

## Wandren PD

A testing ground for new possibilities



GOV2.0, A NEW YEAR, AND A NEW APPROACH TO PUBLIC DIPLOMACY?  
OR WHAT DOES 'MANY TO MANY' ACTUALLY MEAN?

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It is nearly a year since Public Diplomacy practitioners and scholars met at White Oak Conference Center in Florida. The spirit of optimism from the arrival of a new administration combined with the [desire to restore Public Diplomacy as a viable tool of foreign policy](#). A year on, the time spent with positions unfilled and without a 'quarterback' with the ability to reach across both government and private sector has dented some of that optimism.

However, while frustration over slow bureaucratic progress is ongoing, optimism about the potential of new technology remains; certainly if the rate at which articles are appearing about Public Diplomacy 2.0 and the broader Government 2.0 can be taken as an indication. Equally, John Bolton's recent wild optimism that Public Diplomacy could make a military strike on Iran welcomed by the Iranian people produced an avalanche of comment which emphasised the channels social media can create for the dissemination of opinion.

The Australian Government 2.0 taskforce has just produced a more measured understanding of the potential of 2.0 in their report [Engage](#). Particularly worthy of note is the emphasis on creative commons, openness and [govhack](#); a day sponsored by the taskforce for programmers to develop 2.0 tools for governmental use. The result was [It's Bugged, Mate](#) a tool to enable visitors to sketch out a local maintenance problem with public infrastructure on Google Maps complete with diagrams and comments.

This useful report highlights the potential of Gov 2.0 and has a high degree of applicability for PD2.0. However, two points suggest the report authors are still finding their way with social media. First, their recommendations on 'Accessibility' include

*"It is recommended that agencies prevent personnel from accessing social networking websites that pose a higher than normal security risk relating to the unauthorised release of government information or disclosure of personal information".(p. 69)*

These sites include Twitter, Facebook, and Myspace, despite the taskforce using both Twitter and Facebook, along with [Ideascale](#). How government 2.0 is intended to '[Engage](#)' while banning use of popular social media tools is not fully addressed in the report. It maintains the perspective that, which much PD2.0 comment follows that, 'the people' must come to government, rather than Gov2.0 engaging with communities and conversations in the spaces of others' choosing.

Linked to the first weakness, the second limitation of the report is that despite numerous mentions of 'networks' and 'social networks' the report does not address the types of networks nor how the different forms would require different approaches to engagement.

Coming out just before Australia's Government 2.0 review, The Congressional Research Service's [U.S. Public Diplomacy: Background and Current Issues](#) and Colleen Graffy's recent article about [The Rise of Public Diplomacy 2.0](#) left further questions unanswered about the extent to which adding '2.0' to the name had changed the strategy and particularly mindset of those tasked with enacting it. Specifically, have public diplomats accepted they are interacting in an environment that emphasises peer to peer engagement, or do they still cling to ideas of hierarchy and privilege?

As [Evgeny Morozov](#) wrote;

"So far, new media has been deployed to help *create supply* of American ideas on the Internet, on the assumption that improving global access to unfiltered and carefully crafted American positions would help dispel some of the myths about the country and its policies (i.e. the real assumption is: if only they had the means to learn more about us, they would be on our side)"

To reach the full potential of using social media and Public Diplomacy 2.0, public diplomats will need to be part of a conversation, rather than finding new means of projecting messages. *If Public Diplomacy 2.0 is to influence behaviour, it must focus on doing this which makes that behaviour more likely, not on what an organisation would like to be saying.* This is not a question of either messaging or conversation but using the right tone for the situation.

For all the discussion of Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, and social networks within Public Diplomacy 2.0 very few practitioners or analysts have ventured any comment on the form these networks take and the way individuals actually behave within them. [Brian Hocking](#) and R.S. Zaharna provide a notable exceptions examining [networked approaches](#) to communication and highlighting, on FPIF, the importance of shifting mindset from providing information to developing [relationships](#). The shift to focusing on relationships requires diplomats to consider a "new approach to public diplomacy that seeks engagement rather than victory" as [Mark Lynch](#) described it. Without clarity about the networks Public Diplomacy 2.0 risks using the wrong tone and reducing the chances of extending influence.

