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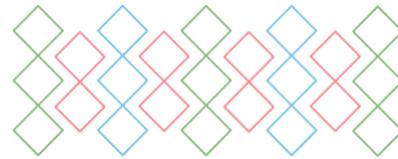
PUBLIC DIPLOMACY FOR THE 2020S AND BEYOND:

Investment in Social Media
and Artificial Intelligence
Show the Way Ahead



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Executive Summary

This report explores new tools and platforms being used by the public and private sectors to get their messages to target audiences. By analyzing successful cases of digital marketing, the research team identified five valuable trends and practices in social media and artificial intelligence that can be adopted by the U.S. State Department's public diplomacy officers to better reach desired audiences overseas.

Humorous content receives significant traction on social media, and diplomats around the world have successfully used humor as a strategy for increasing audience engagement. Humorous content can help diplomats reach broader audiences, engage with existing followers, and show the human face behind their embassy.

Short form looping videos like TikTok and Instagram Reels are increasingly the focus of investment by social media companies and marketing professionals as vital tools for reaching new audiences. Different uses of short video, including directly produced and user-generated content, provide models of success for long-term growth and campaign-based strategies.

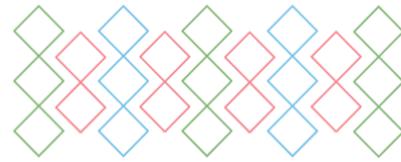
Influencer marketing uses personal connection to advertise in ways that blend in with the social media platform on which the influencer's content appears, to a targeted audience that trusts or likes the influencer. The methods used in influencer marketing will allow the State Department to better sell its messages and/or activate its target audience for calls to action. Different case studies of influencer marketing, such as by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, reveal the value of adding personality to a social presence.

Giveaway marketing involves reaching new audiences through the incentives of free rewards and prizes. By having followers interact with a post in order to win some type of reward, the social media accounts of embassies all over the world can grow their audiences. In addition, prizes from these competitions can be a unique way to push the policy agendas of an embassy.

Artificial intelligence (AI) trends in digital marketing can increase the reach of the State Department and enhance the public diplomacy process by providing predictable and measurable outcomes. Two forms of AI are outlined in this report. The first subset examined, ***natural language generation***, uses humanized language to elicit a specific emotion to drive a desired call to action. Using natural language generation in email subject lines can increase engagement with State Department emails used in various campaigns. Second, ***social listening*** uses artificial intelligence tools to constantly ingest and analyze huge volumes of data from social media, online news, and more to help one identify patterns and trends more easily.

Lastly, **general recommendations** for State Department social media accounts include the use of hashtags in profile names, following back diplomatic accounts, and including alt text/SRT files in online posts are simple but effective methods for improving accessibility and reach on social media.

By implementing these social media and artificial intelligence strategies in accordance with recommendations outlined in detail below, the U.S. State Department will be better positioned to reach new audiences and better reach their intended audiences.



Introduction

This report was produced at the request of the U.S. Department of State's Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources for the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs for the PD Incubator Unit and the broader Department of State public diplomacy practitioner community. This partnership is part of a larger initiative known as the State Department Diplomacy Lab which partners various offices of the State Department with Universities across the country. The goal is to have student researchers use their skills and connections to investigate solutions to challenges facing foreign policy of the United States.

Six American University seniors in the School of International Service took on the task of identifying new tools and platforms being used by governments and the private sector that are effective in reaching online audiences. Through independent research and conversations with academics, government officials, and private sector actors, the research team was able to identify several cases that they believe will be of use to the State Department and embassies around the world. This report first details some social media strategies that have promising results regarding increased engagement and breaking through to new audiences. It then explores exciting new technologies that can make the State Department's marketing more effective. Finally, the authors make recommendations stemming from each new trend as well as broader recommendations emerging from their research that can help make the digital marketing of the State Department more effective.

Trend #1: Humor in Digital Diplomacy

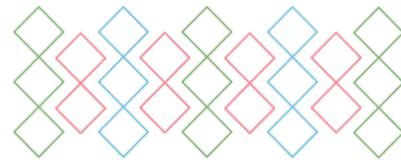
Humorous content is widespread on social media. As the global rate of internet usage increases every year, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok have correspondingly seen an explosion of funny content, particularly in viral posts. By 2021, 35% of global internet users (aged 16-64) logged on to find funny or entertaining content.¹ This is the second main reason why people use social media, behind staying up to date with news and current events.²

The popularity of humor on social media has not gone unnoticed by national governments. Especially in recent years, the social media and digital diplomacy teams of many nations have increasingly incorporated humor into their online content, with much success. This section analyzes the use of humor by Ukraine and Israel to highlight the value of humor as a tool to engage with audiences

globally. It is important to note that while some individual U.S. embassy accounts have used humor effectively, this varies widely between diplomatic missions and there is no standardized guidance for incorporating humor in social media posts.

Case Study #1: Ukraine

Both before and after the Russian invasion, Ukraine has extensively utilized humor in its digital content. Broadly, the Ukrainian social media strategy is characterized by cohesive messaging, enthusiastic adoption of new technology, and the prominent use of humor across all accounts. The Ukrainians have one primary objective when using humor: to create viral posts that spread their policy priorities to the largest audience possible. Correspondingly, the Ukrainian government will post the same content across all platforms where they have a presence to



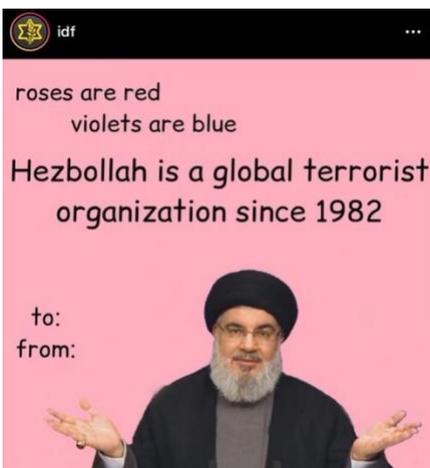
increase content reach. Here are several examples of what this strategy looks like in practice:

- [This](#) post (12/7/21) is about types of headaches. It received over 693.5k likes and 142k retweets on Twitter.
- [This](#) post (12/27/21) is about “Putin’s real fears.” It received over 44.5k likes and 5k retweets on Twitter.
- [This](#) post (4/13/22) is about the types of weaponry Ukraine needs. It received over 47.7k likes and over 7k retweets on Twitter.

