Evaluating Online Public Diplomacy using Digital Media Research Methods: A Case Study of #ObamainBrazil

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Summary of Approach & Recommendations

Social media is rapidly becoming an important means of gathering news and information around the world. Traditional foreign policy tools are increasingly complimented by newly innovated and adapted technologies that empower groups of individuals to achieve their own aims. Public diplomacy has the opportunity to engage in these new and innovative forms of communication.

In doing so there is the opportunity to leverage networks and technologies that connect individuals around the world – but to be effective public diplomats must adopt new research techniques in order to develop, implement and evaluate digital media campaigns. In this study, we use the opportunity of President Obama’s March 2011 trip to Brazil to evaluate the US State Department digital engagement campaign.

Evaluating public diplomacy activities within digital media combines two approaches to analysis:

- **Trends**: The shifting volume and tone of the information being shared overtime
- **Flow**: The networked structures through which that information flows.

**Evaluation = Trend + Flow**

Practical approaches to evaluation should combine analysis of:

- **Volume**:  
  - The messages - Mentions, Links, Searches, Tweets, comments, etc.

- **Distance a message travels**:  
  - Information transfer - Re-tweets, cross posting & syndication.

- **Tone**:  
  - Content of response to message - tone, nature of comment.

- **Network structure**:  
  - How information flows between users - how individuals relate to each other.
This approach to evaluation allows research questions to be posed at four different levels of analysis:

- Are the messages of a Public Diplomacy organization being passed on?
  - If so how many people pass them on?

- How far do these messages travel and through which networks are these PD messages flowing?
  - Who are the key individuals in these networks?
  - What are their interests?

- What groups or clusters in the network are creating their own shared meaning of events or messages?
  - What is the shared meaning being created?
  - What is the tone of the conversations?

- How do PD actions and messages relate to the information horizon and network architecture within which events take place?
  - How can this network position be used?
  - Where in the network are competitors, rivals, key hubs and potential allies?

Combining the analysis of content and structure allows conversations taking place between individuals at different parts of the network to be identified.

This image identifies the users who produced content that was subsequently passed on by others. The smaller spheres represent the users that passed on information. The word clouds were produced from the most common words used in those tweets that were passed on.
**Key Research Findings - #ObamainBrazil**

- Short-lived interest rather than producing a sustained interaction with the embassy.
- Unexpected offline events can create unexpected online trends.
- Two central types of twitter influentials emerged around the President’s trip - news feeds or aggregators, and political activists.
- Obamabr.org appears to have received little support from other relevant US Government sites.
- A small number of users took inspiration from #ObamainBrazil to protest using #ObamaoutofBrazil to communicate the tone of their comments.
- Analysing the wider flow of information the State Dept.’s digital campaign yielded little impact on the position of its web properties in the Brazilian infosphere.

**Report Recommendations: Analyzing Social Media**

- Consider using network analysis at numerous points in a communication campaign including, Planning, Implementation and Post-campaign evaluation.
- Analyze both the behavior of individuals and their position in the network architecture -
- Identify Influentials within Target Communities
- The Need for human intervention by Native-Language speakers to allow analysts to identify nuances in expression drawing on local knowledge and cultural understanding.
- Recognize Research Constraints caused by the digital environment.
Evaluating Online Public Diplomacy using New Media Research Methods: A Case Study of #ObamainBrazil

Introduction

In March 2011, U.S. President Barak Obama embarked on his first trip in office to Latin America. The centerpiece of the four-day, three-county trip was a visit to Brazil. The visit was historic as the leaders themselves represented "firsts" for their respective countries - Obama as the first African American U.S. president and Dilma Rousseff as the first Brazilian female president.

The trip’s goal, as announced in Obama’s January 2011 State of the Union address, was to “forge new alliances across the Americas.” In addition to the formal interactions between the leaders, many of these potential new alliances and relationships would potentially be forged through various dimensions of digital media.

With a new emphasis on utilizing digital media as a public diplomacy tool, the State Department used the trip as an opportunity to deploy a comprehensive digital outreach campaign employing social networking websites, a crowdsource-based website and various other web properties. The trip and the digital media campaign were also opportunities for InterMedia to study the ability of its web-based research tools to gauge the impact of an important new vector for U.S. public diplomacy in cyberspace.