Hierarchical and non-hierarchical approaches can provide parallel options, but they need to be applied in the appropriate contexts. For example, many commentators and diplomats to overemphasise their side in any interaction, focusing what they want to say, and undervalue the role and agency of the 'other'. In many instances this leads to an overemphasis on traditional and hierarchical 'them and us' approaches, creating a false division between the embassy and 'the people'.

Effective Public Diplomacy 2.0 is a combination of tools and mindset based on an understanding of the particular network with which the organisation is interacting. While at times material will need to be pushed, this should not obscure an approach which focuses

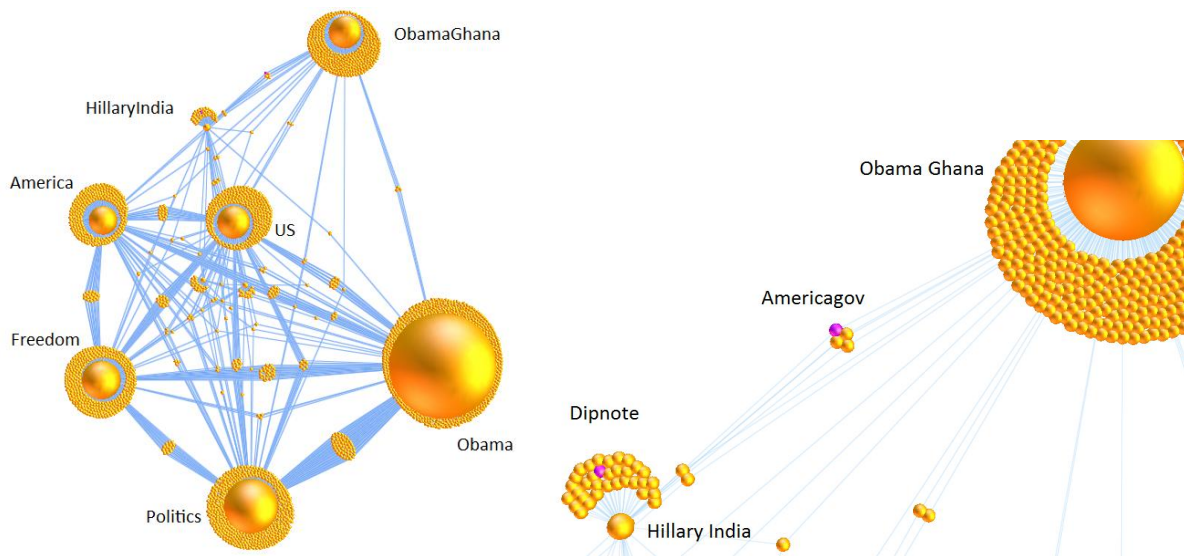
on engaging with people as peers in a genuinely symmetrical interaction. "It doesn't make sense to be using Web 2.0 tools for the sake of using Web 2.0 tools," as Sheila Campbell put it, nor does just using the tools realise the full potential of 2.0.

Graffy's argument highlights the dichotomy; "Social networking tools ... resolve a lot of public diplomacy challenges in the field. They allow public affairs staff to engage with masses of individuals without the need for members of the public to travel to our now often isolated and distant embassies and go through off-putting security controls". However, some diplomats, according to Graffy, haven't even begun to engage with new tools and approaches; "Identifying ways to 'push out' material onto the Internet is still absent in many overseas posts. This is a critical deficiency; we simply cannot assume, in this open, competitive system, that consumers are regularly checking a U.S. embassy website". While wisely advocating the use of new tools and recognising that people have other things to do than read the embassy website, looking for new ways to 'push out' material from inside the embassy walls is telling both in mindset and metaphor.

