many similarities with today's world."<sup>10</sup> He describes "really old" media as the time prior to 1833, when information was shared and distributed through means such as pamphlets, papyrus rolls, poems, letters, and local newspapers.<sup>11</sup> Coffeehouses became places where patrons openly discussed and debated topics of the day, including what was contained within these types of written documents. Standage argues, of which I agree, that social media, in the form of pamphlets, such as *Common Sense* by Thomas Paine, letters, and local papers, "played a role in the Reformation, and in the American and French revolutions" as their "main function was to reveal and synchronize public opinion."<sup>12</sup>

Standage describes "old" media as "the broadcast era" in which newspapers, radio, television, and phones were used to disseminate information along social networks, such as the Germans did in World War II with their use of radio to spread propaganda.<sup>13</sup> However, he states that although the phone allows for two-way exchanges between individuals, watching television is entirely one-way and inhibits the sharing and exchange of information and is the opposite of social media.<sup>14</sup> However, I would argue Standage's stance on this point. Just as radio has evolved to allow and encourage listeners to call in and readdress radio host's views, with the advent of the Internet, people can now share, provide feedback, and debate issues with other people or with the news agencies themselves. This two-way communication has proven to have

an impact, shown when news agencies either retract stories or provide statements correcting errors they made during their broadcasts.

Although New Media technologies, including social networking sites are readily abundant for personal and professional use today, it took nearly three decades to mature into the highly used juggernaut they are today. Its origins can be traced back to the 1970s when the BBS, or Bulletin Board System, was first introduced. BBS was a platform that eliminated the need for in-person gatherings by creating online meeting places, for locals-only activities, over telephone lines via a modem, where users could communicate and post messages to other users, as well as, download files or games.<sup>15</sup> Another social interaction avenue that originated in the 1970s and became available to the public in the late 1980s was CompuServe.<sup>16</sup> Not only did CompuServe allow its members to share files and access news and events, it harbored thousands of discussion forums “on virtually any important subject of the day” for which people could exercise their First Amendment rights to free speech, bestowing their personal opinions, while engaging others on the matters presented.<sup>17</sup> In the 1980s and 1990s, AOL, or America Online, took the discussion forums a giant leap forward through its member-created communities that included searchable “Member Profiles”, which allowed users to post pertinent details about themselves.<sup>18</sup> This important feature allowed people to search for others who shared common interests, ideals, experiences, or professional interests in an effort to start conversations or build social networks. Unlike in-person meetings, AOL provided a platform through the Internet that enabled millions of people to voice their beliefs to others they never met, but who would listen and respond back.

The desire for people to connect with others through an online Internet community, based on their common interests, quickly led to the rise of additional social networking sites aimed to do just that. Sites developed, such as Friendster in 2002, LinkedIn and MySpace in 2003, and

Facebook in 2004, improved on the concept brought to fruition by AOL further, by connecting people with common interests through a “Circle of Friends” idea.<sup>19</sup> This idea revolutionized social networking by enabling people to meet the friends of their friends, thus increasing their connections to people who shared the same interests. People no longer had to go to conventions or meetings to find new friends or people who had commonalities. Through the Internet, and friends of friends, people were now connected to others around the world. However, as many of these social networking sites are based on the same premise, they could not all survive, as users continued to switch to the sites their friends were using or to the most popular sites at the time. For instance, as of 2014, Friendster and MySpace are no longer in the mainstream casual social networking circle of sites. Friendster now exists solely as an online gaming site, while MySpace is a social networking site targeted to bands and musicians.<sup>20</sup> LinkedIn and Facebook are still thriving in 2014, though aimed at different audiences. LinkedIn is a networking resource geared towards business personnel who want to connect with other professionals with more than 297 million members, while Facebook is the current king of social networking for the casual user, boasting more than 1.3 billion active users.<sup>21</sup>

Facebook’s rise to the top is a combination of good advertising, easy to use features, the inclusion of hundreds of thousands of apps on their platform, the capacity to download videos, and the ability to easily search for friends or other people who have the same interests. Facebook’s allure to its users is based on the premise that it promotes both honesty and openness between all its users.<sup>22</sup> The ‘Like’ button is a testament to Facebook’s success as it has appeared all across the Internet, and currently is used to personalize a user’s page, as Facebook tracks each individual user’s ‘Likes’ and then conveys advertisements or other Facebook pages the user may be interested in checking out, based off of their past Internet search preferences. This is

Facebook's greatest strength, as it has built a self-perpetuating optimization machine that measures what is "engaging" to its users, thus "constantly showing you more of what it thinks you want to see and click on and read."<sup>23</sup> However, as this short history of social media illustrates, Facebook, like many of the social networking sites before them, may or may not last long, before the next "big thing" ascends to the top and becomes the new king of social media. One could argue that applications such as Twitter, which provides a forum for live discussion and running commentary on just about everything going on in the world, Snapchat, Tumblr, Google+, and Yik Yak are already starting to erode the power of Facebook.

Tom Standage believes that New Media is more closely related to "really old" media versus "old" media, especially when it comes to the political impact it has in triggering protests and revolutions, stating the examples of Arab Spring and the outcomes of the movements in Tunisia and Egypt.<sup>24</sup> However, his question regarding whether social media inherently promotes freedom and democracy due to greater access to the Internet is valid, as oppressive regimes can exploit social media through propaganda and surveillance of activists.<sup>25</sup> Though he states that skeptics believe that social media will lead to more people hitting the Facebook "Like" button, versus taking real-world action involving political struggles, I believe the information sharing potential and capacity that social media mediums provide for mass communication that otherwise would not be possible, will spur greater positive political actions by the world to resolve issues rather than condone or hide them.<sup>26</sup>

