

## Harnessing the Power of Social Media Analysis - ACT

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**Social Media consists of tweets, blogs, status updates and hashtags, but Social Media is really about communication. Paying attention to online conversations provides insights into an organisation or to a process that might otherwise be overlooked.**

Social Media is booming. It seems as though everyone and every organisation is participating. From grocery stores to churches to government, it is inevitable that someone is communicating through Social Media. While each communication tool has its place (websites for establishing Internet presence and company image, email for easily reaching personal and business contacts in a documented format, phone (gasp!) for actually speaking to another human), it is the explosion of short posts and status updates via social networks that have garnered 98% of the U.S. online [population](#) . However, once you grasp the idea of news and life updates in 140 characters or less, you will see that it is not your reading or shorthand skills that need tweaking, but your listening skills.

### **Social Media Transforms Relationships**

Social Media is transforming the relationship between organisations and their stakeholders by making communication more democratic. Not only do organisations talk about themselves and their services, but now their stakeholders have the ability to express opinions and spread news as well. This democratic environment offers a great opportunity for organisations to listen to their stakeholders and tune their messaging to specific audiences. On the other hand, not listening to stakeholders can make an organisation seem rigid and out of touch. Organisations across the globe have invested in Social Media and Social Media tools. In 2011, 79% of polled [organisations](#) were said to be using some type of Social Media analytics to gain a better understanding of their audience and how their brand was perceived by their audience.

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### **Social Media Analytics Adds Value to NATO**

Social Media provides every stakeholder with the ability to respond nearly instantaneously to the messages and actions of any organisation. The near real-time feedback can be analysed and used by organisations to be more responsive in their planning and communication. In an Allied Command Transformation (ACT) limited objective experiment (LOE) during the 2012 NATO Summit in Chicago, IL, a team of analysts focussed on two of the Secretary General's televised speeches and 'listened' to the feedback of the public generated via Social Media outlets. By listening, the analysts were able to monitor and analyse responses then quickly evaluate the public perception of NATO key messages to help ensure a truthful and accurate understanding was achieved by the public. Analysis of Social Media during the 2012 NATO Summit showed that stakeholders were actively engaging in Social Media directly from the event, and that they were responding to the messages being put forward by NATO from across the globe. The ACT analysis team was able to identify conversations, both positive and negative, from relevant sources that could help the organisation to be more effective in understanding its audiences in the future. The results of the experiment were put forth in near-real time to ACT Strategic Communications (StratCom) staff in Chicago who delivered the reports to the Secretary General's StratCom advisor and NATO PDD. Being a new form of experimentation and analysis, it was realized that while the analysis was useful, more training on incorporating Social Media inputs for messaging to the public will be required. The results from the Chicago Summit experiment provide a foundation for future work with Social Media analysis. Following the experiment it was determined that further experimentation with Social Media analysis by the ACT (StratCom) Capability Development Team would be of significant value. With support from NATO Public Diplomacy Division (PDD) and the Secretary General's StratCom team, a greater visibility and focus on the use of Social Media analysis is anticipated.

### **NATO Strategic Communications**

The aim of NATO Strategic Communications is to ensure that NATO audiences receive truthful, accurate and timely information. NATO must use all relevant channels, including traditional media, Internet-based media and public engagement to build awareness and understanding; and thereby gain support to develop decisions and operations consistent with agreed NATO policies, procedures and principals. While Social Media is a key analysis tool in the age of Social Networks, it needs to be considered as part of a larger media analysis package to deliver benefits to the Alliance.

### **What is Next**

The Summit Social Media experiment was designed as a single activity within a larger Strategic Communications capability development campaign.

A new experiment is currently underway to explore the use of Social Media as a sensor for social unrest which could aid analysts in horizon scanning. The ability to identify these situations

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earlier will allow NATO to be more prepared for future needs.  
The full experiment report can be found online [here](#) .

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