Military Communication Strategies Based on How Audiences Meld Media and Agendas

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In 1422, Charles VI of France died, and Charles VII ascended the throne moments later as, according to tradition, the Duke of Uzès announced, "The King is dead, long live the King!" (translated from French).[1] Just as old kings die and are replaced by new kings, institutions and social perspectives gain and lose favor over time, and sometimes overnight. Traditional military tactical guidelines and operational principles also evolve. Without change, institutions weaken and atrophy.

In the U.S. Army, changes are necessary and inevitable. Changes to institutional policies and principles have to be communicated to soldiers in a way that effectively alters their attitudes and behavior. Institutional changes have to be communicated to the general public as well. Therefore, to positively influence change, Army leaders must ensure their messages are reaching their intended audiences while considering how messages from competing sources influence those audiences.

One effective way to analyze the influence of organizational messages is by applying the concepts of *agenda setting*, *media melding*, and *agendamelding*. Communication research into these concepts suggests leaders can monitor organizational performance and adjust communication approaches to responsibly influence institutional change.

Agenda Setting

What is agenda setting? Political scientist Bernard Cohen in the early 1960s discovered that what people knew about foreign affairs was closely related to the editorial selection of items covered in the news media they followed (i.e., media connect people and set a news agenda). This correlation was relatively simple to establish in Cohen's time because the dominant news media comprised few television networks, radio stations, print newspapers, and magazines. The topics featured in the news among the handful of powerful media of the time could be compared rather easily to surveys of public awareness of issues.

Cohen's research led him to argue that the press was not especially effective in telling people what to think but was exceptionally powerful in telling people what to think—and talk— *about*.[2] This, in a phrase, is *agenda setting*: media frame and focus community interest on a discrete set of issues by means of regular news coverage.

Since then, hundreds of media studies have confirmed the observation that news media influence which issues and topics people consider most important and are worthy of thinking and talking about, to the exclusion of other important issues and topics of possible interest available.[3] Therefore, in general, though the media usually do not change people's values and attitudes by themselves, they do frame a picture of the world at large for their audiences. This limits the array of issues and topics about which public attitudes and values are subsequently formed. Thus, the agenda-setting function of the media has an immensely powerful indirect influence on public attitudes and values.

Statistical Correlations between the Media and Public Agendas

To explore the influence of media news agendas on the public, researchers have employed sophisticated research models based on statistical analysis. Statistical correlation is one such analytical tool that has been used to demonstrate the power of agenda setting by determining the level of media-audience agenda agreement on public-interest issues. Correlations between factors defined as variables can help with understanding relationships even if they cannot directly identify and prove cause and effect. For media research on agenda setting, the scale of correlation ranges from 1.00 (perfect agreement) to 0.00 (no agreement at all). In other words, among a sample group from a designated audience, a correlation of +1.00 would mean that the media and members of the sample group agreed completely on the importance of all topics mentioned in the news, from most to least emphasized. Conversely, a correlation of zero would mean there was no media and sample group agreement whatsoever on the importance of those topics. (There can even be a −1.00 correlation, which means the public completely rejects the media emphasis, not a realistic situation normally.)

Using statistical correlation as a metric for analysis, studies of media influence have consistently demonstrated that there is a strong relationship between topics selected by the media as newsworthy and topics perceived by the public as important to the community (defined as, say, a correlation of .65 or higher). Such findings consistently demonstrate the significant agenda-setting power of the news media.

Figure 1. Media Use by Age

Agenda Setting with Regard to Specific News Topic Levels

Scholars studying agenda setting have established that the media, in addition to focusing community interest on broad issues in news coverage, also effectively highlight *specific* aspects of those issues.[4] For example, if there was a front-page news story about Iran that focused on an Iranian effort to build a nuclear weapon and also mentioned the effects of trade restrictions on Iran, then audiences probably would say, when asked, that Iran was an important topic in the news. If pressed why, they likely would go on to cite the Iranian nuclear program and the effects of trade restrictions, since both were mentioned prominently in the news story. This illustrates what some scholars call the exchange with audiences of general or main topics as *agenda setting level 1.* The exchange with audiences of story details is an example of *agenda setting level 2.* (Research into these areas has also produced some evidence suggesting that the media do influence *how audiences think about* the subtopics and subissues they present.)

Consequently, a list of the major issues covered by newspapers, television, and other major media—now including social media—likely would be highly correlated with issues listed by their audiences.

Evolving Roles of Traditional and Social Media as Agenda Setters

Just as the rise of unmanned drones has caused a need for the military to alter battlefield strategies, so too has the emergence of social media resulted in a need for the military to change communication strategies that previously relied on traditional media. For example, Army leaders now use tweets as well as the *New York Times* as part of their public communications planning (or they should).

To help Army leaders develop effective communication strategies in a changing media environment, this article briefly discusses the types of media audiences use, the ways audiences combine (meld) them, and the ways those media influence audiences to select issues they regard as being important. Additionally, it concludes with five recommendations to help Army leaders communicate with and influence their organizations and the public.

Challenges to Effective Communication Strategies

Because it takes many years to climb the leadership ladder, senior leaders of any organization are usually older, and often are somewhat established in their leadership styles—to include the ways they communicate with subordinate members of their organizations and external audiences they deem essential. One common characteristic is that many such senior leaders prefer one-way traditional media (such as newspapers or magazines) together with other vertical (top-down) communication strategies, thinking they can set institutional agendas for their subordinates once and for all.