The use of language such as 'consumer' and the focus on methods to 'push out' material highlights the traditional hierarchical mindset. This mindset has led some diplomats to build virtual walled gardens where they feel safe interacting, while other colleagues use Twitter as little more than a micro-broadcast system. At times these may be the right approaches, while at others Public Diplomacy 2.0 is about using new tools on the terms the public want to use them not as defined by the State's desire to project messages. There is a reason they are known as 'social media' not 'push media'.

Daryl Copeland recently highlighted the different mindsets and the importance of engaging as a peer when in a peer to peer environment. He described the [guerrilla diplomat](#) as someone who "will know how to swim with comfort and ease in the sea of the people rather than flop around like a fish out of water, and prefer to mix with the population rather than mingle with colleagues inside the embassy walls".

To demonstrate the difference between conversation and messaging through a practical example, the below images show the public discussion on Twitter of America, US, Freedom, and Obama along with trips overseas by the Secretary of State and the President. The map, from data collected earlier in the year, is constructed using the corresponding #tags the communities choose to use; it focuses on their terms in the conversation. A longer introduction to using network analysis in Public Diplomacy can be found on [Mountainrunner](#).

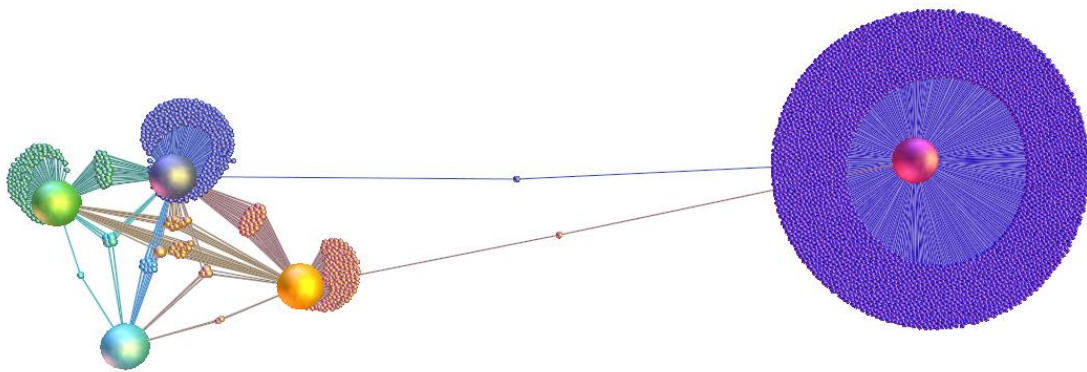


The left hand image shows the network of individuals choosing to use the various #tags. The right image demonstrates where Dipnote and Americagov engage with these conversations. It shows that conversations about freedom, America, the US and Obama continues independent of these State Department initiatives. At the same time, as Mountainrunner observed, [evidence](#) demonstrates Americagov is micro-broadcasting to an audience the [majority](#) of which is American.

