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14. ABSTRACT

Social media is an under utilized tool for internal communication and leadership in the United States Army. Most Soldiers and family members frequently use social media in their personal lives, yet the Army has not embraced a comprehensive approach to communicating and influencing in this space. This paper reviews social media and organizational communication literature, overviews standing military guidance on social media use, and proposes a framework for social media engagement at the tactical level.

15. SUBJECT TERMS

Social Media; Leadership; Internal Communication; Organizational Communication; Internal Marketing; United States Army; Tactical Level Leadership

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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

SOCIAL MEDIA AS AN INTERNAL COMMUNICATION TOOL IN THE UNITED STATES ARMY

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

CAPTAIN CHARLES L. HARRIS, UNITED STATES ARMY

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Executive Summary

Title: Social Media as an Internal Communication Tool in the United States Army

Author: Captain Charles L. Harris, United States Army

Thesis: The United States Army has failed to realize the potential benefits of social media as a tool for leadership and internal organizational communication at the tactical level.

Discussion: Social media's popularity and widespread use has introduced a sweeping change in how people and organizations communicate with each other. Most Soldiers and their families are engaged in some form of social media activity already. Though the Army is very active in recruiting through social media, it has yet to emphasize the potential benefits of social media as a tool for leadership and internal organizational communication. Positive internal communication can have a profound effect on a Soldier's perception of their organization, their motivation, and ultimately their performance. If used appropriately, social media can provide an effective means to communicate internally.

Conclusion: The United States Army should encourage the use of social media as an internal communication and leadership tool by providing tactical leaders a framework for social media engagement and encouraging its application.

DISCLAIMER

THE OPINIONS AND CONCLUSIONS EXPRESSED HEREIN ARE THOSE OF THE INDIVIDUAL STUDENT AUTHOR AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT THE VIEWS OF EITHER THE MARINE CORPS COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE OR ANY OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCY. REFERENCES TO THIS STUDY SHOULD INCLUDE THE FOREGOING STATEMENT.

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Preface

The purpose of this research is to provide a framework for tactical leaders to engage and lead their Soldiers through the use of social media. When I began this project, I was convinced that social media was eroding the critical thinking abilities of our young leaders. While there may be an element of truth in that statement, through my research I began to realize I had misdiagnosed the problem. While social media certainly isn't a panacea for solving the challenges of leadership and internal communication, it can assist organizations as they grow to face the challenges of a fast-paced and dynamic leadership environment. As an Army officer and former company commander, I understand the challenges of leadership at the tactical level and it is my sincere hope that this research will benefit those at the forefront.

I want to thank my wife, Maggie, for her encouragement and support in the completion of this project. She managed to balance the challenges of a full career, life as a new parent, and a global pandemic while I poured hundreds of hours into this project. This accomplishment belongs to her. I would also like to thank Dr. Craig Hayden for his patience and mentorship as this project evolved. I could not have completed it without your guidance and insight.

"As one of the most defining developments of our time, social media has fundamentally changed people's private and professional lives. It is no longer a trend or playground for first movers, but communications professionals' most important challenge in the twenty-first century."
-Sonja Dreher in Corporate Communications: An International Research Journal[1]

The job of an Army leader is simple: accomplish the mission and improve the organization.[2] This charge is accomplished through leadership. According to the United States Army, leadership is "the process of influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation to accomplish the mission and improve the organization."[3] This definition allows leaders maximum latitude to explore their ideas for how best to lead their organizations. Some leaders have chosen to embrace social media as an unconventional yet effective complement to established organizational leadership methods. Despite the initial ban on social media in 2007, the military has slowly begun to realize its advantages.[4] According to the Pew Research Center, 90% of Americans aged 18-29 and 82% of Americans aged 30-49 were active users of social media in 2019.[5] Combine those statics with the fact that 79.8% of the Army is under age 35 and the implication is astounding – most Soldiers already consume and actively participate in social media, leaving the door open for innovative leaders to utilize the platform.[6] Accordingly, many units and senior Army leaders have some sort of social media presence. Since the vast majority of potential recruits are actively engaged in social media activity, the Army has predictably developed a large presence in that space as well. What is missing, however, is the embrace of social media as a leadership tool at the tactical unit level. The potential benefits, with special regard to internal organizational communication, are extensive.[7] Adapting to the digital revolution is an exceedingly important task, yet the Army has only provided cautionary, guidance that can discourage its use.[8] Research has shown that restrictive policies are "anathematic to social media engagement" and thus negate its potential benefits.[9]

The Army is understandably concerned about the personal and professional use of social media in terms of reputation and image management, but the ubiquitous nature of social media renders any attempt to control content effectively moot.   Instead, the Army should embrace a framework that encourages effective social media use at the tactical unit level.   Such an embrace allows tactical leaders to fully leverage the advantages of social media as an internal communication tool without a latent fear of disapproval. Tactical unit leaders are uniquely postured to increase their organization's performance by using social media to conduct effective internal communication. Internal communication is argued here as crucial for tactical leaders because it has been proven to increase engagement, motivation, satisfaction, and overall performance in civilian organizations. This thesis recommends a framework for tactical unit leaders, such as company commanders, to utilize social media with purpose. In so doing, it describes social media's rise and impact on organizations, the importance of leading through internal communication, a synopsis of existing guidance, and recommendations for further study. Finally, the appendix includes a proposed "Tactical Leader's Guide to Social Media Engagement" that provides as testable model for how social media can be adopted as a leadership tool for tactical unit leaders.