Such traditional communications mainly go in one direction: from source to audience, from leader to subordinates, from one to many. These traditional media, like daily newspapers and television news, strive to reach a large, diverse audience but attempt to do so
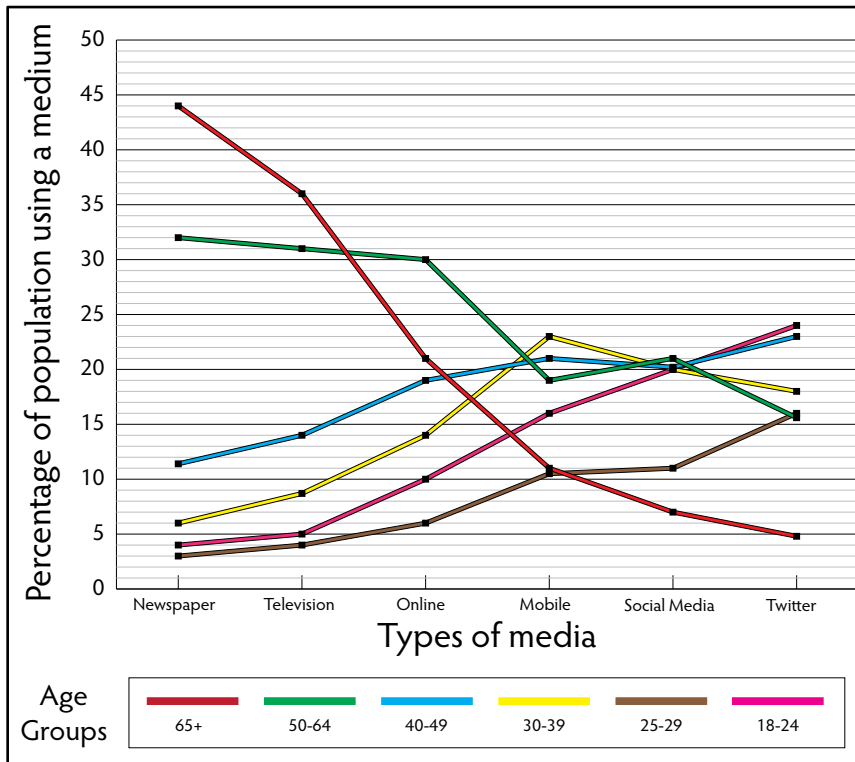
as if shouting from the top of a pyramid to the masses of people at its base.[5] This article labels such media *vertical*.

Senior leaders who rely exclusively on such traditional vertical media to get their message across may not appreciate how younger people at lower levels of their organizations readily gain information and form social connections in virtual communities, influencing one another through social media relatively unaffected by vertical media intrusion. In contrast to traditional vertical media, social media provide users with an individualized flow of information that does not pass through an editorial gatekeeper. It is as if people were effectively communicating horizontally across the face of the previously mentioned pyramid at some level below the top. Hence, this article labels these *horizontal media*. Audiences construct their picture of the world and the organizations in which they work from both vertical *and* horizontal media.

Some senior leaders may be at a disadvantage because they do not recognize the enormous influence (and challenge to their reputation or moral authority) of social communities that form around social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. Such social media provide platforms for audiences to connect to one another and to form virtual communities in cyberspace centered on shared interests and tastes without an editorial authority dictating, or even being invited into, the virtual community's agenda-setting process. The audience can choose.

Thus, senior military leaders would be well advised to recognize that social media provide for more horizontal and individualized flow of information. It is as if people were communicating face-to-face on one of the levels of the aforementioned pyramid.

Social Media Individualize Messages

Service members have freedom to select and meld what they learn from traditional, vertical media

with what they learn from social, horizontal media. In this way, they create a highly personalized picture of the world, including determining the purpose and value of their work (as well as the fitness or ability of their leadership).

As vertical media, such as newspapers and local television, attempt to inform the civilian population about the communities in which they live and work, likewise official military media strive to do the same thing for military personnel. Figure 1 demonstrates the general shift by age in recent use of vertical media such as newspapers, network television news, cable television news, and a selection of social media.[6]

Notably, people who came of age before the Internet tend to prefer traditional, vertical media. In contrast, digital natives—people who grew up with computers and the Internet—are more likely to meld information sources without showing dominant vertical preferences. This principle applies equally to people within traditional organizations such as the U.S. Army as well as the general public.

Figure 2 shows the age spread by rank within U.S. military forces.[7] These age groups have been socialized
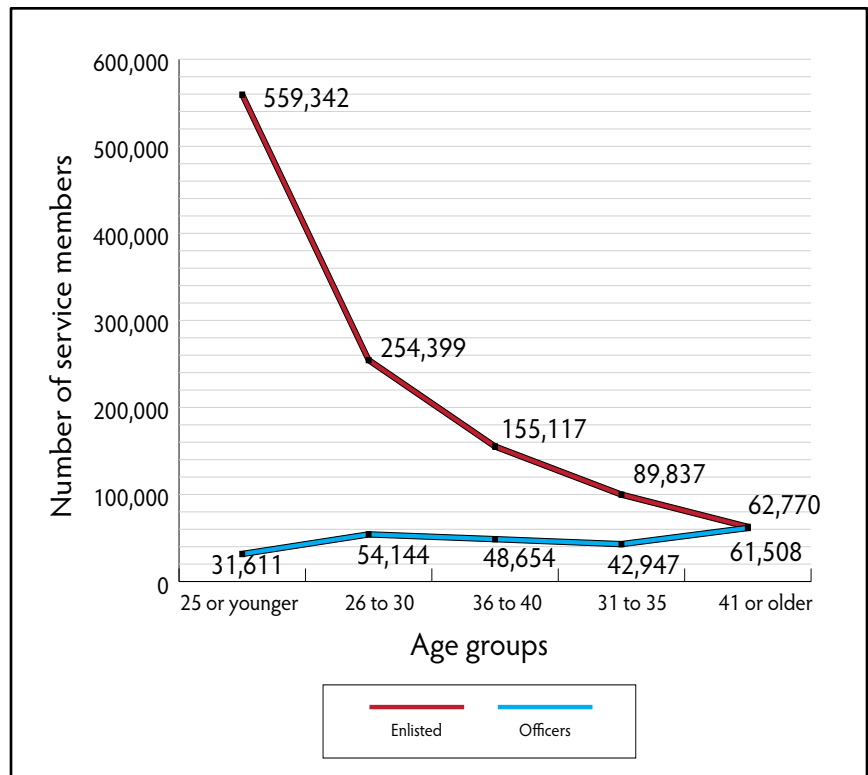

