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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

Leadership in the Communication Age: Social Media's Effect on the Military

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

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Sample Executive Summary

Title: Leadership in the Communication Age: Social Media's Effect on the Military

Author: Major Michael C. Rock, United States Marine Corps

Thesis: In order to maintain relevance in today's technologically advanced society, Marine Corps leaders must develop a comprehensive strategy that facilitates collaboration through on-line forums, fosters digital professional military education (PME), and incorporates training on the appropriate use of social media and Internet-based technologies. Doing this will help the Marine Corps maximize the advantages that social media provides, while also minimizing the associated risks.

Discussion: Social media has expanded the capabilities of military commanders to share and exchange information. From a messaging standpoint, social media has proven to be a force multiplier in terms of how services target prospective recruits. It has also provided a mechanism that increases collaboration and information sharing which improves situational awareness. The use of social media can enhance anything from disseminating command updates as part of the family readiness program to sharing lessons learned and best practices as part of a peer collaboration forum can be enhanced through the use of social media. As a training aid, social media allows commanders to do more with less. Commanders can use social media to support their professional military education program or conduct other types of training, which is key during the resource constrained environment that exists today.

The benefits of social media within the context of the military are far reaching, but the use of social media also presents several challenges to military commanders. Increased access to the Internet and social media on the battlefield can result in a loss of focus, as soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines worry more about communicating with their friends and family back home than preparing for the upcoming mission. Additionally, the expansive use of the Internet and social media can create concerns about Operational Security (OPSEC), as service members could potentially leak operational information to friends and family that could end up in the hands of adversaries and jeopardize operational capabilities and/or missions.

Conclusion: The rise of social media has presented military leaders with obvious benefits and significant consequences. While the risks associated with the widespread use of social media challenges the military institution, military leaders must develop a comprehensive strategy to mitigate those risks in order to take advantage of the benefits that social media provides and to stay relevant in the ever changing communication age.

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Preface

The purpose of this research paper is to address the growing number of issues the military is facing with regard to social media and the evolution of the information age. The paper will identify both the positive and negative aspects of social media. As a Marine officer who has served in command at every rank, from lieutenant to major, I am deeply concerned with the changes that are taking place within the military as a result of social media. My intent is not to provide the answers behind the issue, but to highlight the issue itself.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank several people who have either directly or indirectly helped me develop my research for this paper. First, I would like to thank Doctor Rebecca Johnson for her support and guidance throughout this process. As my mentor, she was instrumental in focusing my research and shaping development of my paper.

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Introduction

Social media represents one of the most prolific and often used modes of communication.

Timothy Cunningham, a Deputy Program Manager at the National Intelligence Open Source Center, describes “new media” (which includes social media) as being focused on “dialogic” communications between producers and consumers of information or messages, allowing for interaction among distributors and audiences through social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter.¹ Social media has become the leading source of news dissemination, especially among the millennial generation;^{*} however, social media is more than just a news source. Social media provides a means to expand everything from video sharing to marketing and consumer sales. The versatility of social media has opened new doors in terms of how the world operates.

Social media’s evolution has impacted every aspect of society. While one could easily dissect the effects of social media on the political, economic, or social sectors of society, this paper will focus on the military. Social media has expanded the capabilities of military commanders to share and exchange information. From a messaging standpoint, social media has proven to be a force multiplier in terms of how services recruit prospective new soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines. A recruiting message sent via social media can reach millions of people at once. The cost to disseminate the message is so small that the return on investment in terms of generating interest in joining the Marine Corps is quite significant. It has also provided a mechanism that increases collaboration and information sharing, which improves situational awareness. The use of social media can enhance anything from disseminating command updates as part of the family readiness program to sharing lessons learned and best practices as part of a

^{*} The term Millennials refers to a generation of people born between 1982 and 2000. While there is much debate about the exact timeframe that makes up this generation, these dates form the general consensus. Why this demographic is important to this paper is that this generation grew up in the computer age, so the technology that exists has been a constant part of their life.

peer collaboration forum. As a training aid, social media allows commanders to do more with less. Commanders can use social media to support their professional military education program or conduct other types of training, which is key during the resource constrained environment that exists today.

The benefits of social media within the context of the military are far reaching, but the use of social media also presents several challenges to military commanders. Increased access to the Internet and social media on the battlefield can result in a loss of focus, as soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines worry more about communicating with their friends and family back home than preparing for the upcoming mission. Additionally, the expansive use of the Internet and social media can create concerns about Operational Security (OPSEC), as service members could potentially leak operational information to friends and family that could end up in the hands of adversaries and jeopardize operational capabilities and/or missions. Finally, social media has the ability to flatten traditionally hierarchical communication structures and amplify a leader's presence, which opens the door for increased interaction between the leader and the led.² As a result of this increased interaction, the potential to affect the good order and discipline of the unit increases, as social media friendships between seniors and subordinates can easily turn into virtual, and potentially actual fraternization.