The Reach and Impact of Social Media

Developing an effective social media approach to internal communication first requires a comprehensive understanding of social media, the people who use it, and the role it can play within organizations. Over 90% of American adults have regular access to the internet and that number approaches 100% for those less than 50 years of age.[10] Similarly, 81% percent of Americans have smartphones with numbers again nearing 100% for younger age groups.[11] Social media use is part of the daily routines of millions, if not billions of people worldwide.[12] In 2009,

Americans reported that the internet was their "preferred source for information and the most reliable source for news."[13] ComScore, an independent media evaluation firm, reported that "communication via social networking exceeded that of email" for the first time in 2009 as well.[14] Americans are online more than ever and much of that activity is spent connecting with others through the use of social media.

Motivation is a key element of organizational leadership, and social media can connect us to those motivations. Outside of a social media context, motivation is "as simple and complex as whether or not our psychological needs are satisfied."[15] Experts disagree on what those psychological needs actually are but recent research seems to suggest that individuals gravitate toward social media because it meets a "larger number of their combined needs, such as information-seeking, socialization and emotional support."[16] For many young Americans, social media use is "related most to their need for connectedness, but also to their need for self-expression and, to a lesser extent, for utilitarian purposes."[17] Individuals have a myriad of reasons for participating in social media, and not all its effects are positive.

Recent studies have shown a "negative relationship between social media use and life satisfaction among adolescents."[18] While social media seems to foster interconnectedness and support, "the values of social support received and given online are limited."[19] Social media may be able to improve some relationships, but it could also "increase awareness of differences and lead to interpersonal conflict."[20] However, research into Facebook use among *co-workers* has indicated that individuals who "actively participate….are more likely to experience feelings of connectedness and higher levels of happiness."[21] In a comprehensive study, Anita Whiting and David Williams identified ten potential "uses and gratifications" for participation in social media and asked their subjects to identified which reasons applied most to them. In order of

importance, these include: social interaction (88 percent), information seeking (80 percent), passing time (76 percent), entertainment (64 percent), relaxation (60 percent), communicatory utility (56 percent), expression of opinions (56 percent), convenience utility (52 percent), information sharing (40 percent), and surveillance and watching of others (20 percent).[22] While an individual's particular motivation may vary, it's clear that social media satisfies "our ancient propensity to connect to other humans, albeit with electrons flowing through cyberspace rather than conversation drifting through air."[23] The integration of social media into leadership and management of organizations needs to reflect awareness of what kinds of needs these platforms fulfill.

Social Media, Engagement, and Performance in Organizations

The popularity and widespread use of social media has introduced "substantial and pervasive changes to communication between organizations, communities, and individuals."[24] One potential advantage of social media utilization is the positive effect it may have on engagement, satisfaction, and, by consequence, organizational performance. While it may be intuitive that engaged employees are "key to competitive advantage," recent scholarship has found links between engagement, organizational performance, and the new role that social media plays in internal organizational communication.[25] Engaged employees feel more emotionally connected to their jobs.   They are typically energized, dedicated, and "fully immersed in their work."[26] In addition, "engaged workers are more open to new information, more productive, and more willing to go the extra mile."[27] It's likely that engagement is directly affected by that employee's sense of ownership provided by the organizations demonstrated "confidence, trust, and care for employees."[28] Of equal importance is the organization's ability to demonstrate that

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"confidence, trust, and care" through effective communication.   The employment of social

technology is an emerging communication technique within organizations and its use has been

empirically demonstrated to have a positive effect on "routine and innovative job

performance."[29] This technique may be driven by growth in use of social media outside of the

organization, and create resistance to traditional forms of organizational communication.

The shift in communication strategy is largely due to younger employees "resisting

traditional communication tactics such as long mass emails and instead preferring short messages

on the device of their choosing" and their expectation that one-way communication is obsolete.[30]

In contrast to "traditional" communication techniques, social media provides the brevity and

accessibility that many young employees expect. In addition to meeting communication

expectations, a recent study of organizations utilizing Facebook found the platform was

positively associated with work satisfaction.[31] Furthermore, that study also found that promoting

work satisfaction also led to the "tangible outcome of productivity and profit for the

organization."[32] A broader study into social media utilization in the workplace echoed those

claims and further concluded the positive effect was especially seen on "creative and innovative

tasks" rather than those deemed more routine or mundane.[33] In other words, employee efficiency

may decrease in the short term, but social media seems to offer the more subtle effect of

providing a platform for collaboration and knowledge sharing that is valuable, if difficult to

measure in previous studies.