These examples offer a glimpse into how Ukraine uses humor to reach its target audiences.

Unfortunately, due to the precarious security situation within the country, the Ukrainian government has not yet published official data on the reach of their content. Despite this, publicly available information on social media platforms illustrate that humorous posts receive significantly more engagement and interaction than non-humorous content.

Case Study #2: Israel



“While you plan the perfect Valentine’s Day date, Hezbollah plots new ways to terrorize Israel.” IDF (@idf), February 14, 2022, [Instagram Link](#).

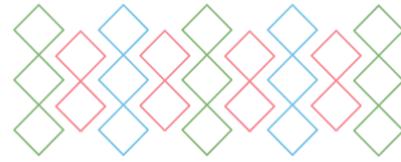
Much like Ukraine, Israel’s social media strategy incorporates humor as a tool for increasing engagement. The main objective of Israeli content using humor is to raise

awareness about threats to Israeli security, such as Iranian aggression and rising antisemitism. An important characteristic of Israel’s strategy is the adoption of new social media platforms and features. For example, Israel’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) was quick to join TikTok, and the platform has since become a major source of new followers, due in part to its extensive use of humor to drive engagement. Israel was also one of the first nations to use private groups on Facebook, which provided a space for engaged followers to interact more directly with MFA staff. Most recently, Israel has embraced the use of Twitter Spaces for live conversations about its policy priorities. Overall, Israel has empowered both government agencies and individual diplomats, allowing them to use humor when interacting with followers.



Total followers of Israel’s social media accounts since 2015: Yiftah Curiel (@yiftahc), January 9, 2022, [Tweet link](#).

Israel’s successful social media strategy is demonstrated by the fact that only 9.2 million people live in Israel, but its government accounts combined have over 10 million followers. Total reach on their HQ platforms (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok) exceeded 2 billion people in 2021. Most importantly, from 2018 onward, total followers on Israeli government accounts increased by at least 30% annually.³



Takeaways

It is clear from these case studies that there can be significant value in a digital diplomacy strategy that effectively utilizes humor. These cases provide several lessons to heed when considering such a strategy.⁴

First, humor can be used to attract new followers. When done right, humorous posts often go viral, attracting new followers who would not have seen the post otherwise. Second, humor is also effective for engaging with existing followers. Occasional humorous posts offer existing followers a break from normal and more serious messaging. As posts can be humorous in many different ways, consumers may be more inclined to interact with these posts differently than traditional messaging. Third, humor can show the human face behind the organization. Often, government social media accounts feel particularly distant and robotic. Humorous content can help a government account show personality and seem more approachable.

When using humor in digital diplomacy, the social media team must possess a thorough understanding of the target culture and their attitude towards humor. While this should not be an issue when using embassy staff for social media, coordination between Foreign Service Officers and Locally Employed Staff can help ensure that humorous content is both culturally sensitive and congruent with current U.S. policy priorities. Moreover, cultural understanding is essential to ensure that posts are genuinely funny and not offensive to the target audience. Similarly, for this strategy to be effective, posts must be modified for different audiences to apply to the specific culture in question. In other words, humor should be adjusted to best fit the sensibilities of locals and the priorities

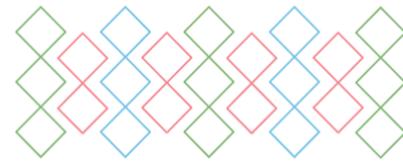
of local U.S. embassies. That is, content that works in Western Europe is unlikely to have the same effect in East Asia.

Another important consideration when using humor in digital diplomacy is that humorous posts should complement traditional messaging, not replace it. As mentioned earlier, humor augments existing content and diplomatic missions need to individually determine what balance between each type of content results in the most engagement.

Finally, a humorous digital strategy will work best when embassies have the freedom to experiment with humor and gain expertise. While mistakes are possible, messages can be taken down quickly. Collaboration among the embassy team should help prevent errors. The State Department should share successful examples of humorous posts with diplomatic missions and build training modules about the use of humor. Recognizing and sharing successes will help embassies improve their use of humor to create as much engagement as possible.

Trend #2: Short-Form Video

Starting with Vine and reappearing in TikTok, short form looping videos are the future of social media consumption. Top business leaders and brands are already highlighting the importance and potential of this form of digital marketing. Their comments and marketing decisions are driven by data on changes in how users consume social media content across several social media networks. More government leaders and agencies can and should communicate to their audiences through short video. This section highlights three government agencies effective in using the format that offer models for sharing this content, with success. The State Department should



be able to use short form video to great effect for a variety of objectives.