Today's military leaders need to be able to leverage social media's opportunities while protecting subordinates and units from social media's pitfalls. Despite these challenges, social media competence is necessary to stay relevant with the younger generation of service members that provide the foundation of the armed forces. In order to maintain relevance in today's technologically advanced society, military leaders must develop a comprehensive strategy that facilitates collaboration through on-line forums, fosters digital professional military education

(PME), and incorporates training on the appropriate use of social media and Internet-based technologies. Doing this will help military leaders maximize the advantages that social media provides, while also minimizing the associated risks. This paper will seek to determine how the rise of social media has enhanced the capabilities of military leadership, and will be presented in three parts. First, this paper will address the impact of social media on the military in terms of recruiting and messaging. Secondly, this paper analyzes the effects of enhanced Internet connectivity and social media on the military. Finally, this paper will provide a recommended strategy for military leaders operating in this new media age. In order to properly frame this problem, one must first look at history in order to fully understand how technology has evolved to where it is today.

Background

The continued development of technology is often one of the deciding factors in determining the innovative status of a society. In fact, technology does not just impact the society where it was developed, it affects the world over. For example, the Industrial Revolution brought about a number of technological developments that forever changed the world. Today, with the evolution of computer technology the world is once again in the midst of another transformation. This section will address the technological developments over the last forty years, specifically the development of computer and smart phone technology, to determine how these changes led to the development and expansion of social media as a primary means for communicating and sharing information, and the impact that this technology has had on the military.

Since the beginning of recorded time, the need to share and exchange information has been one of the most enduring human traits. While this exchange of information began with very primitive means, the establishment of a common language helped increase understanding

and effectiveness. With the common understanding came the discussion of ideas and dialogue between individuals, which is in essence the origin of communication. Face-to-face verbal discussions between two or more people defined inter-personnel communication for many years. The messenger allowed for the exchange of written communication between people, which took time to deliver. Over time, technology enhanced the way in which people communicate.

The development of the telegraph in the 1830s and 1840s by Samuel Morse revolutionized long-distance communication, drastically increasing the speed of message transmission.³ During the American Civil War, the telegraph allowed senior military leadership to maintain better situational awareness because of the timely reports from the battlefield commander, which helped influence decision making.⁴ By 1876, the telephone enabled verbal communication between people over vast distances⁵. As technologies advanced, so too did the way people communicated ideas and shared information.

When Guglielmo Marconi invented the radio in 1901, he changed the way in which people could send and receive information.⁶ The radio provided the ability to transmit messages over great distances and reach a large audience at once, which was not previously possible. During World War I and World War II, both sides used telephone and radio technologies to extend lines of communication and increase the overall situational awareness throughout the battlefield.

Eventually, the television supplanted the radio as the most effective means, as it allowed people to not only hear the message, but also see the messenger. This invention became influential during the Korean and Vietnam wars because for the first time it was able to broadcast images and reports of battlefield action into living rooms around the world, greatly influencing the public perception of the wars. Further improvements to existing telephone, radio, and

television technology enhanced the fidelity of those systems, but failed to quench the persistent thirst for more information and means of communicating. The invention and commercialization of computer technology in the late 1970s and early 1980s would address this issue.

While the conceptual idea behind computing dates back to the late 1800s, for practical purposes, the utility of computers and computer technology within the military really focuses on the last twenty to forty years. The release of the first personal computer (PC)—the Apple 1—in 1976 marked the beginning of a new era, one based on the capabilities that the computer provided.⁷ The Marine Corps' transition to networked computing began in the late 1980s with the endorsement of Enabled multi-application software suite and large-scale purchases of 80286 IBM compatibles, which introduced many Marines and Corps-employed civilians to general purpose (GP) computing.⁸ GP computing served as an enabling power that cut across traditional layers of the work force, and presented the clerk, manager, and executive alike with the means to articulate, automate, and communicate more effectively.⁹ The Marine Corps adopted the Banyan VINES as its operating system (OS) in 1988 for the system's ability to provide off-the-shelf worldwide network connectivity with rich built-in email, file, and print features.¹⁰ As the Corps' system of choice, both in garrison and while deployed, the VINES OS performed exceptionally well during the 1990-1991 Persian Gulf War, where units were able to seamlessly coordinate ground, naval, and air strikes across military boundaries by using the chat function to pass target lists and adjust naval gun fire on the fly.¹¹ In 1999, the Microsoft Windows OS replaced the VINES OS in an effort to link the Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps on one common email system.¹²

As the years went on, the demand for smaller, lighter weight devices that could access the Internet and perform the tasks of a desktop computer became greater. Early laptop computers

provided the mobility that people wanted, but were still cumbersome. Eventually, laptops became smaller and more capable, which led to the development of the tablet and smartphone, combining the capability and mobility that consumers demanded.

Today, computer and smart phone technology has advanced to what people in the late 1970s and early 1980s would likely refer to as futuristic science fiction. For example, Apple's iPhone S model phones provide a virtual personal assistant function that resembles the HAL 9000 Supercomputer from the 1968 Stanley Kubrick film *2001: A Space Odyssey*.¹³ Today's technology has advanced well beyond the basic capabilities for which it was originally designed. What was once only available through a stationary, desk mounted device is now accessible virtually anywhere. As a result of this unprecedented level of access, millions of people and organizations around the world, to include the US military, have turned to this technology as the primary source for receiving and sending information. Both the Army and Marine Corps have incorporated advanced mobile technology into their daily operations with initiatives such as the Net-warrior program for the Army and M-pod for the Marine Corps, which will be discussed in more detail later.