Figure 2. Distribution of Military Service Officers and Enlisted Members by Age

to media differently. Older officers and enlisted service members grew up in an environment still dominated by traditional media. Younger officers and enlisted service members have been socialized in a world of more personal social media.

Social Media and "Democratization" of the News

Everyone is a consumer of information. But today, due to social media, everyone is also a potential news journalist and information creator. For example, a web-based platform called Newzulu allows its more than one hundred thousand "citizen-journalists" to syndicate and share their videos, photos, and packages with over seven thousand news outlets around the world.[8] Videos posted on Newzulu often attract the interest of, and then appear in, traditional, vertical news media—especially footage from places where professional journalists have little access.

Recognizing the public relations value of such expanded access by popular social media, the White House, which historically has preferred formal and traditional top-down media like television and newspapers, is diversifying its media access by selectively allowing social media organizations, such as BuzzFeed and the Daily Beast, into its press briefing room.[9] BuzzFeed? The Daily Beast? Who would have predicted such a development in media just ten years ago?

Notwithstanding, as the rise of social media and decline in traditional media show, the ongoing dominant status of a medium is unpredictable; all media rise … and fall.[10] But in whatever form, social media are here now and wield great social influence, and more are coming.

Agendamelding

Irrespective of the type of media, media audiences are not passive. Like vertical media, social media also set agendas for those who use them. Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms convey a set of broad issues with details that frame what social media users then collectively think about.

From this point of view, an expanded revision of the agenda-setting concept that takes into consideration social media helps explain the relationship between modern day news media and society as a whole. This expanded concept can also clarify the relationship the leadership of such institutions as the U.S. Army or General Motors now have with media that communicate messages through official, unofficial, and social media channels to their soldiers, employees, affiliated supporters, and others. What makes the agenda-setting process different today is that all these audiences now have instant access to a profusion of other media as well as the opinions of other people collected on a single handheld device. For many this is their most important source of information and opinion, with a significant impact on shaping their attitudes and values.

As discussed earlier, a high correlation between the media and the audience generally indicates their agreement on the importance of the topics mentioned in traditional news reports. However, if there is not such a high correlational agreement, it is highly probable that audiences are turning to social media and personal witness from other people to fill out missing information or assumptions to frame their worldview. Thus, some audiences now use what the authors of this article have labeled *agendamelding*—the modern day process of expanding the selection of topics and issues from a variety of media and combining them to individually tailor a personally framed world view.

One consequence observed is that the less the agreement between official, traditional media messages and alternate sources of information on topics and issues, the more attention audiences will give to searching other kinds of media as a check on information from traditional sources. Additionally, audiences draw on their own experiences to fill in the gaps between traditional and social media information. Thus, audiences now increasingly use a combination of vertical and horizontal media news, opinions expressed by individuals (much of which is derived from social media), and personal experiences to create a personally tailored picture of the political, social, and working worlds in which they function. Figure 3 illustrates this process.

How do audiences meld these vertical and horizontal media agendas? It sometimes may be a relatively subconscious cognitive process that results from the plethora of media to which individuals are now exposed. Two of the main author's recent studies of elections suggest that communications in vertical and horizontal media platforms influence agendas for their users, but *in different ways* and *to different degrees*.[11] Audiences in this example, voters, used traditional media as a major source of information, but they also
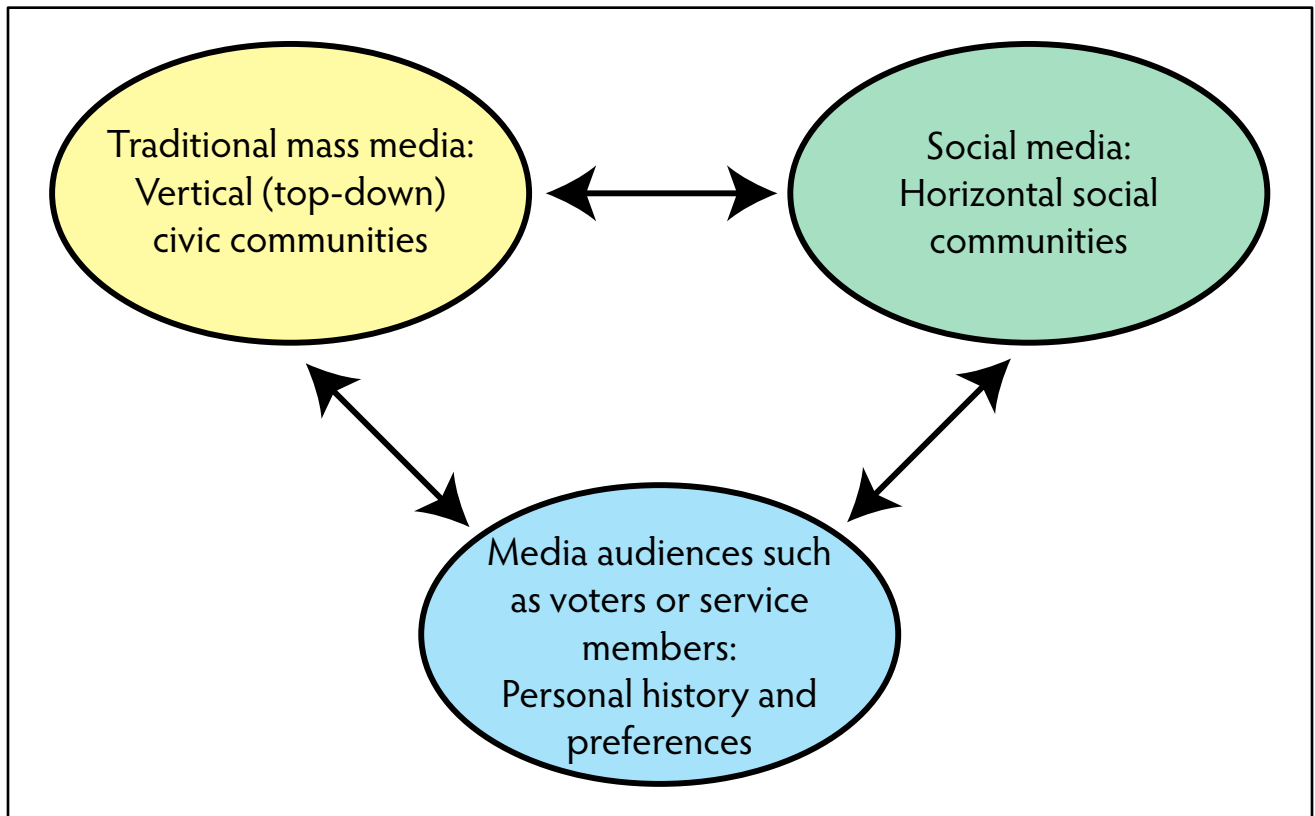
Figure 3. Agendamelding during Election Campaigns and Other Decision-Making Events