### **History of Social Media Use in the U.S. Military**

Senior Strategist for Emerging Media with the Department of Defense, Jack Holt, defines social media as an "environment outside the hierarchy, the democratization of publishing

allowing everybody to have a voice... It's outside the hierarchy and everybody has the opportunity to engage."<sup>27</sup> This understanding of social media, and the level of transparency it offers and encourages, helped foster the movement towards DOD personnel's use of social media. As social media use began to spread in the public and business sectors, personnel in the military started using it for personal and business interests as well. A few notable high ranking U.S. defense personnel who were the first to engage in New Media activities to obtain information from U.S. troops were North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) Supreme Allied Commander for Europe, Navy Admiral James Stavridis; Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Marine General James E. Cartwright; Secretary of Defense, Robert M. Gates; and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Navy Admiral Mike Mullen. In July 2009, Stavridis posted a blog through social media to disseminate his goals for both the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe and the United States European Command.<sup>28</sup> Stavridis is widely considered the first geographic combatant commander to use Facebook and a personal blog, which he used while at U.S. Southern Command from 2006-2009 prior to his stint at NATO, as a way "to convey the importance of partnership and cooperation to confront threats facing Latin America and the Caribbean."<sup>29</sup> When Cartwright commanded U.S. Strategic Command from 2004-2007, he embraced social media by launching a command-and-control blog, with the goal of cutting "through the traditional top-down military structure and information stovepipes to improve communication."<sup>30</sup> Gates and Mullen jointly launched interactive virtual town hall sessions through the Internet in August of 2009, to "provide a forum for people to ask questions or offer suggestions or insights and get direct feedback", in an effort to connect more closely with the military, the American public, and people overseas.<sup>31</sup> Mullen used New Media technologies to launch the "Ask the Chairman" venue that enabled people to pose questions to

him on YouTube, as a way to have conversations with troops akin to the way he engaged with personnel during his all-hands calls when he traveled to bases all over the world.<sup>32</sup> Rather than relying on the off chance that the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff would visit one's base, and then had the time to answer all the questions posed, this venue allowed troops to ask questions anytime they derived them.

### **Memorandums/Guides/Policies**

Although the inception of social media in 1997 diffused into the lives of millions of people, and high-ranking U.S. military defense leaders were already using different mediums of social media, it took over a decade before the U.S. military would institute a policy governing its use among military personnel. Without an official DOD policy in place, along with the inherent security implications of an open public system that could reach millions of people with no filters, the separate branches of the U.S. military took the matter into their own hands by instituting their own individual policies. For instance, in 2007 the DOD "began blocking social networking sites from its computer networks based on concerns for bandwidth, network security, and the posting of personal and operational information."<sup>33</sup> Though the U.S. Marine Corps blocked access to all social media sites through their networks in early 2007 as well, they did allow Marines to access the sites through their personal computers.<sup>34</sup> The U.S. Army took the opposite approach in June 2009 when it issued Army Operations Order (OPORD) 09-01, which directed bases to stop blocking Facebook and other social media from troops.<sup>35</sup> The DOD's goal of establishing an official social media policy began in August 2009, when U.S. Deputy Defense Secretary William J. Lynn III directed a study of social media sites, to weigh the benefits of their use to communicate in a 21st century environment against the security vulnerabilities they created.<sup>36</sup>



The long-awaited DOD policy on social media was released on 25 February 2010, when William Lynn III issued a directive-type memorandum, DTM 09-026, on the “Responsible and Effective Use of Internet Capabilities.”<sup>37</sup> The memorandum not only authorized social media use in the DOD, but provided “guidelines for military use of social media and acknowledged ‘that Internet-based capabilities are integral to operations across the Department of Defense.’”<sup>38</sup> The DOD updated their policy on 11 September 2012 with the issuance of DOD Instruction Number 8550.01, “DOD Internet Services and Internet-Based Capabilities”, which expanded the scope of DTM 09-026 and outlined all elements associated with DOD social media use.<sup>39</sup>

After the DOD published its official policy, the different branches of the U.S. military followed suit, and started issuing more in-depth guidelines explaining how social media could be used individually or to showcase various groups, along with what could and could not be posted. A few examples of what can be found in regards to the U.S. military and social media on the Internet follows. One of the most complete U.S. military social media guides belongs to the U.S. Army. The U.S. Army Social Media Handbook, published in January 2013, can be found on open source mediums such as the Internet fairly effortlessly, and provides a quick description of what social media is and why the U.S. military is being proactive in using it. It is a 48 page comprehensive document that provides information and checklists on how service members and military units can register official social media pages, as required by the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs on [www.defense.gov](http://www.defense.gov).<sup>40</sup> The handbook also provides information in regards to incorporating Operational Security, safe social media practices, and what soldiers, along with their families, can and cannot post online in reference to their general daily activities or during times of crisis.<sup>41</sup> Lastly, it provides case studies as examples of authorized posts, a list

of DOD social media resources, frequently asked questions, and multiple New Media reference lists for soldiers that want to obtain more information.<sup>42</sup>

Two other examples of DOD references in the proper use of social media for the U.S. military are; the U.S. Air Force Social Media Guide, and the DOD's Military Community and Family Policy Social Media Guide. The U.S. Air Force's current Social Media Guide was released in 2013 as a 15 page quick reference pamphlet readily available to all Airmen and their families. The guide begins with an introduction that discusses what social media entails, and proceeds to define how Air Force leaders, Airmen, and their families can use it for sharing information and experiences, while remembering to maintain operational security and safeguard critical information at all times.<sup>43</sup> The Air Force Social Media Guide provides a good overview of the different avenues for which the military can use social media. A few avenues it covers include; connecting with family and friends, entertainment, building relationships based on common interests, comforting a parent or spouse, improving morale, and where to receive the latest Air Force news. The guide concludes by discussing emerging social media trends, and provides a list of common New Media platforms and 16 tips for using them, frequently asked questions, and a list of DOD and Air Force publications referencing its use.<sup>44</sup>

The DOD's Military Community and Family Policy Social Media Guide expounds on the opportunities for military families to connect with each other and other families through "virtual communities of support."<sup>45</sup> It describes how social media provides critical tools to keep service members and their families connected in the military lifestyle, a source to find needed support, an avenue to meet new people and build camaraderie, as well as, a way to share new information.<sup>46</sup> The guide references 17 different New Media platforms that military organizations, leaders, service members, and families can use to obtain information on items

such as; the Exceptional Family Member Program; Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) activities; Quality-of-Life (QoL) issues; and sites dedicated to spouses looking for employment.<sup>47</sup> It also provides guidelines for the responsible use of social media for service members and their families, including how to protect their children and personal privacy online.<sup>48</sup> The focus of these handbooks and guides is to make sure service member's families have a place to turn to when challenges arise or when they need answers to questions. Military life is just as difficult on the service member's family as it is on the member, so knowing what resources are available when the member deploys, or which schools are better at one of the many places a family may relocate to, leads to a key aspect of social media, in that it can provide this type of information quickly and easily.