Evidence Behind the Rise of Short Video

Social media marketing professionals and industry leaders see short form video as the future of social media. Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg made clear on the December 2021 earnings call that its short form video platform, Reels, would be his top investment area going into 2022. Mentioning Reels at least 20 times, he highlighted that Reels is Meta’s “fastest-growing content format by far” and is already the biggest contributor to engagement growth on Instagram. Meta’s director of product for Reels, Tessa Lyons-Laing, emphasized that investment in Reels is not a fad; it is one part of the industry as a whole’s “arc toward short-form video.”⁵

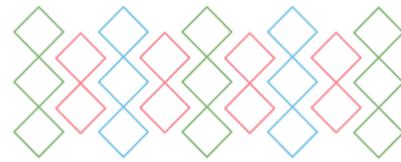
HubSpot, a software company for contact relationship management, marketing, sales, and customer service, found short form video has the highest return on investment compared to other social media marketing strategies as 30% of social media marketers plan to invest more in it than any other content in 2022.⁶ Moreover, two-thirds of global brands plan to increase their focus on social media video in 2022.⁷ A November 2021 YouGov survey of Americans 13 years and older found time spent viewing social media videos is rivaling some forms of TV, with 16% of time spent consuming media watching user-generated videos, compared to 18% for traditional TV.⁸

Ultimately, short form videos are better for increasing engagement and reaching new audiences. Social media users share videos twice as much as other forms of content.⁹ Reels are also more likely to appear to users outside of one’s followers because they appear in the Reels-specific explore

tab of the Instagram app.¹⁰ Conviva, a platform for video streaming with advertising, social, and content analytics, conducted a comparison of average engagements per Reel and per video for the team accounts of the MLB, NFL, NBA, and NHL found engagement with Reels was higher than that of regular videos for each league, by as much as 67% for the NFL, just in the first month of Reels’ launch.¹¹ As for Facebook, 11 of the 20 most-viewed posts on Facebook in the fourth quarter of 2021 were Reels.¹² Effectively sharing messaging and increasing engagement on social media will require increased engagement and attention paid to short form video content.

From TikTok to Meta Reels and YouTube Shorts

TikTok, the standard for short form video platforms, began its rise in 2018 and largely owes its success to its database of music, filters, and clips, as well as an algorithm that predicts what content users will engage with. The U.S. and other governments worry about the national security and privacy implications of using the Chinese-owned app, which likely shares this data with the Chinese Communist Party.¹³ Nonetheless, other social media giants have responded to its growth and consequent ban from certain countries by expanding their offerings of similar products, including Meta’s Reels for Instagram and Facebook, YouTube’s Shorts, and others. Reels is available in 150 countries via Instagram and in 200 via Facebook. Reels also benefits from the platforms’ existing large base of users.¹⁴ YouTube’s Shorts is also a contender in this space, first launching in India in November 2020 when TikTok was banned.¹⁵



Governments are also active and having success in using this form of communication.

Case Study #1: Singapore Ministry of Communications and Information (MCI) – TikTok

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, MCI’s public communications channel, Gov.sg, has had two successful TikTok-based public health campaigns. The [#SteadyCNY2021](#) campaign focused on educating the public on COVID-19 safety protocols for the 2021 Chinese New Year (CNY) celebrations. The first component of the campaign is the Branded Hashtag Challenge, which [asks](#) users to engage in the campaign by creating their own videos and posting them with the hashtag. This kind of campaign promotes user-generated content (UGC), as opposed to one official account sharing content. Secondly, Gov.sg developed an interactive Artificial Reality (AR) filter for the UGC, which included CNY-themed animated props and safety protocols, allowing users to have fun [engaging with the campaign](#). Third, Gov.sg promoted an original CNY-themed song, or audio, to which the user-generated videos can be set. Lastly, they increased the campaign’s visibility with In-Feed Ads – video ads that appear in between user videos on users’ For You page where they view content the algorithm recommends – and having it promoted on the Discovery Page. Over 15,000 TikTok users participated with their own videos using the #SteadyCNY2021 Branded Hashtag. This content received a total of 23.3 million views. The MCI’s campaign helped remind Singaporeans to consider how to celebrate the holidays safely. ¹⁶

The goal of the [#IGotMyShotSG](#) campaign was to encourage younger Singaporeans to get vaccinated

more quickly while educating them about the vaccine and dispelling misinformation. This campaign also used a Branded Hashtag and In-Feed Ads, but used a gamified Branded Effect, meaning the AR aspect was an in-video game. Titled “[Covid](#)



[Slayer](#),” players get points by slashing viruses and misinformation, avoiding hitting

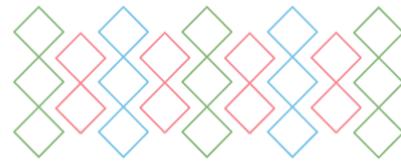
masks, and choosing to get a boost from the vaccine. Similar to the CNY campaign above, this campaign weaved in bite-sized amounts of information while making its message more fun. Over 942,000 Singapore-based TikTok users were reached by the over 1,400 videos that used the hashtag, generating more than 4 million views. According to TikTok and MCI, this campaign accomplished the goal of reminding Singaporeans of how to celebrate the holidays safely. ¹⁷

Case Study #2: U.S. Transportation Security Administration (TSA) – Instagram Reels



Although one might expect the TSA’s Instagram account ([@TSA](#)) to have a small Instagram presence, they boast over one million followers and post dozens of Reels. ¹⁸ The

TSA’s award-winning social media team leans on puns and humor, and their manager, Janis Burl, explained it is their way of covering what the public cares about in a memorable way. Burl noted that she and her colleagues also spend “each morning collaborating to determine what is trending and whether there’s an opportunity for an educational moment.” ¹⁹ Commonly, the account will share Reels of the TSA’s K9s. One recent Reel



[exemplifies](#) this theme with 560k views highlights one of TSA K9s working in Minneapolis-Saint Paul Airport, using the trending “We Don’t Talk about Bruno” song as audio. From January 1, 2022, to April 25, 2022, the account posted 25 Reels, each receiving between 117k to 679k views.

Case Study #3: UK Prime Minister – Instagram Reels

The official UK Prime Minister account for Boris Johnson ([@10DowningStreet](#)) has used Reels as part of its public communications in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The strategy of the Prime Minister’s account is to produce high production value Reels that make the video both captivating/ entertaining and informative, almost like a mini-documentary. While the account has just 292k followers, three of its five most recent Reels on the UK response to the invasion of Ukraine



have over 500k views. This example speaks to the importance and potential of communicating

on social media about global news when the issue is trending and people are paying attention.