relied heavily on social media or the opinions of other people they knew and valued to make decisions about whom they would vote for. That is, people melded agendas from vertical and horizontal media as well as from their own experiences and those of others, as indicated in figure 3.[12]

As figure 3 shows, there are three general sources of information about social and working communities. Information comes from traditional media, from social interactions with other people and social media, and from personal experiences. In other words, the sum of these three agendas constitutes 100 percent of people's information sources.

Example of Agendamelding in Evolution of Voting Patterns

While measuring the personal experience of voters is difficult, agenda-setting studies have shown that the correlational value of traditional, vertical media agendas can be measured somewhat accurately for voters and media. This article proposes a useful formula to follow

this process, which is similar among people in a military organization, a commercial company, or a nation.

For the purposes of this formula, together the total value of all important issues is 1.00. Knowing the correlational value of the vertical media, users can estimate what people learn from horizontal media or personal experience, using this *agenda community attraction* (ACA) formula.[13]

$$\text{ACA} = 1 - [(\text{Vertical media correlation})^2 + (1 - \text{Vertical media correlation})^2]$$

The formula argues that an audience's picture of the changing workplace, or even the world at large—irrespective of the recent and dramatic impact of social media into society—still begins with vertical media. Next, what people do not learn from vertical sources, they learn from horizontal media and from other people.

For example, if a person sees a candidate's television advertisement in vertical media, and then sees a friend's post on Facebook, that individual may evaluate

his or her views about the candidate's political party from personal experience and knowledge. That is, if individuals do not complete their information pictures from vertical sources, they *must* get information from other sources, namely personal interactions with others, to paint a complete personal picture.

The information from all three sources accounts for 100 percent of what individuals know, or 1.00 in the ACA formula.

To estimate the relative power of vertical media, horizontal media, and personal experiences and perspectives, the vertical media correlation is subtracted from the value of 1.00 (which, by definition, accounts for everything individuals know) to get the horizontal media and personal portion of agendas. This figure is then squared to account for variance. The act of squaring allows formula users to weigh them proportionally. The square is then added to the vertical media correlation squared and the results subtracted from 1.00. The resulting number is the ACA. Three examples follow that illustrate how the formula works.

In the first example (see figure 4), if a public opinion poll indicated a high correlational agreement between the vertical media and general public at .80, that would mean up to .20 of media influence came from

elsewhere, probably from horizontal media, other people, or personal experience. *These are assumptions of the formula that attempt to account for all informational and experiential knowledge.* Thus, the ACA formula for the group represented by the .80 correlational poll would look like this equation:

$$ACA = 1 - [(.80)^2 + (1 - .80, \text{ or } .20)^2]$$

$$ACA = 1 - (.64 + .04)$$

$$ACA = .32$$

Even with this relatively high hypothetical correlation ($\rho = .80$), there is evidence that horizontal media and personal experience play a role. If, for example, the correlation between traditional media and audiences were a perfect 1.00, then the traditional media's agenda would determine the issues their audiences think about. The ACA formula would result in zero. That would mean that if audiences knew what traditional media were saying, analysts could predict what audiences would regard as important. In fact, that would seldom happen. This is not North Korea. It is not *1984*.[14]