It is hard to imagine a world without tablets and smart phones, but in reality the existence of the smart phone, as recognized today, has only been around for the last twelve years. The idea of having access to email, web browsing, or streaming video on a mobile phone device was unheard of when the first mobile phone hit the market in 1973.¹⁴ Today's smartphones have evolved into compact devices that carry email client, web browser, GPS functionality, and desktop synchronization tools, as well as organizer-type functions such as diary, contacts, notepad, and voice recorder among other things.¹⁵ Within the military, the extensive use of Blackberries has enabled senior officers and officials to maintain networked access to phone and

email services while away from their desks. Through the use of this mobile technology, senior leaders have the ability to stay connected while conducting battlefield circulation and keeping their fingers on the pulse of the unit.

Since their inception in 1996, smartphones have been one of the fastest growing technologies in the mobile phone market with an estimated one billion sold worldwide, and reaching nearly two billion by the end of 2015.¹⁶ A study released in October of 2015 from the Pew Research Center indicates that 68% of US adults have a smartphone, and 86% of Millennials (ages 18-29) own one.¹⁷ These numbers are consistent with a survey conducted by researchers at the University of Hertfordshire in the United Kingdom (UK) consisting of 140 respondents fifty years old and younger, and twenty respondents over the age of fifty. The UK survey determined that 88.7 percent of respondents currently have a smartphone, and of those fifty years old and younger, 93.1 percent used a smartphone.¹⁸ The UK survey also identified ten features, ranked in terms of use which is listed in Tables 1 and 2, but what is interesting is the breakdown between age groups.¹⁹ The demographics of smartphone users overwhelmingly favors younger generations. With so many Americans and individuals world-wide having immediate access to news and information from portable devices, it is fairly easy to see why the military has started turning to this type of technology to enhance the capabilities of service members. For example, in 2011-2012, the Army began developing a program called “Net Warrior” which uses an Android powered smartphone that can provide “commercial-based, integrated computer, display and data-entry capability for dismounted use in either standalone or networked configuration, providing the Soldier with enhanced mission planning, monitoring, communication and situational awareness.”²⁰

Smartphone usage for individuals 50 years of age and under



Table 1²¹

Smartphone usage for individuals 50 years of age and over



Table 2²²

The Marine Corps is also leveraging mobile technology to enhance the capabilities of Marines. In 2008 the Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory (MCWL), Marine Corps Combat Development Command, began the Marine Pod (MPod) project to provide Marines with a hand-held device that would assist in language translation, familiarization, cultural learning, and

PME.²³ To test and evaluate the M Pod, MCWL chose 1st Marine Logistics Group as a test bed and distributed forty two MPod kits for use during the upcoming deployment.²⁴ The kits were evenly distributed between officers and enlisted personnel, and MCWL conducted monthly assessment surveys, as well as an overall assessment survey upon completion of the deployment. The overall assessment results showed that 70 percent of the responses (32 of 46) indicated the MPod supported assigned duties, with 78 percent (36 of 46) indicating the MPod was used on a daily to weekly basis.²⁵

Both the Army and Marine Corps examples show how computer and smartphone technology has revolutionized the way the military operates. Today, people around the world have access to the Internet from their portable laptop, tablet, or even their phone. The level of access to the Internet that exists in today's society has helped shape the development of social media. Through a variety of social media platforms, individuals now have the ability to share information with others at any time, in any place. The social media boom spans the globe and touches all aspects of society. From a business standpoint, social media provides a means for colleagues to network and share information. Educators can use social media to create online forums for their students to enhance learning. Within the military, social media can serve as a force multiplier, allowing the commander to convey information to his or her troops and their families. For today's military leaders, understanding how technology and social media work is key to staying relevant with the millennial generation that form the foundation of the US military

The Impact of Social Media on the Military

The concept behind social networking has been around for years. Today, millions of people around the world turn to social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and more for just about everything. Social media has become a phenomenon that has revolutionized the way the

world communicates, and as a result, has shaped the way in which many organizations—including the military—market their product. This section will focus on the increased use of social media within the military. It will specifically focus on how the Marine Corps is leveraging social media in both a recruiting and messaging capacity in order to recruit, retain, and maintain relevancy with the millennial generation.