Takeaways

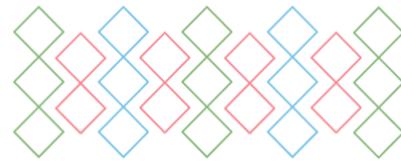
The Singapore model and TSA model both entice users with entertainment value while incorporating bite-size information. Although the Singapore model requires high investment for a short-term campaign aimed at generating “user-generated content,” or UGC, the TSA model is aimed at more regular, low-investment, funny Reels posted by their own account. While Singapore’s success can be measured based on results from a short time period

for a specific purpose, the TSA’s must be measured over a longer period as it is aimed at building long-term engagement and informing the public on many different aspects of the TSA’s work. The UK Prime Minister model is better described as combining short-term and long-term models for informative entertainment, or “infotainment.” This strategy is not only useful for sharing a message, but also for gaining followers in a target audience if they see similar content is frequently posted.

Bigger accounts like Boris Johnson’s, or comparably the U.S. State Department, would benefit from and are more likely to have the budget for this type of content multiple times per week. On the other hand, smaller accounts like embassies may benefit from posting high production Reels once a quarter specific to their host country on topics like military aid, humanitarian aid, business investments, and more. Embassies can share lower production value Reels can include ones more similar to those the TSA posts with bite-sized amounts of information. Functional bureaus like the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs frequently [release](#) country-specific security cooperation fact sheets on which they could base a 30-60 second mini documentary-type Reel, for example. A recent and timely fact sheet that could be used is “[U.S. Security Cooperation with Ukraine](#).”

Trend #3: Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing is a form of native advertising – defined by blending in with the informal platforms on which they appear in ways that “do not signal advertising and have less clear material outcomes” – that uses influencers.²⁰ Influencers are essentially specialists in generating content that consumers engage with, helping achieve wider reach on social media.²¹ Companies have begun to invest



more of their social media marketing budget in influencers for a few reasons.

First of all, influencers form personal connections and advertise in more subtle ways, which helps offset the increased aversion of online consumers to overt advertising. In other words, selling social media users on a product – or in the case of the State Department, a message or call to action – requires authentic advertising approaches. Second, social media users spend more time in the “consideration and evaluation stages” of decision-making. This means selling them on a product or idea requires more frequent exposure to it. Third, since social media platforms aggregate consumers based on shared interests, an influencer’s message is able to reach the niche audience to which it appeals most.²²

If the State Department is trying to sell its audience on a message, it should consider that “consumers respond better to ads appearing within content they like... or content that fits the surrounding mood.”²³ To effectively reach users online, it is important that official State Department accounts and messaging fit the mood of Instagram. This means appealing to an audience who is mostly under 34 years old and where over two-thirds of users are coming to the app to interact with creators.²⁴ Accounts that adapt the methods and tone of influencer marketing will gain more traction on social media by fitting their message into the type of content that social media users are ready to receive. Moreover, influencers give a company the ability to reach an audience they may have not been able to reach before and better resonate with the audience they have. Personal content helps influencers build trust with the audience and gain followers. With that accomplished, they can better promote a message to an audience that may not have

otherwise seen it.

An influencer is able to encourage a call to action by providing incentives for the audience to participate and creating hashtags to help the campaign go viral.²⁵ Mari Smith, a leading social media marketing expert, advocates for a content mix of about 70% video, 20% images, and 10% links to maximize engagement.²⁶ A blend of content appeals to different audiences and gives room for the audience to know the influencer better. Influencers can be incredible allies for social causes and their authority among communities allows them to share important messages with their followers.

Case Study #1: Former Ambassador Christopher Landau

Former U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Christopher Landau built a strong social media presence in a simple yet highly effective manner. Tweeting in

Pasamos un fin de semana muy agradable recorriendo algunos rincones típicos de la ciudad. ¿Que otros lugares nos recomiendas?

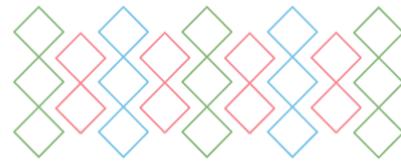
Translated from Spanish by Google

We spent a very pleasant weekend visiting some typical corners of the city. What other places do you recommend?



Landau family photo (Mexico City) – over 1600 likes and 280 replies Embajador Chris Landau (@USAmbMex), August 19, 2019, [Tweet Link](#).

Spanish, sharing his favorite places to socialize, and posting photos with family and various Mexican communities all helped Landau engage with local audiences and build meaningful connections, earning him over 245,000 Twitter followers by 2020.²⁷ A positive and engaging presence can



become an important bridge between people and governments, especially when the broader political climate is unfavorable. Nonetheless, Landau’s social media following often did not carry over to policy promotion. While Landau himself was a very charismatic and outgoing person on Twitter, those who are less naturally adapted to social media could gain a following if given the right techniques and guidelines. Such guidelines could help ambassadors gain traction online and learn how to promote their priorities without being inauthentic.

Case Study #2: Volodymyr Zelensky



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky’s [Instagram](#) follows the principles of successful influencer marketing. President Zelensky, as “the” current digital marketing influencer, has

created an atmosphere of transparency and connectivity by personally engaging with the public as a way to push the narrative of the war. Putting a face to what may, otherwise, be an impersonal situation. Zelensky appeals to the three Rs of influence – relevance, reach, resonance – in a few different successful ways.²⁸ Consistently sharing content on Ukraine’s response to the Russian invasion (relevance) and [collages of photos](#) and [clips](#) that feature the destruction of cities and humanitarian disaster (resonance) allows Zelensky’s message to be heard by and keep the interest of millions around the world, which helps him to secure military and humanitarian assistance (reach). Now, he is activating his followers through a new social media campaign: [#ArmUkraineNow](#).²⁹ He is calling on his followers to post a photo of a sign with that hashtag, calling on their government to send Ukraine heavy weapons, and also to tag three friends.