In the second hypothetical example (see figure 4), let us imagine the agreement is .50. In this case,

$$ACA = 1 - [(.50)^2 + (1 - .50, \text{ or } .50)^2]$$

$$ACA = 1 - (.25 + .25)$$

$$ACA = .50$$

Finally, in the third example (see figure 4), if the traditional correlational agreement was low, at .20, then,

$$ACA = 1 - [(.20)^2 + (1 - .20, \text{ or } .80)^2]$$
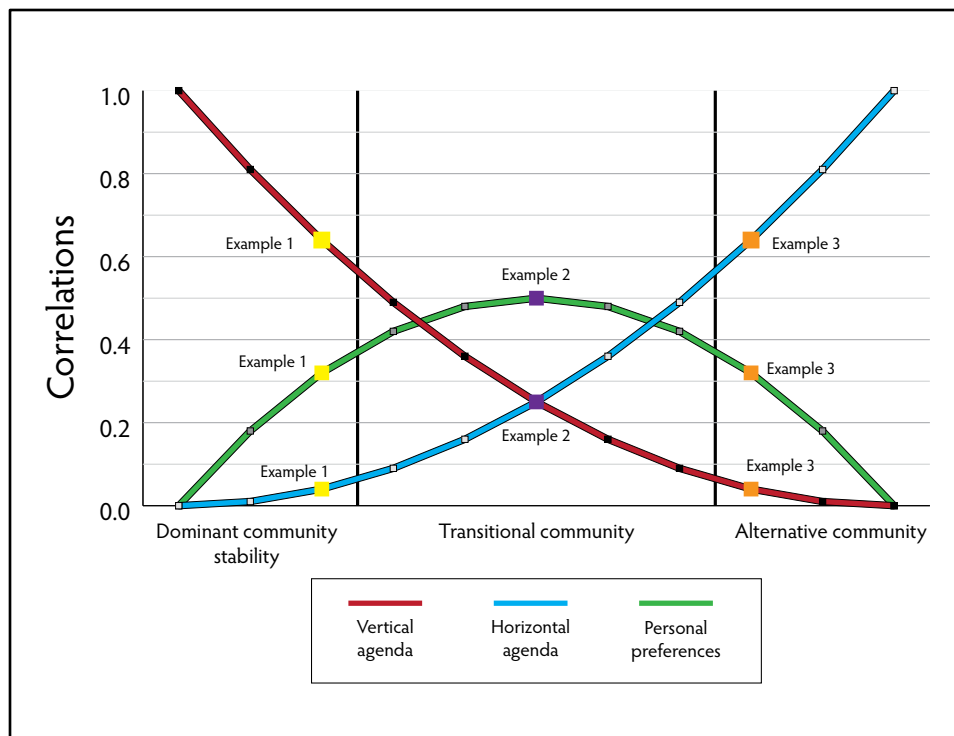
$$ACA = 1 - (.04 + .64)$$

$$ACA = .32$$

Figure 4. Dynamics of Agendamelding and Civic Balance

In the third example, the power of vertical media is, in effect, being replaced by a rising, alternative community agenda. This has implications for social organizations from communities to entire nations. If the correlational agreement between vertical media and audiences declines, then leadership confronts challenges in maintaining influence. Otherwise, as figure 4 indicates, the organizational values may be in a potentially transitional drift (as with a correlation of .50).

Figure 4 shows a range of hypothetical correlations from 1.00 to 0. (Correlations can also be negative—not considered here.) Figure 4 also illustrates the evolution of a social system from dominant vertical media agendas to dominant horizontal media agendas. Leaders can use this method to estimate where their own organizations fit in the dynamics of agendamelding and civic balance. Surveys might show a high correlation between leaders' and subordinates' views about the importance of organizational issues and goals (similar to the first example in figure 4). However, if the correlations drop sharply from generals to field grade officers and senior enlisted, and then to junior officers and enlisted, that might indicate that efforts to influence subordinates are not effective. In this case, everyone would be in the Army but not everyone would, in a sense, be living in the same agenda community—a significant difference with potentially far-reaching repercussions for all levels of command.

The United States and Iran: Examples of Agenda Community Attraction

The ACA formula illustrates how audiences meld vertical and horizontal agendas differently and how social systems evolve as a result. Leaders seeking to influence their organizations need to understand how people use media differently, not just by age but also by political beliefs and cultural identity. Otherwise, leaders might risk far more than failing to influence. This section illustrates the operation of the ACA formula first, by analyzing three U.S. presidential elections. Then, it describes a historical case study from Iran about a leader who lost power when he disregarded how the people he sought to influence shared information and melded their own views.

Studies of U.S. voters. In the original agenda-setting study in Chapel Hill, during the 1968 presidential

election between Hubert Humphrey and Richard Nixon, university professors and researchers Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw found a correlation between local media and voters in the ranking of important issues of .97.[15]

Shaw and others replicated the Chapel Hill study forty years later in the campaign season leading up to the 2008 presidential election between Barack Obama and John McCain. A content analysis of local media and personal interviews was conducted with a stratified sample of seventy Chapel Hill voters to determine the correlation between issues deemed important by the media and by voters. The correlational agreement stood at .87.

The lead author of this study, with Chris Vargo of the University of Alabama and other scholars, ran another test in a 2012 presidential election study of social media using Twitter. They used a large sample of 13,116,850 tweets to calculate the correlations between the issues tweeted by vertical media (expressing the messages of traditional, top-down news media), horizontal media (expressing the collective messages of social media communities), and issues tweeted by individuals (expressing individuals' personal perspectives). The correlation for Twitter users with vertical media tweets in the week preceding the election stood at .98.

Using the ACA formula, figure 5 shows the relative contribution of traditional media sources, collective social media community sources, and personal, individual views across these three elections.[16] Traditional media remained powerful even with the rise of social media.

However, Democratic, Republican, and independent voters used traditional and social media *differently* in 2008, as did Democrats and Republicans in 2012. (The researchers did not study independent voters in 2012 and did not study social media in 1968.) This is depicted in figure 6.[17]

The broad conclusion is that traditional media remain powerful, but their audiences are not passive; voters meld agenda communities from traditional and social media sources that fit their personal preferences. Additionally, most likely, everyone mixes traditional and social media messages in making important decisions—soldiers as well as voters.