The Role of Social Media in Internal Organizational Communication

An organization's effort to engage its employees is often referred to as internal

organizational communication. Having established the importance of an engaged workforce and

the potential of social media to provide a platform to engage employees, it is also important to

review the concept of internal organizational communication itself. According to Vercic et al "internal communication is the aspiration (starting from the vision and proceeding to policy and mission statement and eventually to strategy) of achieving a systematic analysis and distribution of information at all strata simultaneously coordinated in the most efficient way possible."[34] Some scholars suggest that "internal marketing" is a better term there is widespread agreement that such communication is the best way to make employees feel "valued and appreciated."[35] Though both terms have gained equivalence, internal marketing tends to emphasize that "enterprises should value and respect their employees by treating them as internal customers."[36] In this respect, employees should feel valued by their employer rather than feeling as if they're just a tool to reach the customer. Internal communication can facilitate this perception of valuation.

Either way, the goal of a deliberate internal focus for organizational communication is to "help internal customers (employees) gain greater job satisfaction, which should promote job performance and facilitate the organization accomplishing its ultimate business objectives."[37] Trust and transparency are key attributes of an effective internal communication strategy.[38] While internal communication "facilitates interactions between an organization, supervisors, and employees which create workplace relationships based on meaning and worth," those relationships are invariably based on trust and transparency.[39]

Unlike other legacy methods for internal communication, social media is inherently interactive. In comparison to more traditional internal communication methods, such as mass email, social media places "additional demands on the organizations in relation to the number of voices that are allowed to speak for and about the organization."[40] This same phenomenon likewise provides a unique opportunity to establish openness, transparency, and trust in ways that

simply haven't been as readily available. As recent research has shown, employers who "share substantial information with employees, encourage employee participation, convey balanced information that holds leaders accountable, and are open to employee scrutiny are likely to gain trust, satisfaction, commitment, and control mutuality."[41] The benefits for both employee and employer are mutual and substantial.[42]

Social media is important for organizational communication because it enables "new types of behaviors that were previously difficult or impossible to achieve before these new technologies entered the workplace."[43] More precisely, it provides *visibility, persistence, editability, and association* more consistently and fluidly than other means of communicating internally. First, research has shown that if people "perceive that information is difficult to access, or they do not know what information exists from them to access, they will likely not seek it out."[44] Second, the ability to review, record, and share information is a key expectation of organizational communication. It is evident that "having a record of previous communication can allow presentations of information to be properly contextualized and provide people with the time to better understand conversations."[45] Third, by offering employers and employees "the time to craft and compose messages, editability allows for more purposeful communication that may aid with message fidelity and comprehension."[46] Fourth, social media affords association with relevant individuals and content through "(a) supporting social connection, (b) access to relevant information, and (c) enabling emergent connection."[47] The social media characteristics described here illustrate its advantage over more traditional forms of organizational communication. Ultimately social media can play an important role in "facilitating supervisor-employee relationships as a vehicle to express values and goals, and in turn, pave the way for favorable organization-employee relationships."[48]

However, the same characteristics that make social media a relevant and useful platform for internal communication can also facilitate undesirable outcomes for the organization. Leaders are increasingly visible and accessible to employees, and as a consequence of open communication, more readily scrutinized. For this reason, it is important that leaders craft a deliberate, intentional presence on social media platforms. By virtue of their position, leaders will invariably "set service standards by their own behaviours and management styles" making leadership a "critical ingredient in creating and maintaining an effective and positive service orientation."[49] They must intentionally influence that narrative if they intend to communicate effectively and transparently.

Transparent communication "critically affects the building of a quality relationships with employees" and every effort must be taken to ensure its application.[50] Research has consistently shown that "employees perceive a better relationship with the organization when they perceive their managers to be authentic, ethical, balanced, fair, transparent, and consistent in what they say and do."[51] Truly transformational leaders "motivate employees by appealing to their higher-order needs and care about their welfare, concerns, and personal growth and development."[52] Sending that message through social media carries risks, but ultimately those leaders can "encourage two-way exchange in communication and listen to the feedback and opinion of employees."[53] This approach to leadership communication concept arguably predates social media, yet social media has increased the possibility of such exchange and thereby increased expectations surrounding its use.

Leadership Through Social Media

Employees value work in an environment where they trust their leaders, take pride on their work, and get along with their colleagues.[54] This environment can be fostered by managers

who demonstrate "honesty, transparency, genuine caring, support, and a willingness to listen."[55] Demonstrating those qualities is most readily achieved through open communication. As such, "leadership is the nucleus of the organization's internal communication process" and is the driving force behind a coordinated and effective internal communication strategy.[56]

Multiple studies have concluded that "effective internal communication plays a vital role in developing positive employee attitudes, such as job satisfaction, identification with the organization, trust and organizational commitment, and positive employee-organization relationships."[57] These attitudes are the driving force behind increased productivity and individual performance.[58] Thus, internal communication can play a pivotal, albeit indirect, role in organizational effectiveness. Since social media is a readily available and effective means to communicate internal to organizations, leaders must develop a deliberate and comprehensive engagement strategy. Social media represents a significant, disruptive shift that carries tremendous implications for leaders and managers. "Social media has fundamentally changed people's private and professional lives. It is no longer a trend or playground for first movers, but communications professionals' most important challenge in the twenty-first century."[59]Its potential to improve leadership cannot be ignored.