Case Study #3: Joelle “JoJo” Fletcher

JoJo Fletcher gained a large following after being the lead of Season 12 of *The Bachelorette* in 2016. Her Instagram now has more than 2.4 million followers. JoJo serves as a successful model of an influencer with a niche audience who has the ability to create informative and entertaining sponsored content about her work. In recent days, JoJo has been using her Instagram story to promote her collaboration with [The Knot](#), a wedding planning service.³⁰ Since she is in the final stages of her engagement, this partnership aligns with both



Screenshot from JoJo Fletcher’s Instagram Story
JoJo Fletcher (@joelle_fletcher),
April 26, 2022.

parties’ brands. Some of these posts include her story of her and her fiancé saying selfie mode how excited they are for their engagement and how useful *The Knot* has been. She has also had partnerships with [Philadelphia Cream Cheese](#), [Herbal Essences](#), and [DSW](#). Businesses continue to invest in her, because she has built trust with her followers and is good at promoting different brands in

ways that are authentic to her followers.

In addition to posting videos to an Instagram story, influencers sometimes add a questions sticker for an “Ask Me Anything,” or “AMA.” There are a lot of stickers that can be added to stories to allow for



different forms of engagement like polls, quizzes, asking for donations, and emoji sliders for reactions. Influencers also use livestreams to give their users a more personal experience.³¹ Although the State Department is not selling products to its audience; they are selling messages. Embassy social media accounts would benefit from more personal techniques like these for audiences to connect with them. One of the keys to JoJo’s success has been maintaining a mix of “authenticity and approachability” along with the paid content.³² For the State Department, this means balancing the entertaining personal content with messaging.

Takeaways

The State Department and U.S. embassies can leverage the use of a more personalized social media presence as a tool to share their message and better target audiences for digital outreach. Ambassadors like Chris Landau who had large followings and those trying to build followings could benefit from being provided guidelines for best practices to build a base of followers, maintain growth, and generate trust in ways that advance State Department messaging. President Zelensky is a useful case study of how to build, maintain, and activate this “influence” for a policy mission.

The State Department could also provide training for a group of professional “social media officers.” These specially trained staff would help embassies establish a more personal human presence that mimics the elements of an influencer’s Instagram. An embassy social media officer can help a message “resonate” by connecting on a human level. Like storytelling, it attaches a human face to a cause, pairing an idea or message with emotion. Placing highly trained social media officers at Embassies with particularly active social media environments

could yield substantial benefits.

While some embassies already do some of these things, there is great value in systematizing guidelines for best practices from influencers and influencer-like leaders for embassy public diplomacy sections to enact.

Trend #4: Giveaway Marketing

A well-known method of breaking through to and retaining new audiences is giveaway marketing. Giveaway, or rewards-based, marketing offers free promotional items or discounts to gain prospective customers and keep loyal customers interested.³³ This marketing strategy has been around for many decades and has come in many different forms in the private sector. Rewards programs that incentivize continued purchases at a certain vendor in exchange for a free or discounted item or hand out free giveaways at a ball game in exchange for buying a ticket have all been used to attract the interest of customers and keep them coming back.

In the digital era, much of the marketing focus has shifted online. Giveaway marketing can be just as effective in growing a brand name or promoting a product among large audiences on social media. Giveaway marketing on social media typically involves an online account tasking others with following, reposting, liking, and generally interacting with posts in exchange for a chance to win some type of reward. All of this interaction with a giveaway post can have an impressive impact on the performance of a social media account. Social media algorithms are designed to reward posts and accounts with a lot of interaction.³⁴

Using a giveaway to manipulate the amount of interaction on posts will do two things:



1. The page running the campaign will appear higher in the search feature of social media platforms.
2. The posts will also appear more often in exploratory features that are meant to provide users with new accounts that they might enjoy.

Many giveaway campaigns require individual participants to repost an original post on their own accounts to be considered for the prize. This means that the original post by a certain organization has the potential to reach millions of people who do not follow the original account but only follow a user who follows the original account. These users may also end up following the account that is running the giveaway to participate in current or future giveaways and win free rewards. Often, followers stick around for the chance to win a free gift in the future. Optimally, these programs reach users who have a genuine interest in the organization or product that is being advertised by the account and might become loyal followers.

Another method of running giveaway campaigns is to have followers participate in certain games where the winners are offered a free prize. Trivia or other contests can achieve the same engagement and interaction on social media if the incentives are there for followers to win rewards based on their performance.

The rewards that are handed out for winning these contests can vary widely. Different companies have offered gift cards for their business, cash prizes for their winners, and even tickets to the Super Bowl or other popular events. Depending on the scale of the campaign, rewards need to attract the attention of your followers, and even the attention of the average social media user. The incentive of a free

reward can gain and retain followers interested in an organization's work when done well.

Case #1: Venmo



Although there are many examples of giveaway marketing schemes achieving success, some stand out. In June 2021, Venmo ran a social media giveaway on its Instagram and Twitter accounts. Venmo is an online payment app that allows users to send money to each other through the app. In this campaign, titled #Venmome, the app would be selecting 200 lucky winners and then sending each of them \$500 through the Venmo app. To qualify for the giveaway, users needed to follow the Venmo account and repost the campaign post on their story on Instagram and retweet the post on Twitter. This post got over 55,000 retweets and 6.8 million views on Twitter as well as nearly 2 million comments on Instagram and over 13 million views.

The 13 million views only take into consideration the people who saw the post on another user's story, clicked on the story to investigate, and were taken to the actual post. There are likely millions of others who could have seen it reposted on one of their friends' stories.

Before this giveaway, the Venmo Instagram account only had 1.1 million followers and by the end of the month had gained 130,000 followers.³⁵ The 2 million comments on Instagram is 900,000 more people than Venmo's follower count at the time, and because users needed to follow the Venmo account to be considered for the giveaway, this means that 900,000 people must have followed the account to have had a chance to get the reward.



The scale of this campaign reached audiences all over the world in a matter of days.