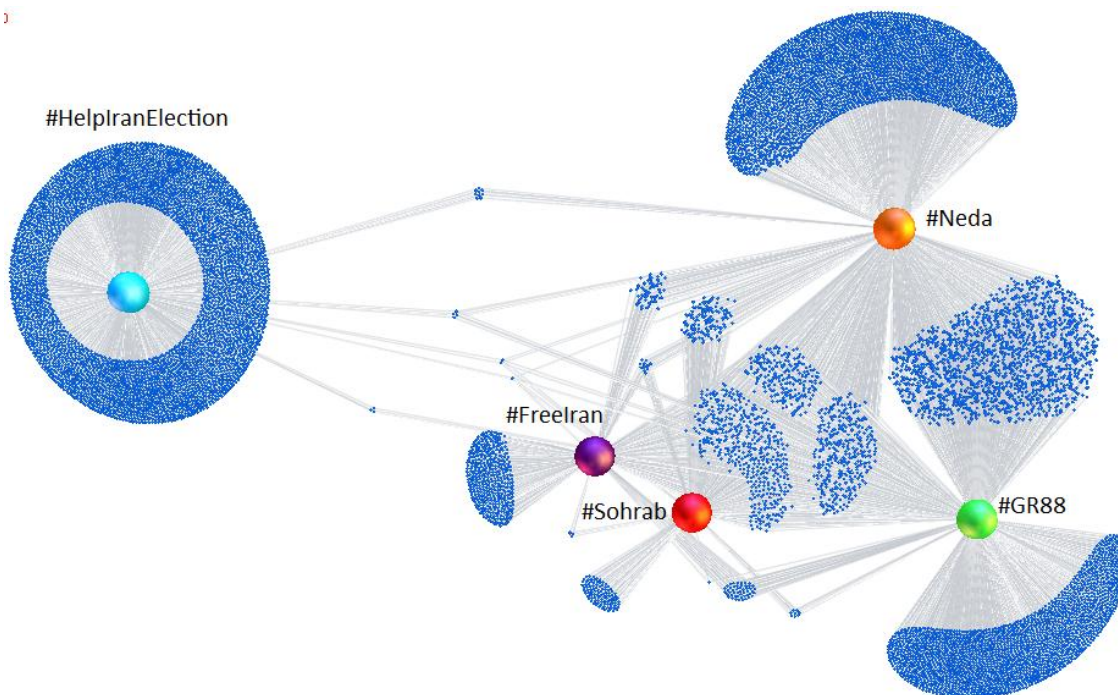
### **An Open mindset and a collaborative approach.**

There are circumstances where messaging is useful, but the internet, as the Australian taskforce report noted, has also provided the means for many collaborative initiatives, from Linux and Mozilla Firefox, to [Architecture for Humanity](#) and coordinating protest at [COP15](#) or the [Battle in Seattle](#). The current vogue example for commentary on Public Diplomacy 2.0 is the use of Twitter after the June election in Iran. Helle Dale writing on [Where the US Government Meets 'New Media'](#) and the recently published report on from the UN Foundation on [New Technologies in Emergencies and Conflicts](#) both highlight the case of Iran. According to Helle Dale this was “when the revolutionary potential of Web 2.0 really came into public focus”.

The numbers were certainly eye-catching, but at a peak of over [22,500 tweets per hour](#) for one #tag alone it is clear that nobody could be reading them all. The relevance to Public Diplomacy 2.0 is looking beyond the surge of interest to understand how communities are interacting within a network and what contribution and organisation can make to their goals. This can be done by mapping the way individuals choose to behave, in this sense identifying their tweets with particular #tags.



The above map comes from mapping the individuals using particular #tags. As previously demonstrated on the [CPD blog](#) the map shows two virtually separate conversations, that of individuals interacting through the four spheres on the left and the individuals centralised around one #tag on the right. This shows that while all these individuals are tweeting everyone is not accessing the same thing. In fact, this pattern continued until November where the map shows only limited growth in users shifting from one side to the other.



Whether in the case of Iran or any future crisis, understanding how groups are behaving through network mapping can empower them to use Public Diplomacy 2.0 in the tone appropriate to the network. If a public diplomat considered engagement between isolated communities to be of value and desired by those individuals, then the ability to connect them would provide that diplomat with greater influence than telling people what ought to happen or messaging government policy. For example some users of #GR88 and #Freelran,

were keen to transmit the images they were capturing on the streets to a largely western audience, #HelpIranElection provided a potential audience, but the two groups were only loosely connected. Some individuals will follow micro-broadcasts, though the [evidence](#) is that the [majority](#) of those are already in the US.

### **Understanding ‘Many to Many’**

Understanding the way individuals behave in networks can support strategic planning. The *New Technologies in Emergencies and Conflicts* report, similar to many discussions of Public Diplomacy 2.0, emphasises the potential of connecting ‘many to many’. However, what does ‘many to many’ mean? Networks of size, implied by ‘many’ rapidly become too large to be meaningful all channel networks, due to the constraints of time.