The purpose of this white paper is to share some of our preliminary findings from the study of online public diplomacy initiatives during the Brazil trip, and to highlight how these new research methods can be used to help strategize for and evaluate digital media campaigns.

The basic goals of the study included examining how various digital networks in Brazil spread news and commentary about Obama’s visit; discovering the types of conversations that took place within these networks; and finding out what role the State Department outreach efforts might have played within these digital networks. Findings from the study will help public diplomacy strategists better understand the potential and constraints of short-term, event-based digital media campaigns. In addition, the findings highlight the types of pre-event research that needs to be conducted in support of campaign decision-making.

In brief, our research took a three pronged approach. The first prong involved the collection of social network data via the micro-blogging platform Twitter to identify so-called influentials within the Twittersphere, track conversations about the trip, and map the digital networks that were sharing information and commenting about the trip.

The second prong utilized a set of link analysis methods to map relevant activity in the social media sphere before and after the trip, and the larger digital environment that the State Dept.’s web properties exist in. This allowed researchers to evaluate the structural impact the digital campaign may have had on the position of U.S. web properties.
Finally, InterMedia conducted content analysis focusing on identified influentials who commented directly about the President’s trip or US-Brazil relations during the time of the trip. This also allowed researchers to gauge the basic sentiment of organically created content and categorized what topics Brazilians themselves were most interested in during the trip.

**Context: #ObamainBrazil**

Social media is rapidly becoming an important means of gathering news and information around the world. Popular social networking sites in Brazil include Twitter and Orkut, a Google property similar to Facebook. While only a minority of Brazilians currently use social media to stay informed about international or domestic news, the US State Dept. needs to stay ahead of the curve in adapting new ways of engaging with all Brazilians. Through actions taken during the President’s trip, it is clear that the US embassy in Brazil recognizes the potential of these tools.

For example, the centerpiece of the embassy’s digital outreach campaign was a new website, [www.obamabr.org](http://www.obamabr.org), devoted specifically to the President’s visit. The site uniquely allows Brazilians to comment and upload original content either as a personal message to the President or as a comment about his visit. The State Dept. also fully utilized the most popular social networking and multi-media sharing sites including Twitter, Orkut, Facebook, YouTube, and Flickr to promote information about the trip and the issues being discussed.

Due to limitations on the collection of private data within most social networks and a lack of administrative rights to State Dept. social network accounts, our research efforts we were limited to the micro-blogging website Twitter. Even though we were unable to gather information from all social network sites, the data collected from Twitter allowed us to map how Brazilians share information about US-Brazil relations and, in particular, President Obama’s trip to Brazil.

**Research Note #1: The Importance of Gaining Admin Rights**

In order for researchers to be able to fully evaluate future social media campaigns it is crucial that the client grant them administrative rights to all social networking accounts or provide them with the required data. Doing so will allow researchers to collect descriptive demographic data of the client’s “followers” or “friends” that otherwise may be prohibited on some platforms, and provide the client with better information about their audience and how information flows within each respective network.
What Volume Tells Us

Using Client Accounts to Monitor Conversation-@EmbaixadaEUA

The #tag is just one of many ways to identify networks that are interested in similar content. The response to a particular twitter account can also provide insight into the interaction and content flow within a network. By monitoring the mentioning of the embassy’s Twitter account ‘EmbaixadaEUA’, researchers were able to evaluate the reach of original content distributed by the embassy and monitor how the network talked about that content, the embassy and the President’s trip.

Similar to the analysis of the #tag, the number of tweets using the word ‘EmbaixadaEUA’ peaked around the days of the visit. After the event, reference to the Embassy declined even more rapidly than the #ObamainBrazil tag. This suggests that users were engaging with ‘EmbaixadaEUA’ as a focal point at a particular point in time. However, the Embassy was unable to turn the increased interest into sustained engagement in this instance.

Analysis of the top users of ‘EmbaixadaEUA’ revealed, unsurprisingly, that embassy itself was among them. Equally important is that the second highest user was America.gov, releasing information in Portuguese to amplify the Embassy’s message.