Case #2: Chipotle

Chipotle, the fast-food restaurant, has run very successful giveaways in the past, as well. In May 2021, for Cinco de Mayo, the Chipotle Instagram account ran a giveaway in which five winners were each given a \$500 gift card redeemable at any Chipotle location. This giveaway had a unique game built into it. The last five people to comment on a



certain post before 5:55 pm were all selected for the winning prize. This post gathered over 64,809 likes and 116,131 comments. This is monumental compared to the 19,790 likes and only 451 comments on Chipotle's non-giveaway post posted a few days prior to the giveaway.

Chipotle Cinco de Mayo Giveaway
Chipotle (@chipotle), May 5, 2021,
[Instagram Post Link](#).

Takeaways

The incentive of a free reward can be a powerful technique to grow a social media page and reach new customers. People like free stuff. Utilizing this fact, social media managers and State Department officials can lead followers to share its page to reach new audiences. Having followers like and repost to be considered for winning the prize is key.

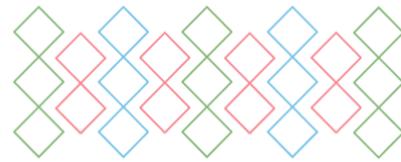
Interaction is the main way to grow a social media page, so having users like and comment pushes the algorithm to suggest a page to more people. In addition, since a condition for entering the giveaway can be having followers reshare a post on their story, many followers that might have never heard of a page will see the giveaway post and discover the brand or organization.

If public diplomacy officers at the country level can successfully run a giveaway campaign, this can increase the embassy's presence and engagement on social media. By having followers repost and interact with a giveaway, an embassy account and an important message or program selected by State Department officials can reach hundreds of thousands of people.

Choosing a prize that is inexpensive and will support official U.S. policy goals is needed. This might include:

- A meeting with the U.S. Ambassador;
- A tour of the U.S. embassy;
- Tickets to events hosted by the embassy or public diplomacy team;
- Interested Students can meet with students who are returning from a study abroad trip in the U.S. to gain more information about the program;
- A gift bag of American made or American themed products; or
- Eligibility to participate in a music program.

With relatively small prizes being offered, an embassy can increase its following and outreach on social media while also supporting a policy agenda.



Trend #5: Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Digital diplomacy seeks to further a state's interest through geographic, cultural, and economic factors using a digital channel rather than the traditional ways that have been used to pursue a specific activity. Various types of Artificial intelligence (AI) can be used for facilitating digital public diplomacy by using objectivity and measurable predictive outcomes to enhance creative professionals' work. AI is already widely used in the private sector for marketing and influencing and has proved successful. Using it as a tool for public diplomacy can enhance the State Department's public diplomacy efforts overseas.

Natural Language Generation (NLG)

AI can improve email engagement for public diplomacy by better gaining someone's attention. A personalized email with humanized AI-generated language can evoke a certain emotion and drive a call to action. An AI-generated email subject line is far more efficient than one person examining the many thousands of ways the message can be written, and it is more objective than a person who would be deciding which subject line is best.

This is where natural language generation (NLG) enters. NLG is an AI subset of "deep learning," which works in artificial neural network systems that are constantly learning algorithms produced by another AI subset, machine learning, to increase the amount of data analyzed. This makes a "training process" more efficient.³⁶ The "training process" involves categorizing data and inferring conclusions based on data characteristics and previous knowledge.

Some characteristics of deep learning include robust learning ability, optimized results, and little hands-

on engineering required. Deep learning should be used, because it is continuously improving. It is used in handwriting recognition, speech recognition, natural language generation, and image classification, and it can be analyzed by an array of academics and researchers.

NLG uses deep learning to produce effective email subject lines and other advertisements based on humanized language – a relevant example for State Department public diplomacy outreach. The process of NLG (1) takes language and decomposes it into binary code, (2) pattern matches to strategies that previously worked in its network, (3) predicts which tactics are good or bad, and (4) executes and optimizes in real-time.³⁷

AI is used to guide the consumer experience through an awareness phase where they are exposed to the message, a consideration phase where they research the message, an engagement phase where they take action, a servicing phase where they follow up or ask questions, and finally a loyalty state where they return for more.³⁸ This yields an expansion in engagement, trust, and awareness.

NLG email subject lines make an email stand out, giving the consumer a reason to open it. The systems can adjust to tone, style, and structure of the language to the brand's demographic and narrative.³⁹ NLG improves return on investment by making email messaging more efficient and better targeted. When the typical email recipient is inundated with countless emails every day, NLG helps an email stand out and gives the customer a reason to open it.



Case Study #1: Phrasee



Phrasee is an AI platform that generates email

subject line language for a specific purpose. Companies that have worked with Phrasee have seen a substantial increase in open rates and click rates with email marketing. In 2016, eBay’s email engagement was inactive, so they reached out to Phrasee, seeking advanced technology that could complement the business as it scaled to grow customer engagement.⁴⁰ In the U.S., United Kingdom, and Germany alone, eBay had 101 million email subscribers, so their goal with Phrasee was to optimize campaigns at scale.

Phrasee’s AI NLG creates an email copy that is specific to a customer’s plans, promotions, and brand tone. Phrasee presented human-sounding language tailored to eBay. The results in email engagement in the United States, United Kingdom, and Germany were:⁴¹



There are on average 700,000 incremental opens and 56,000 clicks per eBay x Phrasee email campaign.