The concept of social media has evolved over the years. Online forums were very popular in the mid-1990s. Myspace and blogging gained momentum in 2002, which contributed to the development of Facebook in the mid-2000s. Since gaining momentum in the mid-2000s, the use of social media has transformed the way in which people, organizations, and governments communicate with one another.²⁶ Originally designed as a social networking site, Facebook allowed people to interact with one another through the Internet by sharing pictures and messages. Over time, Facebook grew to be more than just another communications medium. According to Facebook's official newsroom, as of December 31, 2011, there were 845 million monthly active users, with approximately 80 percent living outside the US and Canada.²⁷ As of December 31, 2015, the number of active monthly users has grown to 1.59 billion.²⁸ As the idea grew in popularity, other sites began coming online. Today, the term "social media" refers to a variety of web-based collaborative communications technologies that allow people to access and share information around the world.²⁹ While initially reluctant to embrace social media, the military has since undergone a dramatic change in that regard. All branches of the armed forces maintain a social media presence, and while the Marine Corps was the last service to realize the effectiveness of social media, the Marine Corps boasts the largest following on Facebook at 2.9 million likes as of February 2016.³⁰ Due to its rising popularity, especially among millennials, social media has become a primary tool for marketing and advertising within the Marine Corps.

With over 80 million members worldwide, the millennial generation is the largest generation in history.³¹ Millennials make up a generation of people who have grown up in this information age. From a military standpoint, social media can be a force multiplier in terms of recruiting the next generation of service members. With all entry level service members being of the millennial generation, all branches of the armed forces are turning to social media to help in this recruiting process. In talking about the impact of social media on recruiting within the Marine Corps, Lieutenant Colonel Raphael Hernandez, Chief Marketing Officer of Marine Corps Recruiting Command, states that “our social media footprint provides an unrivaled channel for engaging both our prospect and influencer audience. Where else can we post a recruiting message certain that it will not only reach nearly 3.5 million people, but likely spark engagement with more than 20,000 of them?”³² Gunnery Sergeant Daniel Evans, Training Team Social Media Director for 12th Marine Corps District, recognizes that “our market lies within social media.”³³ Through integrating social media along the guidelines established in Marine Corps Order 5728.1A, the Marine Corps has been able to expand its marketing campaign. Through social media, recruiters across the country now have the ability to reach an even greater number of potential poolees.[†] According to Evans, “a picture tagged with eight poolees in it got 47 likes, which shares the Marine Corps message to the news feeds of the friends of those 47 people...helping create awareness and possibly sparking more interest in joining.”³⁴ Obviously

[†] Commanding General, Marine Corps Recruiting Command, *MARINE CORPS RECRUITING COMMAND ENLISTMENT PROCESSING MANUAL (SHORT TITLE: MCRC EPM)*, MCRCO 1100.1
Individuals intending to enlist into the Regular Marine Corps and desiring to participate in the Delayed Entry Program (DEP) must first enlist into the Marine Corps Reserve. The DEP is a component of the Marine Corps Reserve. These individuals remain in the Reserve while in the DEP, do not become a member of a specific unit, are credited with inactive duty time against their military service obligation (MSO) of 8 years, are not required to attend any Reserve unit functions, and are not entitled to any pay or other benefits. These individuals are often referred to as ‘poolees’.

the number of friends that a poolee has determines the extent of that reach, but from a marketing and advertising perspective, the use of social media is extremely influential.

One of the main reasons that social media is so appealing to Millennials as a primary source of news information is the constant availability that social media provides. While the availability of social media on a variety of mobile platforms is appealing, what truly makes social media attractive to Millennials is the social aspect of it. According to an American Press Institute survey, 76 percent of those responding said they turn to social media sites like Facebook to see what their friends are talking about and what's happening in their lives.³⁵ Through social media, people can look at the news and post comments about what is occurring. These posts can be extremely powerful in terms of influencing opinions. From a Marine Corps perspective, social media has become an integral part of the service's information operations plan. Through multiple platforms, the Marine Corps can disseminate its message to the world, which makes social media a powerful tool for both marketing and influencing public opinion.

Military Leadership in the Social Age

This age of rapidly exchanged and readily accessible information has revolutionized the way in which the world communicates. Both the expansion of the Internet and the rise of social media have significantly changed the way individuals communicate. While originally designed as a social networking tool, social media has expanded beyond the individual and has become a global means of communication. Today, it is difficult to find any aspect of society that is not in some way tied to social media. The benefits that social media provide in terms of marketing and customer interaction have helped major corporations, businesses, schools, government, and even the military achieve mission accomplishment. Clearly the Marine Corps has demonstrated the marketing potential of social media through the recruiting efforts of MCRC. Additionally, the

Marine Corps has begun to focus on using social media as a way to enhance its information operations plan, through messaging and influencing public perception. This section will look at how else the Marine Corps and other services are applying the benefits of social media, as well as address some of the negative aspects of social media's use within the military. Through a review of the current policies concerning the use of social media and implementation methods, specifically within the Marine Corps, this section will seek to identify a means to enhance the communication capabilities of military leadership while avoiding potential drawbacks that could undermine the institution.

Social media has greatly enhanced the ability for people to stay connected with friends and family members. Through social media, people can stay connected with what is going on in the lives of those close to them, regardless of geographical location. While this ability benefits everyone, within the military it is an extremely valuable resource. Social media's rise took place at the same time that the United States (US) military—as well as coalition partners around the world—were deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. At the beginning stages of these wars, communication was slow. Depending on the service member's location, it could take weeks and sometimes months to get regular mail. Telephone access was limited too, which made staying connected very difficult. For friends and family at home, these long periods created great tension and stress, as they had no way of knowing if their service member was safe. As the wars developed, so did the connectivity provided to service members. This enhanced connectivity allowed service members to stay in contact with their families and friends. In addition, through social media, a service member could reach a wider number of people and provide them updates on how the service member was doing. From the author's perspective as a former company commander in

Afghanistan, the enhanced connectivity and use of social media helped put an end to that tension and stress, improving the morale of the service member and those at home.