Study in Agenda Setting from Iran. In the 1970s, the Iranian mass media—newspapers, magazines, radio,
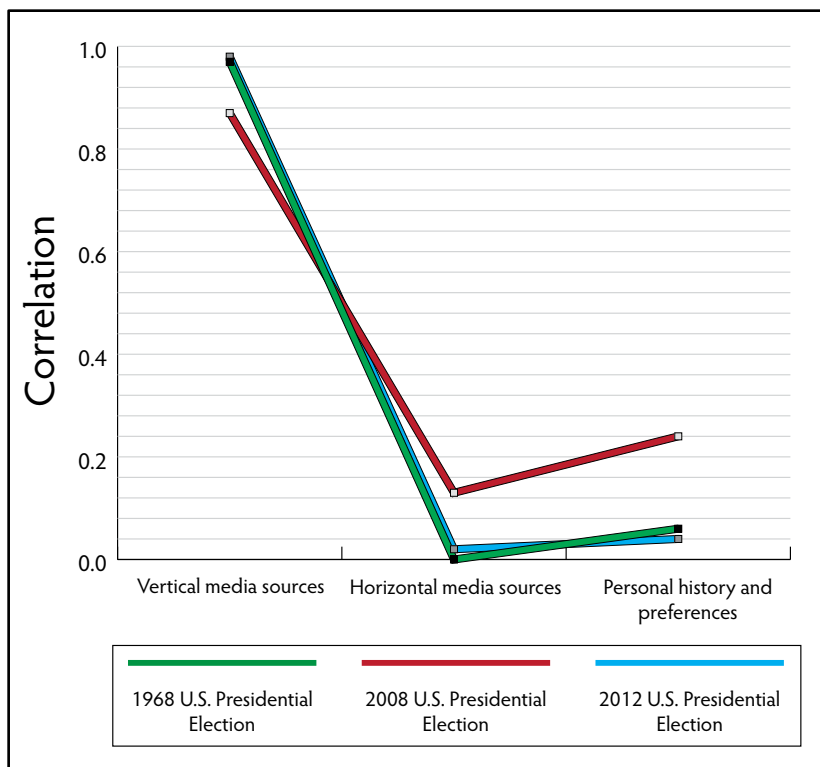
Figure 5. Agenda Community Attraction Scores for All Voters in Three Elections

and television—were under the control of the monarch, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi of Iran, who used them to orchestrate development of the "great civilization" under the direction of government policy.[18] The shah's great civilization policy—sometimes called the Westernization of Iran—was a series of reforms, initiated by his father Reza Shah Pahlavi, aimed at modernizing and secularizing the Iranian society. To enforce social change, the shah attempted to use mass media—which he controlled—to stigmatize as backward the traditional values and ways of Iranian communities in contrast to the supposedly forward-looking and progressive values of the West. One of the unintended effects was to create a sense of frustration and inferiority among many Iranian citizens, especially among the Iranian intelligentsia as well as the clerical class, which in turn created a wellspring of bitter resentment against both the shah and the West in general.[19]

Although the demand for newspapers was growing during this time period as a result of an increasingly better-educated population, the circulation of daily newspapers was not. Instead, the public dissent

and the emergence of private media were suppressed, which left many Iranian journalists and writers no venue to publish their work.[20] Of note, at the time, the state-run radio and television system was the second-largest broadcaster in all of Asia. Every household had a radio, and 70 percent had a television set.[21]

The lack of venues for public discourse led all sectors of Iranian society to seek alternatives. One consequence was that the mosques in every neighborhood became social platforms for exchanging ideas, somewhat similar to how social media connect people today. The expanded significance of the mosque as a place of discourse, exchange of ideas, and debate enabled communities to set their own agendas horizontally, among friends, neighbors, relatives, and peers. Most often, these agendas ran counter to the top-down disseminated agenda of the shah. As a result, dissatisfied communities began to form and organize around agendas of shared views over issues resulting in the beginnings of organized opposition to the government. It was tinder waiting for a spark. As depicted in figure 4, Iran was sliding down the vertical media agenda from dominant stability toward what, it turned out, was a transitional period, and then a revolution.

Example of using a "New" Medium to Foment Revolt

The exiled dissident Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who later became the leader of the Iranian Revolution, used one of the new and most advanced transportable technologies available to the public at the time—audiocassette tapes—to disseminate his revolutionary messages among the increasingly discontented Persian population.[22] Most of Khomeini's messages sent from exile (in Iraq from 1963 to 1978 and in France from 1978 to 1979) came recorded on audiocassette tapes smuggled into Iran and then reproduced or transcribed and copied for

wide distribution through mosques and then to the universities.[23]

In the winter of 1978, the shah ordered the editors of the major Iranian newspapers to publish editorials accusing the now-popular Khomeini of slander and of being a colonialist.[24] Instead of tarnishing Khomeini in the eyes of the public, these editorials had the opposite effect by burnishing his reputation and advancing his message, while angering the population and prompting a massive protest by theology students in the holy city of Qom on 9 January 1978, which was met by police brutality. At least six people were killed and forty-five injured.[25]

In the meantime, Iranian journalists went on strike, demanding freedom of expression.[26] The walkout shut down news production, leaving telephone service as a primary way to obtain news from outside Iran. Eventually, several foreign radio stations began to relay opposition messages into Iran. One popular radio station was the Persian Language British Broadcasting Corporation World Service (currently known as BBC Persian).[27]

By 1979, the shah's formerly dominant agenda had reached the nadir of its influence; it gave way to an alternative agenda, that of Khomeini. As the shah's power declined, Khomeini's rose.