Much like civilian organizations, the Army is an organization that can benefit from better usage of social media for management and leadership. The age demographics of the Army may mean social media plays a more pronounced role in organizational dynamics than in many other enterprises. Most organizations have a mission, sense of purpose, and a desire to perform as effectively as possible in that space. However, the nature of the Army's mission requires special emphasis on performance and mission accomplishment. As the research discussed previously

has demonstrated, social media offers tangible benefits to improving employee performance and sense of purpose.

An Army unit leader's job is to guide the unit toward mission accomplishment. In so doing, the leader has an abundance of tools to assist her in leading her organization effectively. Effective internal organizational communication is imperative; the Army's organizational communication demands thus necessitate a thoughtful social media engagement strategy. Despite the apparent capabilities of social media for leadership of Army units, the Army provided has not provided significant guidance to its young leaders to give them the best chance of success. Existing guidance attempts to regulate individual social media use, with virtually no guidance outlining "what right looks like" at the tactical unit level to improve or sustain leadership and unit performance. The next section will provide a brief overview of existing social media guidance from The White House through the Army level, in order to illustrate gaps and justify future guidance requirements for Army leaders.

Government Social Media Guidance

Given the Army's status as a government organization that ultimately reports to the President of the United States, it receives guidance from various entities within the executive branch up to and including The White House. While the President has yet to provide specific guidance on social media usage within the military, White House Counsel Neil Eggleston drafted a memorandum titled "Disposition of Social Media Accounts" that outlined the use of official social media accounts for government officials, including those of the U.S. military.[60] This document states that officials are not allowed to utilize their official accounts after they leave office. By implication, however, the White House Counsel highlighted the importance and official communication nature of social media accounts. Because the Counsel intervened to

specifically address the disposition and influence of social media, the move signaled social

media's legitimacy as a communication asset at the highest level.

The United States Office of Government Ethics issued a "legal advisory" titled "The

Standards of Conduct Applied to Personal Social Media Use."[61] As the title suggests, the

advisory covers prohibited personal social media practices, with respect to personal social media

accounts. These uses include:

    a. Use of Government Time and Property
    b. Government Title or Position and Appearance of Official Sanction
    c. Recommending and Endorsing Others on Social Media
    d. Seeking Employment Through Social Media
    e. Disclosing Nonpublic Information
    f. Personal Fundraising
    g. Official Social Media Accounts

The U.S. Office of Special Council (OSC) followed with nine pages of guidance on "when the

use of social media could violate the Hatch Act." The OSC document provides examples of

misconduct and how individuals could be reprimanded for such actions.[62]

In addition to national level guidance, the Department of Defense issued its own

instruction beginning with Department of Defense Directive 1344.10 titled "Political Activities

by Members of the Armed Forces."[63] While the Directive does not address social media use

specifically, it clearly indicates that using a social media platform to conduct forbidden political

activity is prohibited.   Department of Defense Instruction 1300.18 titled "Personnel Casualty

Matters, Policies, and Procedures" covers a myriad of topics regarding the handing of service

members remains and next of kin casualty notification.[64] Casualty notification is a sensitive and

emotional communication case, and the Department of Defense insists that next of kin

notification happens in person and by a uniformed service member.   Tracking down the next of

kin in person often takes time and information in the digital age literally travels at the speed of

light. So, the Department of Defense outlines specific guidance of the use of internet-based communication during the notification period.

Department of Defense Instruction 8550.01 titled "DoD Internet Services and Internet-Based Capabilities" does not offer significant social media usage guidance other than to describe how "internet infrastructure, services, and technologies provide versatile communication assets that must be managed to mitigate risk to national security; to the safety, security, and privacy of personnel; and to Federal agencies."[65] Likewise, a 2017 memorandum from Secretary of Defense Ash Carter titled "Guidance on Transition and Archiving of Official Social Media Accounts" reiterated earlier guidance from the White House Counsel.[66]

The "Department of Defense Visual Information Style Guide" is intended for "all DoD military, civilian and contract personnel designated to create VI [visual information] products as part of their official duties. This includes, but is not limited to, Public Affairs, Combat Camera and Information Operations functions through the Department of defense, including reserve and National Guard components."[67] The document was not designed nor intended to benefit the average tactical unit leader.   It is focused on communicating with external audiences, dense, and clearly intended to refine best practices for professional communicators. It does not provide advice for internal communication or engagement for unit leaders who are not communication or public affairs professionals.

The most applicable guidance offered to tactical unit leaders comes from the Joint Publication 3-61 titled *Public Affairs*.   The document is intended to serve as guidance for military public affairs professionals. Accordingly, nearly all of it is inapplicable to the average tactical unit leader.   However, there are important and practical insights embedded within the publication. Annex F to the publication, titled "Social Media" provides general advice, but there

is little guidance outside of these recommendations within doctrinal publications. While these

tenets, captured in Appendix B, are certainly helpful, there are two main issues: 1) they offer

little in the way of practical application, and 2) they are not easily accessible to the average

tactical unit leader. While Joint Publication 3-61 is open source and accessible to download,

new and existing leaders have to also implement a host of other Army regulations. The visibility

of insights from the fifth annex in a joint publication intended for public affairs professionals is

likely limited.[i]

The Army offers its own guidance regarding the utilization of social media. ALARACT

058/2018 titled "Professionalization of Online Conduct"[68] and Acting Secretary of the Army