### **Social Media Use in the U.S. Military**

Though the DOD did not adopt an official policy until February 2010, the U.S. military has had an active role in social media since at least 2009, a role that has continued to grow ever since. The U.S. Army was one of the first services to fully engage in social media use after Major General Kevin J. Bergner, then Chief of Public Affairs, stood up the Online and Social Media Division at the Office of the Chief of Public Affairs in January 2009.<sup>49</sup> He wanted to open up lines of communication that reached across all generations and demographics, with the goal of initiating conversation and dialogue-centric interchanges.<sup>50</sup> It is safe to say, that over the past six years, social media use in the U.S. military has met General Bergner's goals.

With the goal of releasing information to military personnel and their families in the quickest and most advantageous way, there are numerous reasons that the U.S. military has adopted New Media technologies, such as social media platforms and blogs. First, these

technologies provide military leaders, organizations, and individuals an information sharing mechanism that reaches wider target audiences faster, and in different ways, 24/7, 365 days a year. In a 2013 letter to the U.S. Army, Brigadier General Gary J. Volesky, U.S. Army Chief of Public Affairs stated, “In today’s information environment, when news breaks, one of the first places people turn to is social media. We must utilize social media platforms to report the most accurate and up-to-date information.”<sup>51</sup> Volesky recognized that U.S. Army organizations use social media not only to disseminate important general messages within the Army, but to communicate during times of crisis as well.<sup>52</sup> A second advantage for the military, when using social media to disseminate information, is that it is cost advantageous to do so. The military saves taxpayer money, for use elsewhere, as the previous cost to print official bulletins and pamphlets is replaced, by less expensive online subscription services that reach a far greater audience in a fraction of the time required for paper products.<sup>53</sup>

Besides the dissemination of information, the third advantage of social media is the ability to obtain direct, unaltered feedback quickly. Army Chief of Staff, General Raymond T. Odierno, recognized the importance of social media and the dynamic feedback capabilities it offers, by stating in 2009 that “Defense leaders recognize social media forums as the information tool of choice among the ‘millennial generation’ -- 18-to-25-year-olds, many of whom don’t read newspapers, tune in to network news or visit official websites. In addition, they introduce a dynamic that leaders simply can’t get through traditional communication methods: unfettered two-way engagement.”<sup>54</sup> U.S. military leaders can use inward facing social media platforms for the benefit of their organizations, not only to release pertinent information, but as a tool to listen to the troops and obtain honest feedback, whether personal or anonymous, on key topics or programs to adjust their agendas or strategic outlook on issues, as appropriate.

On the other half of the social media paradigm, that which is outward facing, additional advantages of the U.S. military using social media revolve around the military's image with the American public. When the media releases stories that are not accurate, military leaders and individual troops can use social media to immediately correct the deficient reports, as it may take a while before a media outlet vets the updated corrections into their next broadcast time-block. Social media allows each individual troop to be a part of their service's story, where they can discuss their trials and tribulations with family, friends, and the American public. It provides an avenue that allows America to connect with their military, through the timely dissemination of information which permits feedback and suggestions.<sup>55</sup> Military personnel can use social media to discuss why they joined the military, how their families manage when they are deployed, discuss the benefits the military and communities provide them, what training is like, an in-depth look into their career fields, where they have traveled or would like to go, along with their dreams and ambitions. Social media allows each military troop to tell their individual, family, or unit's story, so that others in America understand what military life is like. It also provides an outlet for informing the American public on various U.S. military humanitarian missions transpiring around the world, such as operations in Haiti assisting with earthquake relief, or in Africa facilitating medical issues including Ebola. The benefit for the DOD is that this information results in free advertising, which can lead to additional recruitment. With millions of people on different social media sites daily, information can get to people who have never been to a recruiting office. The U.S. Army trail-blazed a military initiative which expanded its efforts of recruiting, by creating the innovative blog, [www.armystrongstories.com](http://www.armystrongstories.com), that encouraged soldiers to tell their stories, answer candid questions, and openly chat about Army life with potential recruits.<sup>56</sup> The site even provided the reader the ability to share the post on

their personal social networking sites.<sup>57</sup> A critical facet of social media is that it allows transparency between the American public and the U.S. military, enabling each to draw closer together while diminishing the consternation.

The military stories shared on social media not only educate the public about current affairs within the U.S. military, but also help maintain the morale of the troops. The posting of individual or unit accomplishments, along with feedback from the public, allows military personnel to see that their jobs are helping people and making a difference in the world. It provides an avenue that enables the military member's family and friends to obtain any services or support they require, as well as a way to connect and engage with the member on their endeavors when they are away from home. The use of social media also gives military leaders the opportunity to address any "Rumor-Mill" issues which many times causes friction and lowers troop's morale. Though rumors can deeply affect the morale of troops, military leaders can alleviate the stress caused, and prove to the troops they care about their concerns, by clarifying and tackling issues through transparent two-way communication, thus allowing troops to concentrate on their missions, while increasing their morale. Along with rumors, social media can be used to track a military member's health, well-being, and mental state. An online pattern may form indicating a person has suicidal tendencies, or issues such as drug and alcohol abuse, where friends and family can detect it, and notify the appropriate personnel to get the individual the required help. Though social media is a powerful communication tool, one must remember that it is the military personnel themselves who have always been the best and most effective messengers of information, which is why getting them to use social media sites is critically important, if the military wants to continue using its resources to build upon these technologies for the purpose of information sharing.