Case Study #2: Persado



Persado is another AI language platform that

“understands” a branding message and works to

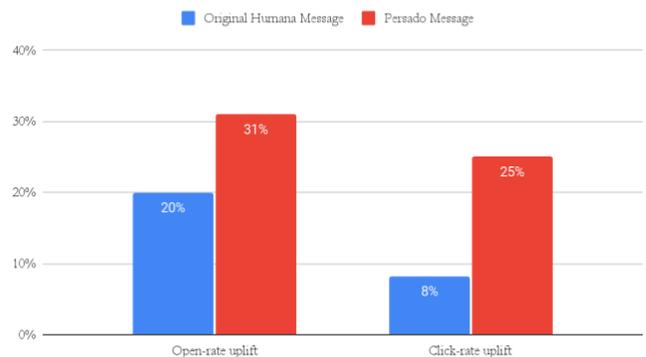
build a consistent relationship with customers. Persado breaks down digital messages into key components to generate and measure the most impactful message across multiple factors: narrative, emotion, and description.⁴²

In 2019, Persado worked with Humana to send flu shot reminders with the idea that the right words can save lives (via the flu shot). Persado added an emotional element to the email subject line, which encouraged people to respond by creating a sense of trust. Persado’s goal was to elicit a feeling of safety and trust for people to then engage with the email and get their flu shot.⁴³

- Humana’s original copy line: “Be sure to protect yourself and your loved ones this flu season.”
- Persado’s copy line: “[First name] we’re serious about protecting you this flu season.”

The results from Humana’s email campaign were significantly improved from the original messaging engagement. On average, there was a 40% increase in all Persado email campaigns:⁴⁴

Original Humana Message vs. Persado Message



Takeaways

Human intuition is good, but it can be inconsistent, biased, or subjective. AI solves that problem by being an objective accessory to that



intuition with measurable and predictive outcomes. AI NLG generates language that adheres to a specific purpose to maximize reach and response. It creates email copy lines that generate increased engagement by understanding how to evoke an emotion that will drive a certain call to action. Depending on that call to action, different emotions need to be leveraged, and AI understands which emotional language will drive the desire to complete the action. AI can tailor its message based on the demographic as long as it understands the message guidelines and desired outcome. In this way, the State Department can also use NLG in its email marketing to increase engagement with its messages and maximize its reach to target audiences.

Social Listening

As seen above, the use of artificial intelligence can be used to reach more people and help with emails, but there is also the potential to improve a brand's social media presence which has become ever so important. This new ability and tool are referred to as “Social Listening.” Social listening can be described as the use of Artificial Intelligence to collect data to give valuable insights to allow one to better understand how to place more effective content on your social media and to better understand what an audience is looking for.⁴⁵

The State Department can significantly improve the social media content that they put out by improving understanding of what works and does not work. Social listening allows you the ability to collect data from social media whether it is posts, comments, engagements, and shares to determine the best strategy going forward⁴⁶. This tool also will allow you to track what audiences are saying about your company or other competitors in your industry so

that you can better understand what the audience may be looking for. This will also allow you to see the general characteristics of the audience that talks about your industry or company so you can better suit content for that demographic.

The use of social listening allows you to bring in all data from your campaigns, or posts and you can compare them with one another to measure which was more successful but it also has the tools to measure you with your competition.⁴⁷ It allows you to understand if they have graphics, videos, and the diction that is used so you can understand what a successful post has. Social listening can also help a company understand which platform performs the best in different regions and which you are seeing the most return so you can focus more on that platform.

Not only does this tool help look back on past data and see what has been successful, but it can also help predict what one should post in the future. Having the tools to identify and analyze what the audience is talking about and popular trends can also help a company or government differentiate itself from the competition.⁴⁸

Case Study #1: Linkfluence



Linkfluence is a consumer insights platform that applies

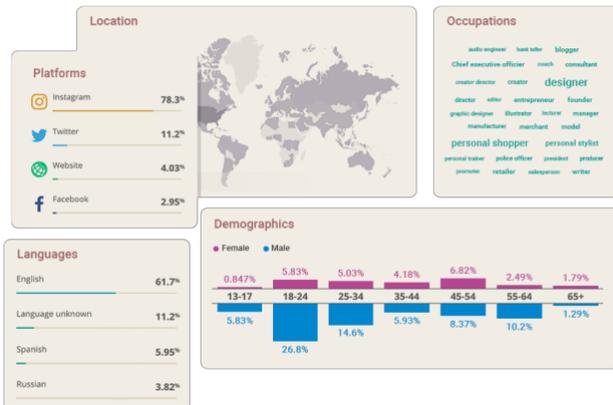
AI, data science, and market research expertise to a live feed of global social data.⁴⁹ Linkfluence is a company that was hired by Publicis, a French multinational advertising and public relations company, to improve its marketing strategy. Publicis wanted to use social media data as a driving force in every campaign they make. It purports to give clients high-value consumer insights in real-



time, instead of waiting months for reports to be created. Since their partnership with Linkfluence started, Publicis reports they have seen:

- €9 billion earned from services since using Linkfluence to create a marketing strategy
- 27% growth of the company

and displays it in the form of “insights” which are graphs and charts for the client to better understand the analysis. The State Department and U.S. embassies could use these analytic capacities to great advantage in designing and running social media campaigns.



Display of Social Data collected by Linkfluence: “Audience summary,” <https://www.linkfluence.com/search>

Takeaways

With technology and social media becoming such a crucial part of society and business today, it is crucial that the State Department finds ways to produce good content and use the technology to its fullest potential. Artificial intelligence is the future when it comes to efficiently understanding the most successful strategies and techniques. The use of companies like Linkfluence can help the State Department to better understand their target audience, their interests, and the type of content they would like to see. Social listening allows companies to see the most successful strategies that have been used. Moreover, by constantly monitoring current conversations, the company can highlight new pathways that could differentiate you from the competition. Linkfluence collects much of the social data viewed as necessary for one’s case



Digital Diplomacy Recommendations to the State Department

Recommendations for Harnessing Digital Marketing Trends

- The State Department should increase the use of humor in its social media posts at the bureau, agency, and embassy levels.
 - State Department leadership should make it clear that each embassy takes sole responsibility for its social media posts.
 - The Department should develop training and suggest best practices to share building from successful uses of humor like those discussed in this report.
- Public diplomacy programs should invest more money and time into short form content like Meta’s Reels for Instagram and Facebook and YouTube Shorts.
 - Social media accounts should adapt to trends and global issues quickly and post more regularly to increase engagement, even when it means lower quality for lower budget accounts. Many social media algorithms favor higher activity accounts, and posts do best when they join a trend at the right time.
 - Social media accounts engaging in an awareness campaign should design a strategy to organize it around short video platforms in a comprehensive way, making use of all platform features that promote user-generated content (UGC), through Branded Hashtags, and artificial reality (AR) filters, and unique audio.
 - Consider regularly creating high production value videos for large State

Department accounts like bureaus or large embassy accounts to share, such as videos that promote what the U.S. is doing for the host country, either historically or that year, on issues relevant at the embassy level or for functional bureaus.