From an individual standpoint social media served as a force multiplier in terms of morale and welfare; organizationally it produced great benefits as well. As leaders, one of the biggest responsibilities is to ensure the care and welfare of each and every service member. Part of that responsibility includes ensuring the family members are cared for. Every branch of service has programs or initiatives that deal with providing support to the military family members. For the Marine Corps, that program is the Family Readiness Program, and it is one of the most important priorities for every commander. As part of this program, a commander is responsible for providing a command newsletter on either a monthly or quarterly basis. The purpose of this newsletter is to provide updates to the families and inform them of what is occurring. In the past, commanders would send their newsletter by mail. This would take time for delivery, and by the time it reached the family members much of the information was outdated. In today's technologically advanced world, the Internet and use of social media have provided commanders the ability to provide up to date and accurate information about the unit to the families.³⁶ While the use of social media as a family readiness tool is an excellent example of the benefits of social media, there are more ways that the military employs this technology to enhance the effectiveness of its leaders and its units.

The term "leadership" is defined in a number of different ways however, the most commonly used definitions focus around two key words; "inspiration" and "influence." Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-22, Army Leadership, developed in 2012 defines leadership as the process of "influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation to accomplish the mission and improve the organization."³⁷ While face-to-face communication is the preferred

method of extending one's influence and providing purpose and direction to an intended audience, the use of social media has grown to be a powerful tool that leaders can leverage to extend and enhance their leadership influence.³⁸

The US Army's use of social media dates back to February 2000 when Colonels Tony Burgess and Nate Allen first decided to create the Company Command Forum.³⁹ The idea came about because the two officers would routinely sit on their front porch and discuss their commands. They would share ideas on what was effective and what was not. After a while, they realized that they were gaining a lot of useful information from each other and that more people could benefit from the same discussions. With this thought, they developed an online forum that tied people together in a collaborative way in order to enhance unit performance. The success of the forum spawned the generation of a number of other sites. Forums such as Company Command Net, S3-XO Net, Platoon Leader Net, FRG Leader, and NCO Corps allow members to pose questions and share insights, videos, and other resources.⁴⁰ The Army's use of the Internet and social media to enhance the capabilities of its leaders provided a path for the other services to take advantage of similar technology. Today, the Department of Defense (DoD) runs a milSuite website that contains a collection of online tools such as milTube, milBook, milWire, milWiki, and Eureka which are similar to their commercial counterparts, but provide a secure means of sharing information.⁴¹

One of the primary roles of a commander is to mentor and counsel those under their charge. The preferred means to mentor and counsel is through face-to-face communication. The reliance on social media has the potential to lessen the amount of face-to-face communication within the military, and subsequently decrease the value and emphasis on that mentorship and counseling. However, the Army views social media as a force enabler in regards to mentoring.⁴²

Much like the family readiness program, every service has a mentorship program, designed to rely on the leadership and guidance of senior members to shape and mold junior members. Once the mentor/mentee relationship is established, the mentor helps to shape the mentee throughout his or her career. Unfortunately, when service members rotate to a new location, that mentor doesn't rotate with them, creating a void in face-to-face communication. This can create a problem in terms of mentorship, but through social media, the mentor is able to stay in contact with the mentee and provide virtual mentorship. Virtual mentoring can also be used when the mentor and mentee are in the same location.

Often, the lack of mentorship that happens is not a result from lack of desire, but from a lack of time to devote to face-to-face mentoring. A study comparing face-to-face mentoring against online mentoring found that both mentor and mentees preferred the face-to-face, but lacked the motivation to conduct the frequent engagements; however, the same study also showed that virtual mentoring allowed mentees to have more than one perspective on an issue and increased access to knowledge and networking opportunities.⁴³ Virtual mentoring can accomplish the same objectives as face-to-face mentoring, but without time it takes to organize and conduct a mentoring session. Additionally, through virtual mentoring, the mentor can model appropriate social behavior.⁴⁴

Another aspect of social media's use within the military deals with esprit de corps. An Army report on Leadership published in May 2012 and April 2013 noted a need for leaders to improve the areas of communication, extend influence beyond the chain of command, develop others, and foster esprit de corps or building teams.⁴⁵ With the rise of social media usage among millennials, it is essential for commanders and leaders to understand how to use social media. A major part of establishing esprit de corps within an organization is the establishment of trust.

Trust comes from many different things, but one of the most important is the shared understanding between the senior and the subordinate. If leaders are unable to develop a shared understanding with their subordinates, it will be difficult to develop that trust. Through the use of social media, leaders will gain an understanding of their subordinates and in turn develop a common understanding or bond. It will also enable better communication throughout the unit. Social media will open doors to communication that were traditionally closed. Through social media, open communication up, down, and across the chain of command can not only help improve unit performance, but also foster a positive command climate where all members of the unit feel comfortable addressing leadership with their concerns. This positive command climate will establish the necessary esprit de corps that unit needs to accomplish its mission.