If researchers could have measured the correlational agreement between the messages of shah's government and the views of the general public, they probably would have seen data similar to these: prior to 1978, the agreement would have been about .80; in 1978, it would have been about .50; and in early 1979, it would have plummeted to about .20 (see examples 1 through 3 in figure 4).

In principle, what happened in Iran could happen anywhere, when the influence of the media preferred by leaders declines, and the influence of the media preferred by audiences increases. At the same time, leaders lose their influence partly because of their ineffective media strategies. New leaders who adapt to the media habits of their followers arise—and the cycle of change starts over.

Ironically, in more recent times, to attract military recruits, Iranian marines have recently sponsored and participated in a music video made by a once-underground musician. When asked what the rationale was for using formerly banned musicians as a recruitment tool, a high-ranking officer in the Iranian Revolutionary Guard said, "We have to learn to speak the language of youth and use their codes."[28]
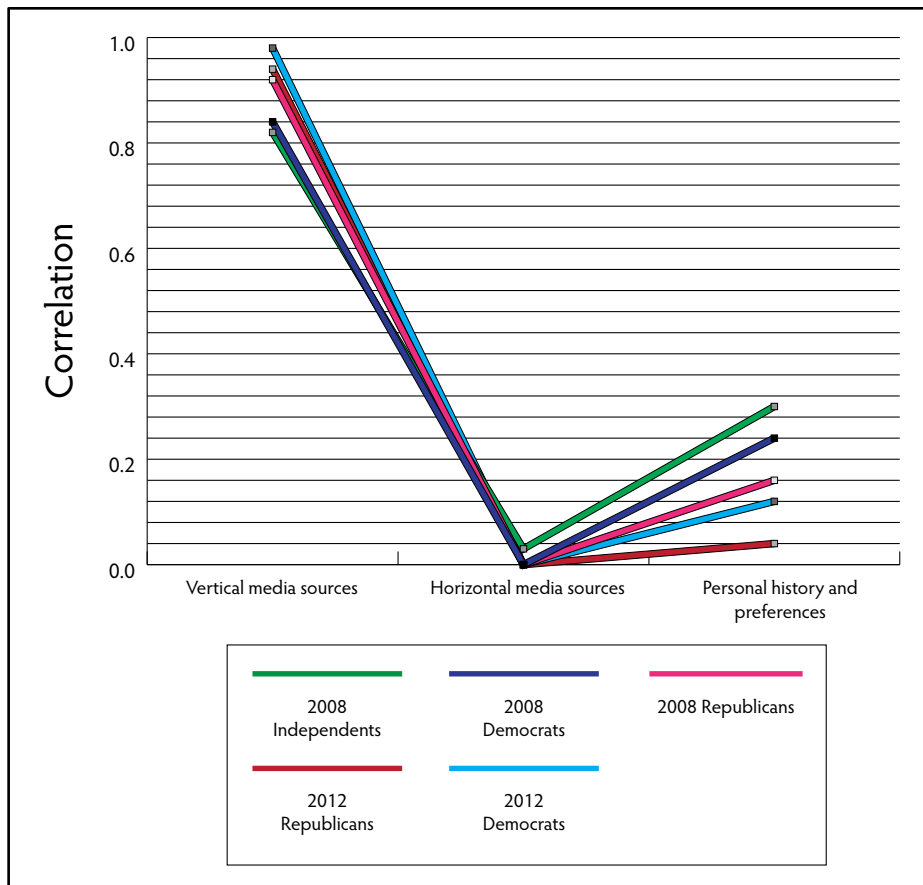
Recommendations for Army Leaders

Responsible leaders prefer evolution to revolution—military leaders included. In a way, the correlational agreement among traditional, vertical media, and agenda-setting input from other sources
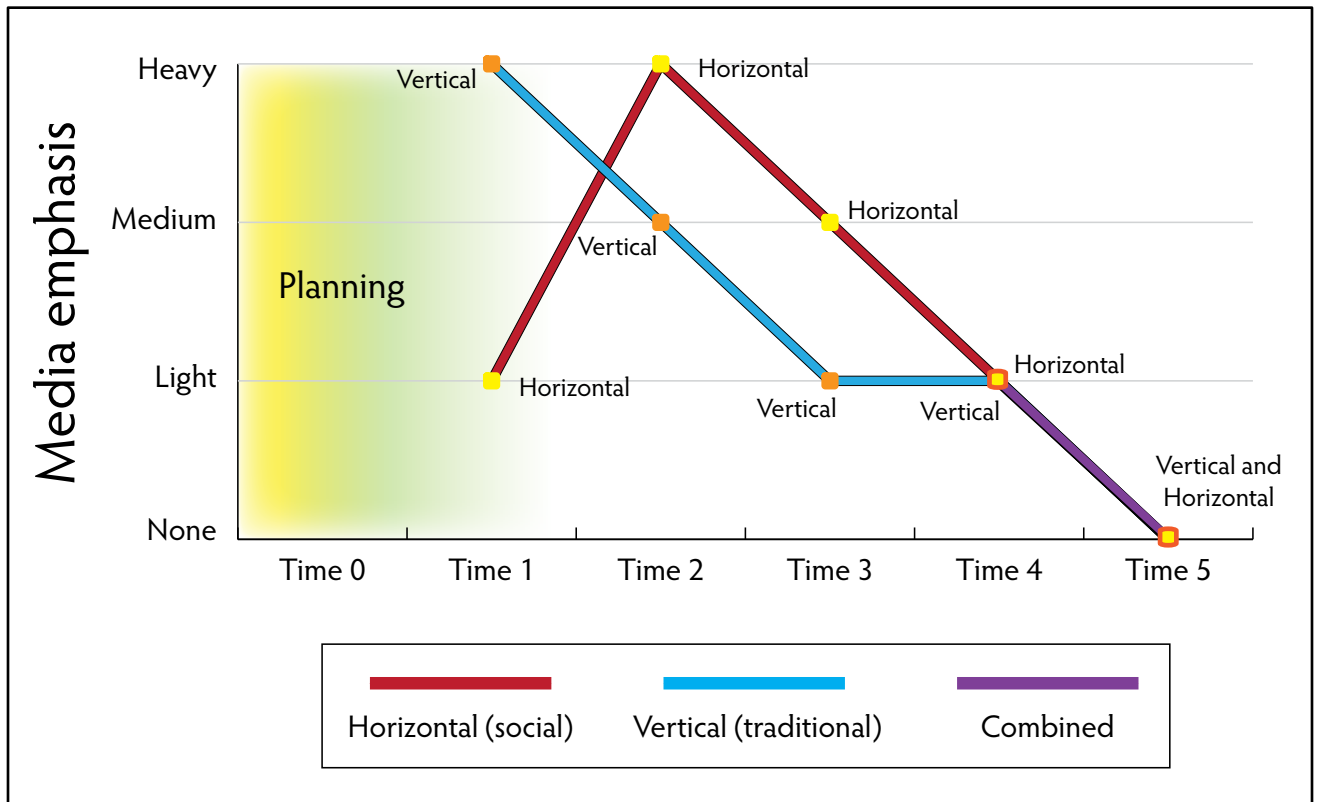