Even if ‘many to many’ was just a group of 30, it would require 870 messages for everyone to send each other member of the group a message. Planning, therefore, needs to consider whether it really is ‘many to many’ or many ‘few to few’ contacts. Swamping inboxes and social network sites with messages between participants means participants will not have the time to read them, alternatively they will opt out of ‘many to many’ engaging in one of the many ‘few to few’ groups instead.

Just as individuals were forced to use more specific #tags which resonated with their particular community following the surge in tweets after the Iranian election, so meaningful interactions between large groups in ‘many to many’ Public Diplomacy will rely on certain hub or coordination points. Deeper understanding of networks would allow for effective interaction with groups to interact with, for example, [swarms](#) and flash mobs. Equally in the lead up to the withdrawal of financial support, it would be possible to plan a transition from centralised to decentralised network it this would give projects a greater chance of sustainability.

To successfully combine network mapping with engaging in a peer environment, whether thought of as Public Diplomacy 2.0 or [Open Source Public Diplomacy](#), diplomats will have to collaborate or cooperate with communities based on the interests of those communities. This will mean rethinking the available options from both hierarchical and non-hierarchical perspectives and fully accepting Nick Cull’s observation, “[\(s\)ometimes the most credible voice in public diplomacy is not one’s own](#)”.

This strategy has certain implications. Helle C [Dale](#) argues;

“Public diplomacy and strategic communications experts within the U.S. government are exploring the potential of the new social media in the effort to win hearts and minds abroad, especially in the Muslim world where today’s war of ideas is being fought”.

The approach as outlined here focuses solely on a hierarchical approach is focused on 'winning hearts and minds' emphasising 'victory' while removing agency and potential to collaborate with communities which Helle thinks of as an 'audience' in the Muslim world.

Thomas Friedman expressed his frustration in an Op-Ed for the [New York Times](#) asking;

"So please tell me, how are we supposed to help build something decent and self-sustaining in Afghanistan and Pakistan when jihadists murder other Muslims by the dozens and no one really calls them out?"

However, the tone emphasises that 'we' are doing the right thing and telling others they are not. Wanting others to speak out may lead a journalist or public diplomat to consider message orientated hierarchical approaches. However, in doing so they might limit the ability or willingness of individuals to cooperate. As a result, the behaviour the organisation is trying to promote becomes less likely.

During the Bush administration, James Glassman's repeated use of joke made by Joseph Lieberman that Glassman was the "[supreme allied commander in the war of ideas](#)", illustrates this point. It makes it very difficult for groups opposed to violent extremism to take action if within their community public alignment with US policy would undermine their credibility at home. If others have more credible voices, it makes little sense to undermine their position. If Public Diplomacy 2.0 and Public Diplomacy more generally are to influence behaviour, influencing behaviour must be the focus, not the message you would like to broadcast whether by micro or traditional means.

This point about influence was nicely demonstrated recently on [The Fun Theory](#), a website advertising Volkswagen. How could they encourage people to take the stairs rather than the escalator? The [video](#) shows an approach which focused on neither telling people they ought to use the stairs nor messaging, but by finding something which would interest them, effectively engaging on the terms of the 'other'. In this case, by turning the stairs into a giant piano that plays a different note for each step.

However much Public Diplomacy 2.0 is about new media and 'many to many' contact, it ultimately relies on engaging and interacting with networks. The greater the understanding of these networks the greater the odds of Public Diplomacy realising the influence diplomats seek.

To return to the 'quarterback' metaphor, having an authoritative pocket presence, strong resources in the form of wide receivers, and knowing [the playbook](#) doesn't make a great player. The 'quarterback' must also have good vision and be able to read the field. Missing one element undermines overall potential. In the case of Public Diplomacy that means mapping, visualising and understanding the networks with which an organisation interacts.