Though social media may indeed evolve as the preferred communications tool of the present and future, if it is not used correctly, it will turn people away and become obsolete. In March 2010, JANSON Communications published a report of a two-week study, between 4-18 January 2010, which examined the use of Facebook pages by the U.S. military, and identified trends, best practices, and typical uses of the social media outlet.<sup>58</sup> The report collected data from 682 online pages, starting with the DOD Social Media Hub site and other armed service's social media home pages, to which the total sample was broken down as follows; Department of the Army – 70 percent, Department of the Navy – 14 percent, Department of the Air Force – 5 percent, United States Marine Corps – 2 percent, and other agencies – 9 percent.<sup>59</sup> There were some surprising findings in the report that the military needs to work on for its Facebook sites to be valuable and worthwhile. The two largest issues brought to light by the report include: the lack of reliable contact information, and lack of response to fans that post inquiries. Even though 87 percent of the pages provided at least one type of contact information, such as a contact person, mailing or home address, email address, phone number, or website, only eight percent provided an official contact person.<sup>60</sup> As the premise behind using social media avenues is two-way communication, the low percentage of pages offering an official contact person to interact with fails to meet the intent. Although the report also found that only four percent of pages were found to be “zombie” pages, those in which no information or content were found on the site, or sites which had not been updated for several months, it brings to light an issue where the U.S. military must be proactive and initiate a plan to clean up and eliminate unused sites, as they can deter people from searching relevant U.S. military sites.<sup>61</sup> In concert with the first result, the most disheartening finding articulated the fact that 84 percent of military pages had no interaction with their fans.<sup>62</sup> Although the recruiting pages attracted fan interest, with 89 percent

of pages having fan posts with questions and supportive comments, recruiting pages only answered 1 out of every 12.5 questions or comments posted to their pages, and only five percent of the pages announced upcoming events for fans to attend.<sup>63</sup> Thus, it is not surprising that the report found a clear correlation between “the amount of interaction a personality page owner has with his fans and the subsequent number of fans who sign up for the page.”<sup>64</sup> The report concluded by emphasizing that “the military is embracing Facebook as a communications tool at a faster rate than in most corners of the private sector and other government agencies, and they are sharing and implementing best practices.”<sup>65</sup> I disagree with the conclusion of the report and would argue the fact that it took over ten years for the military to produce a policy on social media after its public release, and that the report itself states 84 percent of military pages had no interaction with fans, that the military is not embracing Facebook as a communications tool at a faster rate than the private sector, but it in fact lags behind in embracing social media as a useful tool. Therefore, although the report’s conclusion provides a positive outlook on how the military is striving to adopt Facebook as a viable communications tool, it is imperative that the military works on improving their Facebook pages, and other New Media technologies they are using, in the best interest of communication between their service branches and the American public.

The U.S. Army released a memorandum on 4 December 2012 entitled, “Standardizing official U.S. Army external official presences (social media)”, which addressed many of the issues found in the JANSON Communications report.<sup>66</sup> The purpose of the memorandum was to standardize Army-Wide External Official Presences (EOPs) (aka social media sites).<sup>67</sup> Some of the standards listed that the U.S. Army had to adhere to were; requiring uniformity in “branding” (official names and logos) across all social media platforms, the inclusion of contact information (AKO email addresses), and that all updates could not be older than one month.<sup>68</sup> It also



required that all social media pages be registered through the U.S. Army at [www.army.mil/socialmedia](http://www.army.mil/socialmedia), and that page administrators completed Operations Security Training on an annual basis and made sure that each page adhered to Operations Security guidelines.<sup>69</sup> This basic memorandum, which was also put into effect throughout the other U.S. military services, laid out the general guidelines needed to keep military social media pages relevant and standardized. Although the memorandum is a decent start for organizing U.S. Army social media sites, it dismisses the purpose behind why social media is attractive to users; the fact they can be personalized. By standardizing the sites so stringently, where units cannot use nicknames or mascots, nor add personal endorsements, they are alienating their own people from making their unit's social media page their own. The memorandum makes the pages so bureaucratic and official that it detracts troops from being able to enjoy the fact their units have a social media page, thus causing them to turn away from official U.S. Army pages and concentrate on visiting sites where they can reflect personal attributes and share information openly on public pages, as social media forums were intended.

### **Concerns with Social Media Use in the U.S. Military**

Although social media platforms provide military leaders, organizations, and individuals a tool for open communication that had not existed previously, they bring with them a variety of new concerns, risks, and challenges as well. First, social media may provide an outlet for open communication, but individuals who sign the dotted line to join the exclusive club of the U.S. military, do so willingly, realizing they give up some of their rights and must follow the rules set forth by the DOD and the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ). Even though Americans have the right to free speech under the Constitution of the United States, U.S. military

members are subject to the UCMJ even when they are off duty, and therefore “commenting, posting or linking material that violates the UCMJ or basic rules of military conduct is prohibited.”<sup>70</sup> Michael E. Reheuser, Director of the Defense Privacy and Civil Liberties Office, noted that although the “DOD doesn’t monitor personal social media accounts, DOD’s social media policy requires that personnel follow certain rules. Under the UCMJ, service members are prohibited from disparaging the President or other senior leaders, revealing operational details, or divulging classified information.”<sup>71</sup> Individuals who boast about wrongdoings, or vent online through social media avenues, can find themselves awaiting punishment in one form or another, depending on the severity of their actions. Although comments and pictures posted online, such as those pertaining to fraternization, are punishable under the UCMJ, other posts that show individuals drinking under age or consuming drugs are punishable under the UCMJ and by civilian authorities. U.S. military service members need to fully understand, as stated and reinforced in the *Military Community and Family Policy: Social Media Guide*, that “users take personally responsibility for their comments, username, and any information they submit” on a social networking site, as once something is posted, it never truly goes away.<sup>72</sup> The U.S. Air Force Social Media Guide also expounds on the importance of military members being cognizant of what they post or see in other member’s posts, by emphasizing that military members are always on record due to the nature of their profession when posting on social media, thus they will be held responsible for their posts, must abide by the Core Values of each service, maintain appropriate communications and conduct with peers, supervisors, and subordinates, and always safeguard critical information about military operations.<sup>73</sup> It is vitally important service members realize, that although they may think they are safe from observation and reporting of their behaviors, pictures, and comments by making their personal social media pages private

versus public, that this is not necessarily the case, as their family, friends, acquaintances, “Circle of Friends” or friends of friends, or people outside of their private pages may see what they post, and any one of them can report them for violations of the UCMJ or civil law.