Figure 6. Agenda Community Attraction Scores for Party Voters in Two Elections

Figure 7. Sample Communication Strategy Lines of Effort over Time

represents a sort of social thermometer. The leader's goal would be a comfortable "temperature" (correlational agreement on issues across military ranks) of about .68 to .72. This would indicate stable support of the institution by the audience but would also allow for innovation *and* diversity of topics over time.

To achieve a comfortable agendamelding temperature among the troop formations, their dependents, and Army supporters, Army leaders might consider these five broad recommendations:

Recommendation 1. Use media platforms that target audience use *in ways individuals and their social communities do*. Social media have become important to all members of the Army, but especially to the younger members. Even on battlefields, soldiers often stay in touch (when possible) with their families and friends via e-mail, cellphone, or other social media. Arthur Sulzberger, chairman of the *New York Times*, is well known for saying that the *Times* is "platform agnostic" in terms of the way he prefers his publication to be delivered to the paying audience—just as long as it is delivered.[29] This is a realistic perspective.

Recommendation 2. Devote significant resources to ongoing monitoring of the social media usage of members of the organization, including all levels and demographics (this would be a good staff job). Those who send organizational messages should understand their members' use of social media. Should the message be sent by social in addition to traditional media? Or perhaps the message should be sent by social media only.

Recommendation 3. Include traditional news media and social media platforms in *strategic thinking*. Technology is constantly changing. Businesses are using different media to target audiences.[30] Businesses are, essentially, platform agnostic, motivated by profits and market share. The military, of course, has public service motivations and is scarcely agnostic in core commitments or beliefs. Nevertheless, the military can be as flexible in communication approaches as it is in combat operational planning.

Recommendation 4. Do not rely only on a select few media platforms for all messages. When in doubt, reach for appropriate platforms, traditional and social. Be flexible in the selection of platforms from topic

to topic *over time*. As media evolve, communication routes should evolve via traditional and social media.

Recommendation 5. Integrate traditional and social media strategies, varying the efforts devoted to each according to a strategic time line. Leaders can blend traditional and social media when they are trying to introduce significant change to their organizations, such as a change in combat brigade tactics or a new practice involving battlefield artillery systems. Such change is challenging, but it has to be done from time to time.

Figure 7 illustrates a way to blend official messages via traditional media and supporting messages by way of social media. A communication strategy might vary the amount of effort devoted to traditional, top-down media messages and to social media messages according to five hypothetical time segments.

A key guideline is this: first, use traditional media to establish a clear message; later, use social media to explain and support traditional media message. If the intended audience is young, make use of "their" social media as applicable.

At Time 1, emphasize traditional, top-down media for official messages about changes in combat brigade tactics or battlefield artillery practices, but with some emphasis on social media and personal contact. Social media tend to be more persuasive than are traditional media because they are perceived to be less shaped by censoring authority. Additionally, individuals communicating online and in person appear to be the most persuasive of all.

At Time 2, devote more effort to engaging audiences in discussions via social media or in person, while making the traditional media emphasis more moderate.

From Time 3 through Time 4, reduce both traditional and social media messages as individuals or units absorb the changes. Investigate appropriately to make sure the changes *are* made.

At Time 5, all communications on these topics might end. If the communication strategy successfully brings about changes in understanding and behavior related to the combat brigade tactics or battlefield artillery systems, perhaps leaders could turn to new communication challenges. Maybe leaders need to maintain a low level of attention for a while. Monitoring communications is, as we know, a command responsibility.

Summary

Traditional media are not dead, but their declining use by younger audiences suggests that military leaders need to adapt their methods to reach their internal and external audiences in strategic ways, as do other organizations that serve society. To such an end, it may be prudent to tap younger members of the military who are in a position to provide real insights to more experienced leadership on how best to communicate in an age increasingly influenced by social media so they can remain flexible in their information strategies. In this area, leaders need to learn from others all the time, just as did the best kings in ancient times. The most effective leaders still do. ■

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Notes

1. "The king is dead, long live the king!" MedLibrary.org website, accessed 24 September 2015, http://medlibrary.org/medwiki/The_king_is_dead,_long_live_the_king!

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