Robert Speer's memorandum "Online Conduct of Members of the Army Team" both constitute a

reiteration of higher guidance.[69] Army Regulation 3-61 titled *The Army Public Affairs Program*

offers less practical social media advice than the corresponding joint regulation. A quick search

of the regulation reveals that the term "social media" is used only once in the entire document:

> "With the prevalence of social media outlets as a viable and accessible means of quick,
> pinpoint information release, commanders are encouraged to include them in their PA
> [public affairs] planning."[70]

The lack of attention to social media in official Army guidance suggests two observations. First,

the advice given is clearly not intended for nor applicable to the tactical unit leader. Second, if

the Army only superficially addresses "social media" once throughout their entire regulation

covering public affairs, then it comes as no surprise that little social media guidance exists for

tactical unit leaders.

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[i] After spending more than three years as a company commander, I had no idea JP 3-61 existed
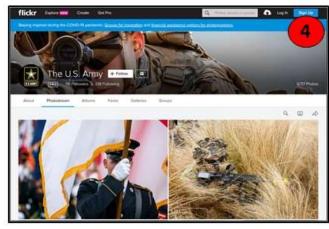until I began research for this project.
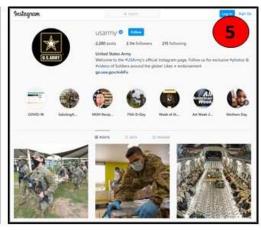
Army Social Media in Practice

Despite the lack of guidance for tactical leaders, it is unfair to characterize the Army as bereft of social media acumen. The Army demonstrates a great deal of social media expertise, especially in the field of recruiting. The Army is actively engaged on every major social media platform with numerous, coordinated posts that communicate a seamless and integrated message. Below are examples from 1) Army.mil, 2) Facebook, 3) Twitter, 4) Flickr, and 5) Instagram. Each of the posts captures an essential message: The Army is relevant, strong, capable, and making a difference in any scenario.

U.S. ARMY

MENU   SEARCH

LEAD STORY
Army astronaut returns from historic nine-month space voyage

FEATURED PHOTO

SPOTLIGHT
U.S. Army Guidance on Coronavirus

SPOTLIGHT
Army Reserve

STAND-TO!
Today's Focus:
U.S. Army Coaching Program

U.S. Army
18 hrs

One team, one fight!

#Soldiers with the 18th Medical Command (Deployment Support) board an United States Air Force C-17 Globemaster III at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, April 13, 2020.

The 535th AS transported #USArmy medical personnel from the 18th MEDCOM to Guam in support of the global #COVID19 response. ...
See More

7.6K   646 Comments 988 Shares

Like   Comment   Share

U.S. Army @USArmy · 1h
Sshhh!

Here we have a tank from the @SpartanBrigade stalking its prey in its natural habitat...

#Ready2Fight

from 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, @3rd_Infantry

21   123   460

flickr   Explore   Create   Get Pro   Log In   Sign Up

The U.S. Army + Follow

About   Photostream   Albums   Faves   Galleries   Groups

Instagram   Log In   Sign Up

usarmy
2,280 posts   2.1m followers   215 following

United States Army
Welcome to the #USArmy's official Instagram page. Follow us for exclusive #photos & #videos of Soldiers around the globe! Likes ≠ endorsement
go.usa.gov/xvbFu

COVID-19   SalutingA...   MOH Recip...   75th D-Day   Week of In...   AA Week 2...   Mothers Day

POSTS

This is perhaps unsurprising given the Army is competing with the other services for recruits who are digital natives and already expert navigators of social media. For the rest of the Army, however, guidance has focused on reputation management. Even established civilian organizations have struggled with the fact that the "power to set the dominant themes" may by no longer be "the privilege of senior executives alone."[71] In fact, "loss of control over messages and image building was cited as the major obstacle and risk of using social media."[72] This uneasiness is "reflected in the broad adoption of social media guidelines. Organizations feel the need to avoid misunderstandings because some employees cannot "fully assess social media's impact."[73] The sentiment is reflected in the Army's statement to Soldiers and families regarding the use of social media, posted on the official "Army.mil" website:

> "Social media plays a very important role in our lives. It helps us learn, share experiences with others and stay connected to things we care about. The Army encourages Soldiers and their Families to use social media to stay connected and tell the Army's story. Many Soldiers and Families are new to the Army, but they are not new to using social media. There are security risks and regulations that Soldiers and their Families, especially those new to the Army, must be aware of before posting. Understanding this dynamic is crucial because, as members of the Army profession and family, you are expected to live the Army Values, online and offline. Soldiers and their Families are personally responsible for all content they publish on social networking sites, blogs, and other websites."[74]

This statement hardly invites Soldiers and their families to engage with their leaders on social media platforms, and carries an implicit warning of improper usage. Employees clearly play an important role in reputation management[75] but social media experts in a recent study were "unanimous in the view that social media could not be controlled."[76] It is not unreasonable for Army to protect its professional reputation on social media, but it will not be able to control the content its Soldiers choose to contribute to social media platforms. While some sort of governance is prudent, justifiable, and perhaps necessary, the Army would do well to focus on the positive potential of social media as a force multiplier.