One final aspect of social media's use within the military is the ability to expand the influence of a commander. Social media serves as a valuable tool that will help enhance a leader's influence and provide a means to leverage in a geographically dispersed, rapidly changing, and resource constrained environment.⁴⁶ A leader's influence over his or her troops, regardless of the size of the command, is incredible, and the ability to spread that influence to a greater number of individuals makes social media all the more attractive for commanders.

One commander who has embraced social media for this reason is Brigadier Mick Ryan of the 1st Brigade of the Australian Army. In discussing why he chose to use social media, Brigadier Ryan said that social media "is a medium to communicate the breadth and depth of talent possessed by the 3000 plus great young Australians that make up this brigade."⁴⁷ Realizing that a majority of his soldiers were Millennials who use social media extensively, Ryan understood that his brigade command team needed to possess an understanding of social media in order to best communicate with the soldiers.⁴⁸ Ryan also stated that he turned to social

media to “disseminate interesting professional development and education articles, which support our Brigade professional education program.”⁴⁹ Ryan’s ability to leverage social media as a medium for expanding the personal and professional development of his soldiers highlights the influence that social media can have within the military. Certainly the use of social media within the military has significantly increased in recent years, and while there are many tangible benefits of using this technology, there are potential consequences that could undermine the leadership and institution as a whole.

The existence of social media has undoubtedly left its mark on society. Within the military, the same is true. Social media usage has enhanced the capabilities of a commander and provided a means to share messages with a wide variety of people in an instant. Unfortunately, the effects of social media within the military are not all positive. One of the most significant issues with social media occurs while on deployment. The expansion of network connectivity throughout the battlefield has provided unprecedented access to service members. While this helps ease the stress of battle, as the service member can disconnect with what is occurring around him or her and reconnect with family and friends back home, it can also cause the service member to lose focus on what is truly important, and that is the mission at hand. While on a recent deployment to Afghanistan, a Marine commander noted that while the Internet connectivity was a morale booster, the connectivity eventually resulted in several issues, such as unrealistic expectation management and disconcerting mental transitions, which became a distraction and took away from the mission’s focus and preparation.⁵⁰

One of the critical issues was the formation of unrealistic expectations from those deployed and back home.⁵¹ When the connectivity is constant, both the service member and those at home expect to communicate on a daily basis. This connectivity can close the gap

between husband and wife, father and son, and so on. When there is an issue at home, the service member knows about it immediately and often tries to handle the situation as if he or she were home. The constant connectivity leads to the inability to make the mental disconnect with what is taking place at home, and creates the unrealistic expectation that the Marine can somehow take care of the issues back home from thousands of miles away. This can create stress and tension for both those deployed and family at home. When the connectivity is absent, that expectation never surfaces. From the author's perspective as a former company commander in Afghanistan, dealing with the issues that result from this connectivity can often be time consuming and detract from mission focus.

Another issue that arises from this increased connectivity is the disconcerting mental transitions that take place for both the service member and the family back home.⁵² When constant connectivity allows for daily email and video chat, it becomes expected. However, there are times when the situation does not allow for that connection to take place, or worse, when it unexpectedly stops. This creates tension for both parties, but primarily on the family at home. For example, Marines could be in the middle of a conversation on Skype when an improvised explosive device or mortar round goes off, causing them to react.⁵³ This can create panic and stress for the friend or family member on the other end of the call because the friend or family member does not know if their loved one is safe. While the fear of the unknown is not a new phenomenon, the age of increased connectivity and social media has made this reality all the more relevant.

The instantaneous nature of social media also has significant negative effects on the institution. For the Marine Corps, there are several instances where Marines have uploaded evidence of misconduct to social media. Events like the scout sniper unit posing for a picture

with a Nazi SS flag, while seemingly meaningless to the unit, had negative effects for the service. Also, the YouTube video of Marines urinating on dead Taliban fighters was an additional problem that prompted the highest levels of Marine Corps leadership to embark on a speaking tour to refocus the Marines on ethics and standards.⁵⁴ Through social media, misconduct on the battlefield can stream worldwide instantaneously and have devastating effects on the individuals involved and the institution as a whole.

Another concern for the use of social media in a deployed environment is the risk to Operational Security (OPSEC). One of the most prolific examples of social media's use resulting in the compromise of OPSEC was during 1st Battalion, 8th Marines deployment to Afghanistan in 2010-2011 in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. During the deployment, journalists embedded with the battalion as part of a Knight Foundation project called Basetrack 1/8.⁵⁵ Throughout the deployment, the journalists used social media sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Flickr, to report on the battalion's activities.⁵⁶ At times, the posts incorporated imaging from Google maps which displayed the physical location of troops and key terrain. The posts on the project's website were so detailed, that it was possible to see the rank, name, and location for individual Marines assigned to 1st Battalion, 8th Marines in Helmand Province.⁵⁷ This obvious breach of OPSEC jeopardized the operational effectiveness of the battalion, and resulted in the journalist's removal from the country in February 2011.⁵⁸ Basetrack 1/8 provides an outstanding example of how social media can affect operations in a deployed environment, but social media poses a risk to the safety and security of the US military, and their families in garrison as well.