As mentioned previously, besides a U.S. service member’s posts pertaining to their personal activities and thoughts, another concern related to social media posts for the DOD is the inclusion of any critical information about military operations. Although emails created on government computers provide users reminders and rules for sending emails containing personally identifiable information or ones designated For Official Use Only (FOUO), those predetermined safeguards and reminders do not exist in the Internet’s public domain in regards to a service member’s use of social media platforms. Operations Security (OPSEC) is defined, as “the protection of classified, sensitive, or need-to-know information in which some of the common information that our adversaries look for includes, information about present and future U.S. capabilities, news about U.S. diplomacy, names and photographs of important people, the degree and speed of mobilization, and leave policies.”<sup>74</sup> As OPSEC is vitally important to U.S. military operations, at home and abroad, and relates directly to the security of the nation and safety of its troops, it is something that cannot be taken lightly in regards to any platform, especially public social media sites. When the first DOD policy was established in February 2010, David M. Wennergren, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Information Management and Technology, understood the security implications fostered by social media outlets when he stated, “There’s a huge imperative for security. It is everyone’s responsibility in the department to make sure they are doing all that they can to protect our information and our information systems.”<sup>75</sup> Wennergren acknowledged that the first policy promoted “secure

information sharing,” by “providing the balance needed to tap into the capabilities social media networking provided without compromising security.”<sup>76</sup>

Not compromising security may be a difficult attribute for the U.S. military to build into social media, but it must strive to accomplish this, as it is a great information sharing tool and place where people around the world exercise the right to express their opinions in a public forum. The challenge of maintaining OPSEC on social media exponentially increases due to the risk of information leaking, not only from military members or their units, but from their family and friends as well. Maintaining OPSEC is a way to keep potential adversaries from gaining information that can jeopardize the lives of troops, their families, or the success of their missions, thus specific return or arrival dates of a service member’s official travel, their locations when traveling, and information detailing casualty numbers should not be posted on any public platform.<sup>77</sup> General information that may seem unimportant and spread out over time can be pieced together by adversaries, who know what they are looking for, to tell the story of troop movements, missions, and the identities of service members and their families.<sup>78</sup> Military members and their families are told that they need to reconsider posting pictures or information that identifies to others they are in the military on social networking sites, because this information could put their entire family at risk by making them potential targets, as this knowledge would be advantageous to adversaries who are looking to kidnap or exploit U.S. military personnel. This becomes extremely important when U.S. military members are killed in action (KIA) or missing in action (MIA), because members of the media or adversaries, if a soldier is in a captivity situation, may try to find information by searching friends and family’s online profiles.<sup>79</sup> People in today’s world want instant information access, to which social media platforms have the capability to provide, but the U.S. military stresses that it is important for

family and friends to understand that information about a troop killed in action cannot be released until 24 hours after the next of kin has been notified.<sup>80</sup> However, due to the difficulty to enforce this policy with the advent of social media, the 24 hour policy is archaic in today's electronic world. The U.S. military needs to be proactive, versus reactive as they typically are with policy updates, and adjust their policy to conform with the realities of how fast information spreads through social media by not stating it as an imperative to wait 24 hours, but rather to read that it cannot be released until after the next of kin has been notified, thus leaving out the mandatory time frame. The most likely scenario is that at least one family member will have already posted the news on social media, as an avenue to let others know, long before the 24 hour timeframe has expired. Social media can provide a positive benefit, as a soldier or civilian who is missing in action may suddenly appear on social media as a captive of an adversary. Although the adversary is using social media for their own aims or demands, the use of it can provide the nation, family, and friends "proof of life" for the captured U.S. military member or civilian. As new technologies, such as social networking platforms, are developed and utilized, especially ones that benefit both friendly forces and adversaries, the U.S. military must continue to update their doctrine and adapt their manuals and procedures, to keep their members informed on how to incorporate them into their day-to-day operations.

Although OPSEC is vitally important to the U.S. military and the nation as a whole, and there are legitimate security concerns in regards to military members and their families using social media, the DOD realizes that New Media technologies are here for the time being and most likely into the distant future. Thus, they must not resist the use of this technology altogether but learn how to incorporate its use, while maintaining security protocols, into their daily environments, much as the military learned to employ radio and other easy to intercept

communications a century ago. In emphasizing the importance of maintaining Operations Security in an era of Web-based social networking, Prince Floyd, the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs in August 2009, stated, “OPSEC is paramount. We will have procedures to deal with that. The [Defense Department] is, in that sense, no different than any big company in America. What we can’t do is let security concerns trump doing business. OPSEC needs to catch up with this stuff. This is the modern equivalent of sending a letter home from the front lines.”<sup>81</sup> He also stated that “No. 1, you need to recognize the benefits taking part in social networking sites and social networking media give you, as well as the risks involved.”<sup>82</sup> To ensure that DOD military members and civilians understand the importance of OPSEC in regards to social media use, the DOD launched an education campaign utilizing scenario based computer training, which describes what information can and cannot be placed in the public domain, into their required annual computer information systems training. In recognizing the benefits of social media, I believe that the U.S. military should not, as previously mentioned, be encouraging troops and their families to reconsider posting pictures or information which identifies them with the military. Yes, OPSEC specific pictures or information, such as pictures of a person working in a top-secret area, or videos showing troop locations and movement operations while deployed must not be posted and should be discouraged by military leadership. However, there are risks involved in every job in existence, such as a person who distributes Pepsi products while living in Atlanta or a guy selling Budweiser in Milwaukee, but trying to eliminate the identity of a person by not allowing them to post pictures of what they do for a living can affect their morale. The U.S. military should encourage their one million plus service members to post pictures and stories while in the military, along with joining or “friending”

military websites, as this encourages troops to be proud of the fact they serve their country, helps with recruitment, and lets Americans connect with those past and present service members.