Discussion

This study is not the first to identify the benefits of social media use at the tactical unit level. In 2017, Brenton Pomeroy identified that the "use of social media at the tactical level can benefit a unit in many ways, including in the areas of leadership communication, recruiting, family support, professional relationships, medical issues, training, discipline, and unit performance."[77] This paper builds on this study by corroborating his claims through a review of relevant academic research. However, it has not necessarily been demonstrated that the military is similarly impacted by the use of social media as the businesses and organization subjects of existing research on internal communication. As of yet, there have been no studies conducted on the military's use of social media as an internal communication and engagement tool.

While social media can be an effective tool for internal communication, it is not the only way leaders can communicate with their organizations. Research has also shown that "across all generational groups, face-to-face meetings, in-person conversations, e-mail, and phone calls are considered the most effective communications tools."[78] However, the availability of these methods becomes an issue when applied to Soldiers. First, all Soldiers have enterprise email but may not be able to access it regularly. Most Soldiers do not have a government issued computer and checking their enterprise email without one requires external hardware and patience with a finicky web application. Second, the Army is an obviously hierarchical organization with leaders who are constantly engaged in solving problems. Though most commander's tout an open-door policy for utilization by any Soldier, the fact remains that higher leadership isn't usually accessible to the junior Soldier through meetings, conversations, or phone calls. In some cases, approaching a commander can be intimidating. So, while "traditional communication tools" may be considered most effective, their effectiveness is confounded by availability.

Social media isn't a panacea for internal organization communication, but it is available, beneficial, and most people have access to it at their fingertips.

Crafting a positive communication experience on a social media platform for Soldiers in a command "requires a deep understanding of the behavioral practices that surround the use of the tool."[79] An uninformed approach toward social media would likely result and a breach of norms and may end up causing more harm than good. Rita Men, an internal communications researcher at the University of Florida, found that organizations "should listen to the concerns of their employees and invite their participation in determining the information they want or need to know. Beyond this, the organization should provide complete, detailed, substantial, fair, and accurate information in a timely manner."[80] Employees across organizational contexts now expect a "two-way, employee-centered, and responsive communication system" that satisfies their immediate need for information and gratification.[81] Furthermore, "quality employee-organization relationships and positive employee communication behavior are critical factors that affect an organization's intangible assets, such as reputation" so, this two-way paradigm isn't just an employee preference but an employer asset.

In addition, internal social media communication requires the balance of "openness and community on one hand and effectiveness in representing organizational interest and achieving organization objectives on the other."[82] While social media can be a place to joke, have fun, and share memes, in the context of internal communication it must also have clear intent and purpose. In addition, internal social media communication "should be integrated and coordinated with other corporate and organizational communication to maintain a coherent brand and consistent messages."[83] Social media is most effective when used in close coordination with other types of communication. In many cases, redundant messages can reinforce ideas but

conflicting messages lead to confusion and a potential loss of faith in the platform and/or the

leader.

Social media (and really, all) messaging should be reliable and credible. One must

assume that anything posted to social media will be available to anyone, at any time in the future.

As such the organization must be "consistent in its values, words, and action and should be

accountable over what it says and does."[84] Finally, consistent activity is also important. Some

research has suggested that it is "crucial to actively maintain communication" and that

"inactivity may even influence the attitudes of stakeholders negatively."[85] These qualities are

characteristic of good social media management and create a favorable user experience, build

trust, and may ultimately lead to more a more positive and engaged workforce.

Engagement in Practice: The Tactical Leader's Guide to Social Media Engagement

When determining an appropriate social media engagement strategy for military leaders,

it is important to consider that communication via social media isn't a topic unique to the

military. Numerous publications, both formal and informal, attempt to describe effective

methods of engaging individuals through social media. Though many such publications are

oriented toward marketing, their ideas can be extrapolated and applied to leadership in a military

context.[ii] Combined with the social media tenets discussed Joint Publication 3-61, these ideas

provided the initial inspiration for "The Tactical Leader's Guide to Social Media Engagement"

which is provided Appendix A. The guide itself is an amalgamation of prudent guidance from

the military and civilian realms and insight based on the author's personal experience. The first

section, titled "Topics to Consider," offers ideas for themes a tactical leader could address on

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[ii] For this thesis I used Janet Fouts' *Social Media Non-Profit* as inspiration. She has many other
books, articles, and speeches that provide similar insight. Her Facebook best practices are
outlined in Appendix C as an example of her work. Another example of social media advice,
from Brenda Peterson, can be found in Appendix D.

social media. The second section, "Tools for Success," covers the best practices for making those posts clear and effective. The final section, "Getting Started" highlights tips for setting engagement in motion. The sections are detailed below:

<u>Topics to Consider</u>

- **Soldier Spotlight**: Feature a Soldier's individual contributions to the team; e.g. Soldier of the Week.

- **Announcements**: Post information pertinent to unit function; e.g. force protection measures, dangerous weather conditions, or crisis management initiatives.

- **Event Coordination**: Publicize details for special events; e.g. Family Readiness Group meetings.

- **Promotions and Achievements**: Highlight individual Soldier achievements; e.g. promotions or military school graduation.