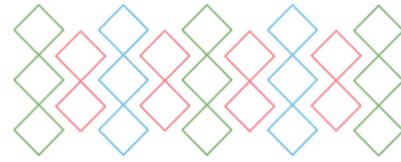
- The State Department should develop a set of guidelines for best practices from social media influencers to harness a following in ways that can advance State Department messaging and American values. These guidelines could be distributed and used for the training of ambassadors and Public Diplomacy sections.
 - Engage more with image and video-based platforms and share regularly on them to build a personal connection and display the work of the ambassador or other official that they like and/or the embassy they follow, depending on the account. Expanding to platforms like these allows an embassy to add depth to its image.
 - The State Department should provide training for a group of professional “social media officers” who are specially trained in these best practices to help build an ambassador’s or senior officials’ social media presence. The Department could test run the idea of designating a social media officer to act as an “influencer” on a U.S Embassy Instagram account, promoting its work and upcoming events and giving followers a look into the embassy’s work. Valuable techniques include:
 - Hosting livestreams to make announcements or take questions;



- Posting an “Ask Me Anything” to an Instagram Story where questions can be selected and posted with answers as a video or typed;
 - Doing an Instagram takeover where staff show what they do in a day;
 - Follow the ambassador around the city and to meetings to provide an inside look at their work.
- Public Diplomacy officers at the embassy level should run giveaway campaigns to increase the embassy's presence and engagement on social media by having social media users personally share the embassy's account.
 - Choosing the right type of prize for the giveaways will be key. Good giveaway items will be inexpensive and push U.S. official policy, like a lunch with the U.S. ambassador or embassy tour.
 - Because the operation is run at the country level, public diplomacy officers with extensive knowledge of the country they are stationed in should be able to calibrate what prizes are most likely to gain traction among local residents.
 - The State Department should implement natural language processing, specifically in email subject lines, to increase continuous engagement with State Department emails
 - Market offering #1: The State Department can engage with vendors who produce and maintain natural language processing applications. This prevents the State Department from having to extend further resources into maintaining the AI, but rational price points are not established for this industry.
 - Market offering #2: Another option for the State Department is to purchase self-service toolkits that third parties use to develop their own applications. This gives the State Department more control and oversight with less cost, but it requires substantial talent in application development from a third party, which may make it more difficult to achieve desired results
 - The State Department should start using a social listening company, like Linkfluence, to create better content and marketing strategy.
 - Implementing social listening programs would allow the State Department to receive vital information and analysis that reveal the components of a successful post based on different accounts' audiences.
- Lastly, given the constant fluctuation of social media best practices and the frequent emergence of new best practices and platforms seen in our research, the State Department should establish an office with the mission to analyze emerging digital marketing trends. Dedicating an office that focuses on new trends and developments allows the State Department to be forward-thinking and identify new guidelines that could become part of the Foreign Service Institute's training programs.

General Social Media Recommendations

Based on our research and wide-ranging conversations with experts in the relevant fields, the



team also developed a set of specific recommendations that are not linked to any of the trends discussed above.

- Increase the proper use of hashtags, especially in the profile names of the account. Hashtags are powerful tools for spreading content across the web and many platforms such as Twitter index accounts based on their profile name. For example, if the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv posted “#StandWithUkraine” in their profile name, the embassy account will appear in the index list when people search for that hashtag.
- State Department accounts should follow every ministry of foreign affairs that has normal diplomatic relations with the U.S.

MFAs often follow the official accounts of allies, partners, and other countries.

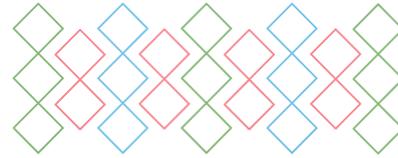
- The State Department should add captions to the content it shares.
 - This improves accessibility to their social media posts by incorporating “alt text” and SRT files in each post. Alt Text is a written description of an image or post and SRT files contain plain text and provide closed captions for videos. Currently, without Alt text and SRT files in social media posts, these computer programs are unable to read content from the State Department. This is also important for videos as many social media users do not use sound.

Conclusion

The student research team investigated new tools and platforms used by governments and the private sector to successfully expand audience reach and increase the effectiveness of social media campaigns. The team identified five trends relevant to improving State Department public diplomacy with digital marketing. The five trends presented (humor, short form video, influencer marketing, giveaway marketing, artificial intelligence) each have unique value to help the State Department reach audiences overseas.

Social media marketing is a constantly evolving field. In order to utilize the current trends that are working for the private sector, the State Department needs to think ahead and use the newest technologies and social media strategies as soon as possible. Social media has a huge influence on people all over the world and diplomats should be actively seeking out new trends in order to draw on the popularity and widespread use of social media.

The digital marketing trends and recommendations illustrated in this report model a path forward for the State Department in an increasingly digital world. These innovative practices and technologies used by the private sector and government entities can be adapted by the State Department to reach new audiences abroad and further its policy objectives, including by improving the image of the United States. Public diplomacy relies on human interactions, and these digital strategies can and should be used to facilitate building and maintaining those relationships.



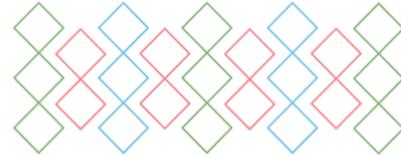
A Special Thank You

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