Expanded access to the Internet and social media increases the potential for a service member to inadvertently violate OPSEC. It is not unusual for service members to return from a

patrol and open social media to inform others of their recent enemy encounters, close calls, and anything else that violates OPSEC.⁵⁹ When this happens there is a significant risk to the unit and the mission, as often the enemy is watching social media and can extract that information and use it in preparation for their own operations in the future. The Marine Corps has laid out specific guidance on the use of social media for unofficial posts. Marine Administrative message (MARADMIN) 181/10 clearly states that Marines are personally responsible for all content they publish on social networking sites, blogs, or other websites.⁶⁰ Additionally, Marines should not post classified, controlled unclassified, or sensitive information, as doing so violates federal law and could result in disciplinary action under the Uniformed Code of Military Justice (UCMJ).⁶¹ These rules and regulations are not specific to the deployed environment, as the potential for OPSEC violations in cyber space can occur just as easily in garrison as on the battlefield.

Garrison use of social media can be dangerous as well. Certainly the potential exists for OPSEC violations at home, but probably the most significant threat is to the good order and discipline of the unit. Social media allows for the instantaneous flow of information, which from an organizational standpoint can mean up, down, and across the organization. Within the military, that means unfettered access to the commander by those within the command. This access is traditionally not available, especially to those at the lower levels of the command, but through social media it is available. While this connection can open the door for enhanced communication within the unit, it can also create an environment where subordinates can voice disparaging comments about the command. While this is not new to the military, the instantaneous and public nature of social media makes this dialogue more available to people

both in and outside the command. When this happens it destroys the morale and esprit de corps of the unit.

Additionally, social media has created a world where people can follow others or become their “friends” on social media to stay connected. For junior service members—both officer and enlisted—this can be a significant leadership challenge. In Lieutenant Colonel Mark Elfers’ *Marine Corps Gazette* article “Marines are Leaders, Not Facebook Friends,” he discusses the advantages and disadvantages of leaders knowing their Marines on social media.⁶² One of the obvious advantages is that leaders know what the Marine does in his or her off time, but one of the major disadvantages is the potential breakdown of the chain of command when the leader becomes “friends” with the led. When this happens, the good order and discipline of the unit is in danger. Clearly the benefits of social media are great. The potential consequences of social media are also strong. The challenges that social media pose are not overwhelming and can be overcome. Leadership at all levels must work to offset the downside of social media in order to take advantage of the tremendous opportunities that social media provides.

A Recommended Strategy for Military Leaders

Since the ban on social media was lifted in March 2010,⁶³ the Marine Corps has begun to incorporate social media to enhance the effectiveness of certain programs and initiatives. While Headquarters Marine Corps (HQMC) and some commands, like MCRC, have fully embraced social media, the lack of a cogent strategy has prevented universal application of this critical platform throughout the Marine Corps. This section will seek to provide a recommended strategy that builds on some of the best practices of other services and international partners in order to develop a method of employment that maximizes the advantages of social media while mitigating the associated risks.

In order to maximize the advantages that social media provides, it is essential that the Marine Corps develops a universal strategy that is applicable throughout the service. To ensure success, this strategy must achieve support from those who will be carrying it out. To accomplish this, the first thing to do is to establish a policy from HQMC that mandates compliance with the establishment of a social media program within each Lieutenant Colonel (O-5) command. The battalion/squadron commander provides the highest degree of influence with the junior Marines that form the foundation of the Corps. This is not to say that applying a social media strategy at the higher levels of the Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) would not be beneficial, it is just that the focus of this paper will be on the battalion/squadron. HQMC should not dictate the details of this program, only that a program exists, broad outlines as to what it should contain, and that it will be inspected as part of the Commanding General's Readiness Inspection (CGRI). By not dictating the specific terms of the program, each O-5 commander has the freedom to develop the program that best fits his or her command. Doing so should accomplish the necessary support for the strategy without making the program a "check in the box."

While HQMC should not dictate the exact nature of the program, there should be some established minimum guidelines. Those guidelines should encompass the best practices of other services as mentioned earlier. At a minimum, each program should consist of a series of social media forums designed to build collaboration among peers within the unit. An example of this would be something similar to the US Army's Company Command Net, that allows company commanders throughout the battalion/squadron to share ideas, lessons learned, and best practices which will ultimately result in increased unit performance and effectiveness. Additionally, each program should entail some sort of professional military education site, similar to how Brigadier

Ryan uses social media, that allows for the further development and education of every Marine in the unit, regardless of where they are on the globe.