- **Opportunities**: Publish opportunities for Soldiers and family to contribute outside of a work environment; e.g. volunteer or community relief efforts.

- **Connect to Purpose**: Show how the organization is achieving its mission; e.g. photos of Soldiers conducting training or executing their mission.

- **Connect to History**: Feature important people and events in your organization's history; e.g. profile a former member or use a "This Day in History" construct.

- **Conduct Polls and Surveys**: Ask for feedback about pertinent topics; e.g. when the next Family Readiness Group meeting should be scheduled.

- **Key Family Events**: Draw attention to important life events (with permission of the Soldier); e.g. birth and wedding announcements.

- **Professional Development**: Post relevant development material; e.g. reading lists or pertinent news articles.

- **Promote Individual Communication**: Highlight the fact that unit leadership can be reached through social media and that the platform is available for public or private communication from Soldiers and families.

Tools for Success[iii]

- **Authenticity**: It is vital for Soldiers to know exactly who is communicating with them and their families.

- **Transparency**: Soldiers deserve transparency; attempts to hide embarrassing information or unpleasant topics may backfire.

- **Consistency**: Soldiers will likely seek other sources of information if social media messages are erratic and inconsistent.

- **Responsiveness**: Social media is a two-way street; answer questions, acknowledge concerns, and thank people who offer suggestions.

- **Positive Attitude**: Use the platform to create solutions, not problems.

- **Sincerity**: Social media is casual and conversational; it acceptable to show personality, even in an official capacity.

- **Humor**: Use cautiously and only when appropriate.

- **Respect**: Respect the opinion and ideas of others, even when contradictory to unit message.

Getting Started

[iii] These tenants are adapted from JP 3-61, Annex F which is captured in its original form in Appendix B.

- **Make a Plan**: Employ social media platforms that are commonly used and attempt to understand existing communication shortfalls.

- **Professionalize the Unit Profile**: Add a unit logo, write a complete unit bio, ensure it is clear who is posting on behalf of the organization.

- **Build a Network**: Follow associated units with and share relevant information; connect with Soldiers and family members in the organization.

- **Ensure Accessibility**: All content should be public and readily accessible to Soldiers and family members.

- **Show Commitment**: Starting a social media communication strategy and letting it go dormant may have a negative effect on perception of the unit and its leaders.

- **Coordinate Communication**: Your social media strategy should be integrated with other forms of communication.

- **Most Importantly**: An effective social media strategy always begins with the ending in mind; take deliberate and appropriate steps to achieve the desired result.

Opportunities for Future Research and Implementation

This guide was developed based upon established academic research, civilian expertise, and existing military guidance. As of yet, no studies have been conducted to verify the effect of quality social media engagement in a military context. This guide could provide the first crucial step toward conducting such a study. For the purpose of this paper, a sampling of company-level Facebook accounts across the Army revealed that almost none followed the examples set forth in the proposed guide. With very few exceptions, it is evident that the use of social media at the company level is ad hoc rather than part of a deliberate plan. This suggests opportunities for experimentation and adaptation exist at the tactical unit level. In a typical Army Brigade Combat

Team there are approximately 30 companies. With the approval of the brigade commander, it would be possible to implement the principles described in the guide with half of the companies, in order to test its validity. The other half could serve as a control and identical surveys could illuminate the difference in effectiveness. If the results are significant, they could be published and the plan could be implemented across the Army.

Eventual implementation is another hurdle that is difficult to address. Company commanders are among the busiest people in the United States Army.[86] While it may seem in their own best interest to implement such plan, the personal demands on the company commander, and any tactical unit commander, are unlikely to result in the implementation of a voluntary program unless that individual truly understands the value of the program. However, most installations require incoming company commanders to attend a course "designed to prepare and orient" them for duty at their respective locations.[87] In such courses, commanders are educated on Army programs and practices that will best enable them, and their units, for success. A social media engagement guide could easily be added to such a program.[iv]

Conclusion

Social media "represents a set of fluid technologies with many dynamic tools and a myriad of functionality."[88] Nearly every Soldier actively engages in social media and most have immediate access to it through the use of their smart phone. Failure to utilize this resource appropriately has resulted in a missed opportunity for tactical unit leaders, who can influence the morale and performance of their Soldiers through its effective use. While technically permitted, the Army has failed to truly embrace the use of social media and has not equipped its tactical level leaders with the tools necessary for success. It has focused on reputation management and

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[iv] I have attended two such courses at two different installations and can say with confidence that social media engagement material would be well received.

operations security concerns through attempts to regulate individual behavior on social media platforms. While those are points worth considering, a full embrace of the positive potential of social media could benefit the Army substantially through morale and performance. The proposed model addresses the need for a guidance at the tactical level and offers examples for implementation. This thesis has offered an overview of academic research of social media's effect on organizations and their internal communications processes. It has also provided a broad overview of government guidance covering the utilization of social media by its service members. Finally, it has made recommendations for social media utilization at the tactical level and provided a path toward testing and implementing those changes. At a minimum, this updated understanding should compel leaders to change their view of social media and afford them the opportunity to develop better strategies for its effective employment.

The Tactical Leader's Guide to Social Media Engagement

Topics to Consider

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Tools for Success

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Transparency: Soldiers deserve transparency; attempts to hide embarrassing information or unpleasant topics may backfire.