Over the past five years, the DOD has focused efforts on encouraging their departments and personnel to use New Media technologies available in the public domain and to engage in open two-way communication with their subordinates and military members. The emphasis behind this DOD initiative lies in the basis that they believe this is the best communication method for information dispersion, one that a majority of their personnel use at home, and therefore would want to use for work and business. The DOD understands that there is a level of risk involved in allowing the use of social media platforms, but believes it is risk they need to accept. Lieutenant General William B. Caldwell, the commander, NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan in 2011, may have said it best when he stated, “Operational security is an enduring concern for military operations. However, we cannot take counsel of our fears at the expense of new media applications. Commanders accept risk in any operation. We are not talking about rejection of risk, but rather about the parameters of the risk, we’re willing to accept.”<sup>83</sup> As the exponential growth of social networking would seem to back this notion, an interesting report sanctioned by the Secretary of the Air Force Office of Public Affairs in 2013 may make the DOD relook at some of their assumptions, as to what military personnel really think of the use of social media for official notifications. The report, conducted in the summer of 2013 and published in February 2014, entitled “Where Airmen Get Information,” was conducted across the Total Force of the Air Force, and included a survey incorporating 6,553 responses from personnel on Active Duty, Reserve, and Air National Guard.<sup>84</sup> The results from the survey’s report were fascinating, in that they concluded social media was the least preferred source for Airmen to use to obtain information in the Air Force.<sup>85</sup> Instead, Airmen preferred and were

generally satisfied with how well the Air Force kept them informed through websites (Air Force Portal, Air Force Link, and Base websites), e-mail, and face-to-face communication through their chain of command, to hear about policy changes, messages from Air Force leaders, local unit or wing news, training materials, or career planning.<sup>86</sup> Additionally, the report found that Airmen across the Total Force preferred to use Facebook only for personal or general use due to a multitude of concerns including; operations security, cybersecurity vulnerabilities, inappropriate professional relationships, disciplinary issues, reduction in workforce productivity, and invasion of personal time.<sup>87</sup> Although Air Force leadership has started to post and push information out to the Airmen on different New Media technologies such as blogs, Facebook, and Twitter, the survey results showed that less than 25 percent of respondents utilized them “to acquire information about the Air Force or as a means of official communication with Air Force personnel.”<sup>88</sup> The results of the survey confirm that as the DOD grapples to figure out how best to communicate with their personnel, even though they are investing time and effort incorporating the technologies available in the 21st century to push out information, and should continue to do so, not everyone uses it, nor wants to. Therefore, the DOD must ensure that it keeps its websites up-to-date, and continues to disseminate information through e-mail and face-to-face. However, if the DOD truly wants to use social media to disseminate messages, it must make sure the content of each message sent is relevant and useful to the service members, and not just useless propaganda. The DOD must also outline what is appropriate and what constitutes a UCMJ violation, to limit concerns people may have when using social media sites.

The DOD must also be kept aware of how devices, known as “Fourth screen” technology, smart phones, tablets, etc... have changed social networking and the way people communicate, by utilizing a mobile device that can go anywhere and fits in the palm of our hands.<sup>89</sup> Many



smart phones and tablets today have replaced desktop computers due to their light weight, mobility, and increasing computing capabilities. One research company found that when people use their phones they “spend more time on Facebook than they do browsing the entire rest of the web.”<sup>90</sup> Thousands of apps are available for download on these devices and the military has taken notice and produced their own apps. However, the “Where Airmen Get Information” survey concluded that less than 20 percent of the Total Force Airmen questioned were aware that the Air Force offered mobile apps, though they would use them to access Air Force websites and obtain general Air Force news coverage, leading to the survey’s conclusion that the military needs to do a better job increasing Airmen’s awareness that such apps exist which provide useful functionality, in regards to Airmen obtaining day-to-day Air Force information including base events.<sup>91</sup> Additional apps for phones which are growing in popularity involve ones which share photos and videos, such as Snapchat and Instagram, or ones that are location-based platforms showing the location where the user currently is or has been, such as Foursquare.<sup>92</sup> These apps are creating OPSEC concerns, as the posted pictures and videos can visually show where military members are, what jobs they perform, or release classified information unintentionally. Location-based apps which broadcast the user’s geographic location, are one of the major concerns in the military today, as “deployed soldiers or soldiers conducting operations in classified areas can bring the enemy right to the user’s doorstep.”<sup>93</sup> Geotagging is a GPS-support feature that reveals your location to other people by adding geographical identification to photographs, videos, websites and SMS messages, thus causing the same OPSEC concerns as other location-based apps.<sup>94</sup> Military personnel need to remember that in order to maintain OPSEC, it is vitally important to remain vigilant at all times, and one thing a person can do, is check to see if their smartphones, or any other “Fourth screen” technology they possess, has

automatic embedded geotags, and if so, they need to turn the function off, so they are not unknowingly broadcasting their location.

## **Military Culture**

U.S. military leaders have acknowledged that social media currently is a valid means to get information out to their subordinates, and realize the importance of taking steps to incorporate this change into their organizational culture. However, to understand how or if social media can be infused into the U.S. military culturally, we must first understand that each of the U.S. military services is inherently different. Rather than referencing the U.S. military as a unified whole, we must look at each service as an independent group comprised of unique cultures. Organizational psychologist, Dr. Edgar Schein defines the culture of a group “as a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.”<sup>95</sup> He states that the “two major sets of problems that all groups, no matter what their size, must deal with: (1) Survival, growth, and adaptation in their environment; and (2) Internal integration that permits daily functioning and the ability to adapt and learn.”<sup>96</sup> If each of the military services, as a distinct group, is to use social media platforms as a tool to effectively address their individual problems, they must understand how the influence of their traditional shared cultures and behaviors within their service can lend to the integration of social media. In order to change the culture of one of the services, one must first appreciate the origins and history which defines the current cultural atmosphere, to have a true understanding of the level of effort required to make the changes envisioned. Looking at the U.S. Navy, Air Force,

and Army as separate groups and analyzing why they behave the way they do and how behavior patterns are sustained by the power of knowledge, Carl Builder, the author of “*The Masks of War*” stated that the Navy worships at the altar of independent command, the Air Force at the altar of technology, and the Army at the altar of citizenry and service to the nation.<sup>97</sup> He states that the Navy views itself as an institution marked by its independence and stature, and although it believes in the use of operations analysis to improve its tactical or operational use of existing platforms, it believes that analysis is not needed to define its requirements, as they should come from experience and traditions.<sup>98</sup> The Air Force sees itself as the embodiment of an idea, a strategy sustained by modern technology, and as an institution that revels in the use of analysis to illuminate or clarify its decision problems and options.<sup>99</sup> Lastly, the Army sees itself as a brotherhood of guilds; personnel who have a common bond, take great pride in their skills, and depend upon one another, and as an institution which uses analytic models aimed at obtaining a single answer, rather than face uncertainties or alternatives.<sup>100</sup>