The establishment of this program will open the door to increased use of social media within the Marine Corps. The program should not be overly prescriptive, but should provide enough latitude for individual commanders to explore the opportunities that exist. As one final aspect of this program, each command should incorporate, as part of the unit's annual training, a class on the appropriate use of social media and Internet-based technologies. The framework for this training should be based on the contents of MARADMIN 181/10 and subsequent orders. While the O-5 command does not have a public affairs officer (PAO) as part of its table of organization, each command should request assistance from higher headquarters in supporting this training. While the PAO, in conjunction with the unit's legal officer, should provide this training, the commander must play a prominent role in the discussion as he or she is responsible for everything that happens within his or her battalion/squadron, to include what happens on social media.

This strategy, if adopted, will provide a structured approach to integrating the advantages of social media into the Marine Corps. While this strategy focuses on the O-5 command level, it is just as applicable at the higher levels of the MAGTF. The O-5 command has the most direct link to the foundation of the Marine Corps. The key to this strategy being successful is the support and backing of the commanders who are charged with carrying it out. Making this program an inspection item will ensure compliance. By not making the program prescriptive it provides those commanders with the flexibility to make the program fit the needs of the unit, and thus ensuring a better chance of honest support and not just another check in the box. Lastly, through this strategy, the Marine Corps will adopt social media as a valuable resource that

enhances the effectiveness of each unit, while maintaining relevancy with the younger generation that form the foundation of the Marine Corps.

Conclusion

Since at least the Industrial Revolution, it has been obvious how significant changes in technology can affect society. From a military standpoint, they have not just shaped the conduct of war, but in some cases helped determine the outcome. During the American Civil War, the use of the railroad and telegraph helped extend the lines of communication for both sides, making communication and logistical support faster and more reliable. During World War II, the US mobilized its industrial complex to support the war effort, which resulted in new technology finding its way onto the battlefield. Today, the technological advancements that have swept societies worldwide are making an impact on the military. The expansive use of the Internet, coupled with the explosion of social media has not only changed the way people communicate, but has revolutionized the way the military operates.

Social media has dramatically impacted the world. While it is used by all ages, the Millennials have adopted social media as their primary means of communication and source of information. For the military, this is important because Millennials make up the preponderance of the junior members of each service. For the Marine Corps, that means about a third of the force is made up of Millennials.

In order to establish commonality and build trust within the organization, senior leaders must learn to embrace social media in order to take advantage of the many benefits that social media can provide. Whether through collaboration and information sharing or through education and professional development, the potential for social media's use within the military is extensive. Leadership must develop a plan to incorporate this platform now. The plan must be

universal so that it is consistent throughout the service, but must also be flexible enough to meet the needs of the commander. Regardless of the positive or negative aspects of social media's use within the military, what remains constant is the fact that social media will continue to impact military operations.

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Appendix 1

Computer Development Timeline

1890: Herman Hollerith designs a punch card system to calculate the 1880 census, accomplishing a task that normally took seven years in just three years. He establishes a company that would ultimately become IBM.

1936: Alan Turing presents the notion of a universal machine, later called the Turing machine, capable of computing anything that is computable; the central concept of modern computing is born.

1943-1944: John Mauchly and J. Presper Eckert build the Electronic Numerical Integrator and Calculator (ENIAC). Considered the grandfather of digital computers, it fills a 20-foot by 40-foot room.

1946: Mauchly and Presper build the UNIVAC, the first commercial computer for business and government applications.

1958: Jack Kilby and Robert Noyce unveil the integrated circuit, known as the computer chip.

1964: Douglas Engelbart shows a prototype of the modern computer, with a mouse and a graphical user interface (GUI) marking the evolution of the computer from a specialized machine for scientists and mathematicians to technology that is more accessible to the general public.

1971: Alan Shugart leads a team of IBM engineers who invent the “floppy disk,” allowing data to be shared among computers.

1975: The Altair 8080 is featured in the January issue of *Popular Mechanics* and described as the “world’s first minicomputer kit to rival commercial models.” Paul Allen and Bill Gates offer to write software for the Altair using the new language; Microsoft is formed.

1976: Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak start Apple Computers with the roll out of the Apple I.

1983: Apple’s Lisa is the first personal computer with a GUI. The Gavilan SC is the first portable computer to be marketed as a “laptop.”

1985: The first dot-com domain name is registered on March 15, years before the World Wide Web would mark the formal beginning of Internet history.

1986: Compaq brings the Deskpro 386 to market. Its 32-bit architecture provides speed comparable to mainframes.

1990: Tim Berners-Lee develops HyperText Markup Language (HTML) and gives rise to the World Wide Web.

1996: Google search engine is developed by Sergey Brin and Larry Page at Stanford University.

1999: The term Wi-Fi becomes part of the computing language, connecting users to the Internet wirelessly.

2003: AMDs Athlon 64 becomes the first 64-bit processor available on the consumer market.

2004: Mozilla’s Firefox 1.0 challenges Microsoft’s Internet Explorer and Facebook, a social networking site, is launched.

2005: YouTube is founded and Google acquires Android, a Linux-based mobile phone operating system.

2007: Apple’s iPhone brings many computer functions to the smart phone.

2010: Apple unveils the iPad, changing the way consumers view media and jumpstarting the tablet computer segment.

2015: Apple releases the Apple Watch, while Microsoft releases Windows 10.