Consistency: Soldiers will likely seek other sources of information if social media messages are erratic and inconsistent.

Responsiveness: Social media is a two-way street; answer questions, acknowledge concerns, and thank people who offer suggestions.

Positive Attitude: Use the platform to create solutions, not problems.

Sincerity: Social media is casual and conversational; it acceptable to show personality, even in an official capacity.

Humor: Use cautiously and only when appropriate.

Respect: Respect the opinion and ideas of others, even when contradictory to unit message.

These tenants are adapted from JP 3-61, Annex F which is captured in its original form in Appendix B.

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Ensure Accessibility: All content should be public and readily accessible to Soldiers and family members.

Show Commitment: Starting a social media communication strategy and letting it go dormant may have a negative effect on perception of the unit and its leaders.

Coordinate Communication: Your social media strategy should be integrated with other forms of communication.

Most Importantly: An effective social media strategy always begins with the ending in mind; take deliberate and appropriate steps to achieve the desired result.

For more information regarding the potential vulnerabilities of social media use visit www.army.mil/socialmedia

Appendix B

"Social media is a platform for building and fostering relationships, and as such your use should embody the following tenets:

a. Authenticity. It is critical that people know who is communicating in social media to instill trust and form a relationship.
b. Transparency. In social media, there is more than an expectation of transparency– there is a demand for it. Attempts to hide embarrassing information or avoid unpleasant topics will not only be ineffective, they will likely be counterproductive and draw more attention.
c. Consistency. The publics using social media will quickly go elsewhere to meet their information needs if messages are erratic and inconsistent in delivery.
d. Responsiveness. Social media, even more so than traditional media, requires responsiveness on the part of the organization. Answer questions. Acknowledge concerns. Thank people who offer suggestions. This is a two-way medium to build understanding with the publics.
e. Positive Attitude. Just like in interpersonal relationships, people using social media want to interact with others who help create solutions, not problems.
f. Sincerity. Be genuine. Social media is conversational, and it is appropriate to show some personality, even in an official capacity. Do not be a disembodied voice of the organization.
g. Humor. Social media users expect and approve of levity and humor. Know where the line is between appropriate and inappropriate, and use humor cautiously when warranted.
h. Respect. Social media is a flat environment. Respect others' opinions, even when different."[89]

Appendix C

Facebook Best Practices Facebook is its own unique culture. People are "friends" and "fans," and you have an opportunity to get to know them on a personal level.

1. Ask questions. Post photos, videos, and events. Share things your audience cares about.

2. Embrace that fact that others want to explore, become invested in, and share your venture/mission; don't be scared to share your story!

3. Don't group a bunch of posts together at the same time—stagger so as not to overwhelm.

4. Be protective of your personal privacy. Avoid oversharing on a public fan page.

5. Have a sense of humor AND a sense of purpose. Encourage questions and respond with answers.

6. Grow your fans organically: engage with positive stories and insightful commentary.

7. Always respond to posts and give them something to share.

8. Facebook isn't a notice board. Use links, images, and posts to engage your fans and get them interacting with your cause.

9. Visuals are key—bring your venture to life through a variety of media and stories about your events. Use the wall for volunteers to engage.

10. Make it fun, make it easy to interact, make it worthwhile, but make sure it's also something you could show Grandma.

11. If you wouldn't send it to all of your own friends, don't post it on your organization's page.

12. Be real, be honest, admit your mistakes, celebrate your successes— nobody wants to follow a "bot."

13. The most important part of social media is the "social." Personalize everything—your beaming face is better than any logo!

14. On Facebook, great photos are worth dozens of comments and tags and incalculable engagement.

15. Facebook is your digital coffee hour, the sidewalk in front of your church.[90]

Appendix D

"How to Build a Social Media Outreach Strategy"

Social media and content marketing strategies require a lot more investments of time and efforts as they imply extensive work related to content creation and relationship building.

1. Get your approach plan in order
    a. What do you want to achieve and how?
    b. What social platform are the most popular among your target audience and potential partners
    c. What habits do your potential audience and partners have on social media
2. Make your social profiles appealing
    a. Add a professional photo or logo
    b. Write a complete bio
    c. Explain what you do briefly yet descriptively
    d. Mention that you are open for networking and cooperation
    e. Add a link to your website or blog
    f. Don't be afraid to show a bit of your personality to make your profile look more friendly and inviting
3. Build your contacts list
    a. Search for people who work in the same industry as yours
    b. Try to reach influencers
    c. Become a member of social groups relevant to your topic
4. Start engaging before you ask for anything
    a. Social media outreach is a long-lasting process of building trustful relationships and you can't approach it simply as a means of content distribution
5. Ask to share your content when the right time comes
    a. You can send a private message to the person asking to get acquainted with your latest article, for instance, and share it with others
6. Maintain your connections all the time
    a. Social media outreach is all about accumulating and preserving contacts that can help your business grow. It isn't wise to treat your connections as a means of accomplishing short-term goals.
    b. Keep in touch with people you've worked with and don't miss good opportunities to help them out on your own part. Being attentive and nice to people usually pays off.[91]

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