If we read into the historical culture of the separate services, we can appreciate how each has gone through the process of implementing social media. It is interesting to note, that although the U.S. Air Force is seen as the service more in tuned with and eagerly accepting of new technology, it was actually the U.S. Army and Marines which first began using social media. One can argue that these statistics are skewed somewhat due to the demographically larger number of younger recruits in the U.S. Army and Marines, as they often have to deal with youth issues more rapidly than in the U.S. Air Force and have a higher turnover rate. From the 2013 U.S. Military Demographic Report, one can see that 49.4 percent of enlisted personnel across all services are 25 years or younger.<sup>101</sup> However, it must be noted that 68.5 percent of enlisted U.S. Marines are 25 years or younger.<sup>102</sup> As the U.S. Navy (including the Marines) and

U.S. Air Force are dedicated to the principles of independence and uniqueness, and view themselves a 'cut above the rest' as evident by their recruiting advertisements, they will inherently face difficulties trying to infuse social media into their culture, as the premise behind it revolves around open communication with all people. The cultural aspect of independence has clearly filtered down from the services to the service members, and the Total Force Airmen survey expresses this point, as it concluded that Airmen preferred to keep social media for private use, rather than for private and work use. The U.S. Army's devotion to the country and to groups of people, where they view themselves as a subset of the American people, as evident by their recruiting advertisements, leads perfectly into how social media was envisioned to succeed. Of course the U.S. Army has had to adjust their overall outlook, due to recruiting numbers that are much lower than the other three services, but it shows that social media's inclusion into a military culture can transpire. Schein states, "the most fundamental characteristic of culture is that it is a product of social learning," thus the military can learn to adjust their focus in the use of social media, by looking to see why and how people are using it and build their platforms to meet those requirements.<sup>103</sup> As social media effectively "is a process and it requires strategy, goals, manpower, and foresight", successfully infusing social media into the culture of the military services will need to start with the senior leadership.<sup>104</sup> Only when the senior leadership is fully bought in to social media, can the culture truly start to change.

For the U.S. military to successfully employ the use of social media platforms into their daily activities, for the purpose of information sharing and connecting with others, they need to infuse it into the culture of their organizations and leadership. One thought process that the U.S. military can engage in to change their culture is Tim Harford's *Adapt* approach. His philosophy believes culture can be changed through "bottom-up thinking", where "learning as you go"

through the process of trial and error is essential to making changes within an organization.<sup>105</sup> The focus of his approach resides on ‘Palchinsky’s three principles’ of “variation - where you first seek out new ideas and try new things, survivability - when trying something new, do it on a scale where failure is survivable, and selection - where you seek out feedback and learn from mistakes as you go.”<sup>106</sup> The military must realize that “accepting trial and error means accepting error”, because “if nobody tries anything different, we will struggle to figure out new and better ways to do anything.”<sup>107</sup> Change begins with quality leadership and a supportive team willing to take on the challenge of implementing social media into the military, but at the same time, understanding that failures will happen along the way, but not to give up and keep pressing forward with new ideas. The key to understanding Harford’s methodology, is realizing that adaptation is a process, not a product, and as long as the U.S. military does not get disgruntled with failure along the way, in which it has attempted to incorporate social media as a stable for communications, success will eventually prevail. Although the U.S. military has made great strides in generating social media platforms and trying to get the word out to its members on their capabilities, the aforementioned Air Force Total Force survey confirms there is still more work to do to fully inoculate it into the military culture.

Another avenue the U.S. military can dissect in order to determine if social media has met the challenges and requirements, to bring about the method of change needed, to transform the military culture is Edgar Schein’s ‘Three Levels of Culture.’ Schein believes that the military can analyze if social media has indeed become part of its culture by studying its impact at three levels; artifacts – visible and feelable structures and processes and observed behavior, espoused beliefs and values – ideals, goals, values, aspirations, along with ideologies and rationalizations, and basic underlying assumptions – unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs and

values.<sup>108</sup> He states that the creation of cultures arise from three sources: (1) the beliefs, values, and assumptions of founders/leaders of organizations; (2) the learning experiences of group members as their organization evolves; and (3) new beliefs, values, and assumptions brought in by new members and new leaders.<sup>109</sup> Reflecting on the above information, the U.S. military may have artifacts, such as posters and online training programs that include social media training, and espoused beliefs and values, with their aspirations and goals of having social media become a standard communications platform as in the public domain, but they fall short at this time in the underlying assumptions. Although the U.S. military assumes the younger generation wants to use social media as the main form of communication, the Total Force survey results, at this time, indicate otherwise. Schein believes that culture and leadership run hand in hand, and if the U.S. military leadership truly wants to articulate and reinforce social media as part of its culture, they need to “state explicitly what their values and assumptions are in a formal statement.”<sup>110</sup> Yes, the U.S. military has made policy that governs the use of New Media technologies, including social media platforms, and some senior leaders have taken the initiative to use them, not every senior leader uses them, nor has a formal statement been made addressing its use as a primary communications tool in day-to-day operations. However, that does not mean the military culture will not adapt to using social media more in the future. It will just take more senior leadership personnel showing their support visually, by using it in their daily reports, forms, and other recurrent tasks, through explicit and implicit communications, that prove to their subordinates this is something they wholeheartedly believe in. Leaders must use embedding and reinforcement mechanisms, in regards to social media use, that “teaches their organizations how to perceive, think, feel, and behave based on their own conscious and unconscious convictions.”<sup>111</sup> To do this, leaders need to focus on primary embedding mechanisms, such as

allocating the appropriate resources needed to fully integrate social media in the military, and pay attention to and measure how the progress is going, as well as reinforcement mechanisms, such as organizational systems and procedures, formal statements of organizational philosophy, and the placing of posters and billboards that echo their belief in the use of social media.<sup>112</sup>

Leaders must also consider what their personnel really want from social media if they truly want to change the culture of the military. They must have open and frank discussions with their troops to understand how and when the use of social media will best benefit their organizations. Leaders must be careful when asking troops for feedback, because they may not want to hear what troops truly have to say. Social media provides military personnel an avenue to truly bond with others who have similar social interests, whether across the other services or throughout the civilian sector. These bonds can reap huge rewards for the military in terms of ideas and process improvements if implemented correctly and swiftly. However, the true culture change from senior leadership embedding social media into the military may not occur just in the communication realm, but in its structural foundation. The concept of social media, and its unaltered two-way communication, has the potential to democratize the way leadership decisions are made and cut into the entrenched hierarchical leadership philosophy that is currently in place.

### **What U.S. Military Leadership Needs To Do**

The question that must be asked is whether or not the U.S. military leadership can adapt to the use of social media, as the culture of their services cannot change until they do. The advent of social media platforms lends to social leadership, where any individual military leader, no matter what their rank, has the potential to develop and share ideas, as well as inspire others while seeking to implement change.<sup>113</sup> “As social leadership by its very nature is

transformational, social media can provide the platform which meets the challenges of a transformational leader which include; leading the change, staying visible, constantly providing motivation, and communicating with followers.”<sup>114</sup> However, the current hierarchical military structure does not facilitate meaningful ideas being generated from the bottom of the ranks to the top. Unlike the corporate world where companies can induce change and innovation by hiring a new CEO outside their company, the military services do not look to the outside world for their next Service Chief.<sup>115</sup> Promotion to the top of the military generally involves following your supervisors lead and not stirring the pot. This causes a stovepipe of individuals at the top similar to those who were there before them, who believe in the same principles and ways of doing things, thus severely restricting the amount of innovation and change within the military organization. The U.S. Air Force did initiate a “Good Ideas Program” where individuals of all ranks can submit best practices, cost saving initiatives, or suggestions for improvements. Although this program makes a good effort to hear from the troops, its focus is mainly on lower level management type decisions and not on the Air Force’s higher level strategic or decision making capability. In defining transformational leadership in the 1970s, James MacGregor Burns stated that “Transformational leadership occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality.”<sup>116</sup> Understanding first and foremost that command and control must exist in the military, if senior military members use social media for true two-communication and embrace a transformational leadership environment, by truly paying attention and listening to the ideas of their subordinates, rather than only mentoring through their experiences from a top-down approach, they may discover innovations and solutions that benefit the military as a whole, and may even revolutionize military operations in the future.



Changes in the military begin with senior leaders adjusting or producing new policy for enforcement. In regards to social media, policy cannot be made just to accommodate the fact that social media exists, but must explicitly state the military's intentions for using it. As stated previously, the U.S. military was not proactive when New Media technologies and social networking sites were first introduced to the world. In fact they were reactive by first trying to contain social media by shutting down all site usage from military locations, until there was an official DOD policy put in place on its use. Though military policies are typically reactive and behind the times, senior leadership can still reverse this trend in regards to social media, by making a concentrated effort to forge forward, but must do so quickly. The current policies are vague, and I believe they have evolved that way due to the fast pace of technological changes in recent years. However, the concept of social media, and the exchange of information from person-to-person has been around for thousands of years, thus deriving a policy based on the official use of social media can be articulated by the military to lay out the principles or rules for military members to follow in short order. The military knows what they do not want, which involves anything pertaining to OPSEC, operational, or combat concerns. They just need to understand the implications of social media use and directly place them into policy. Social media has proven its usefulness, both in the military and civilian sector. The military has found it as a useful mechanism for both internal and external communication, as a force management tool, for force employment, a force multiplier, recruiting tool, as well as a weapon for public affairs. Yes, senior leadership may view social media as something mainly used by the younger troops, but that generational gap in universal understanding must be closed quickly through a comprehensive policy, as these troops will soon be the leaders of tomorrow.

## Conclusion

Although there are many benefits to the U.S. military using New Media and social media platforms as vehicles to distribute information and communicate, not all military members are enthused with the idea of making it the primary means by which to do so in a work environment, due to the inherent security concerns and trepidation that its use would invade on their personal time. At this time, social media is a clear cut tertiary or even fourth-level means of communication in the U.S. military behind e-mail, websites and face-to-face, however its prevalent use in the military shows that there is a potential for it to become a major communications tool within the military, as well as the fact that e-mails and websites cannot provide the immediate two-way communication that social media platforms can. With the way the military is structured, the implementation of social media into the culture and fabric of military life must initiate explicitly from the top. However, transformational leaders lower in rank can help promulgate social media into the military culture by continuing to innovate, communicate, and lead the change to do so. As these leaders advance in rank, the unfettered use of social media, as a communications and exchange of information tool, may one day help break the stranglehold of the current hierarchal culture, and allow for a more democratic leadership culture that encourages new ideas and innovations from the bottom-up. Social media platforms have helped people around the world interact and communicate unlike any technological advancement to date. Although the enduring legacy of its use within the U.S. military is still unknown, its potential benefits can indeed change the culture of the military in how it communicates and disseminates information, both internally within the military community and externally with the American public, thus the U.S. military must continue to advance its immersion in the developing world of social media.

## **Limitations and Future Research Opportunities**

This paper provides a general history detailing how and when the U.S. military began to employ New Media technologies. As the paper focused primarily on the U.S. Army and Air Force, future researchers could use it as a starting point for more in-depth research into either branch, or in concert with research pertaining to the U.S. Navy, Marines, Coast Guard, or other DOD organizations. This paper's research methodology consisted primarily of qualitative research along with quantitative and theoretical research, but there are many viable opportunities for further analysis. Due to the fact this paper touched on only a few essential topics and could not include all possible avenues for which social media and the U.S. military are interconnected, additional opportunities for future research include: leadership philosophies which hinder or advance social media use, changing culture within the U.S. military, correlation between the private sector and U.S. military in regards to social media and if one adopts and integrates this technology later intentionally, and if the "strategic corporal" is enabled by social media.

In addition, as the terrorist organization, Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), showcased in March 2015, adversaries can target military individuals and their families at home with information obtained through Public Affairs and social media outlets. The full repercussions of these actions are beyond the scope of this paper and still being debated, but all future social media research must confront this serious and potentially deadly development. In the same regard, research detailing how the U.S. military employs social media operationally against adversaries, offensively and defensively, may also be valuable. This research provides initial evidence that New Media technologies can indeed be integrated into the U.S. military. Future research should strive to validate the findings of this research by conducting a more in-depth analysis across different communities and technologies.

## ENDNOTES

(All notes appear in shortened form. For full details, see the appropriate entry in the bibliography.)

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