Other top users of the Embassy’s account name have demonstrated an interest in – though not necessarily a positive disposition toward – the Embassy. These users may be individuals to target either during a longer event, or for future events, as they may be equally interested in those events.

This approach allows users to be identified if they have a particular tendency to share information referring to the Embassy. This indicates an interest in the Embassy; text or content analysis can then provide insight into the nature of that interest.

Figure 1 — Top Users of @EmbaixadaEUA
In addition to the volume of users referring to EmbaixadaEUA we also looked at the overall volume of the #tag Obamainbrazil. The analysis showed that there were two days (March 19-20) during which the #tag was in popular use – though still at a relatively low level in Twitter terms. Not surprisingly, the embassy’s Twitter account (@embaixadaEUA) was the highest user at 56 tweets.

Other leading users of the #tag included @Brazil_Portal ‘the official website of Brazil’, @190_milhoes, the organisation campaigning following the death of 154 people in an air plane crash and @Cássio_Bruno, a reporter from O Globo (The Globe). Highlighting how individuals who are not normally associated with international or domestic politics can potentially impact an information campaign, two other leading #tag users included @ricsanto, a person blogging about the computer system Linux, and @RGsite, ‘the fashion, beauty and gossip magazine’.

Figure 2

Graphs such as these can be produced through online services including The Archivist.

Combining insight from the total volume graph and analysis of the most frequent users of the #tag shows that usage was highest for the days of the visit to Brazil (March 19th and 20th). Equally, while there were individuals interested before the visit, any engagement which may have happened around this tag was short lived. As a result, the tag did not grow into an ongoing meme that represented a movement or particular issue such as the ongoing use of #IranElection.
Distance a Message Travels - Why @You should care about Retweeting

Analyzing the volume of tweets using a #tag over time combines original tweets and retweets. In the case of #Obamainbrazil 43% of the volume of tweets were Retweets.

In addition to recognizing the importance of examining volume, identifying the networks through which that content flowed during a campaign provides an understanding of the network architecture which influenced the spread of messages. This can show how messages from an embassy travel in comparison to others choosing to use the tag. It can also demonstrate whether information was passed through long chains of Retweets or only travelled across one or two links.

These networks are established and identified by researchers through the retweeting of messages that contain the research subject’s #tag. Mapping these networks allows researchers to not only identify key Twitter users or nodes who led the discussion about the President’s trip but also to potentially evaluate how far specific pieces of information have flowed through the network.

The figure below shows the individuals who used #ObamainBrazil and whose tweets were subsequently retweeted. The larger central nodes featured in the figure are key information distributors using the ObamainBrazil #tag. Nodes sharing the colour of the larger central node retweeted or passed on content directly from the original producer, the central node. Yellow nodes are those who are retweeting a piece of information for the second time – a third node in a chain passing on information.
This figure can be used to identify the three main networks that passed on information with the tag #ObamainBrazil. The US embassy (red) had the largest number of people retweeting their content. The journalist Marcelo Tas (green) produced content which was passed through a different network. This network was neither as big nor had long chains i.e. the content was not retweeted a second or third time. This may indicate that this was a more niche content which did lend itself to further transmission. Equally it may be a factor related to the nature of the network of people that follow him.

The purple network is an overlapping flow of information from three main nodes – @PSTU (Unified Socialist Workers’ Party), @diego_cruz and @viniciusbruno (a journalist and researcher in political communication). This indicates an overlap in the interests of the followers of these nodes, with the associated potential for shared interest or development of shared meaning. The PSTU sponsored both an online and offline campaign called Obama Go Home!, referring to a need to reject American imperialism, in particular the United States’ actions in Libya.

This approach allows the identification of those using a tag which the network has decided is important. **During longer communication campaigns, compared to the example provided here, this type of analysis can be conducted ad hoc as needed, allowing researchers and campaign strategists to make mid-course corrections on engagement strategy and content development.** For example, by examining the content of prominently shared tweets within each identified network, researchers can advise the client on how to react or target each network and with what content.
Combining the network structure with the content of tweets, the way different messages flowed through the network. The relationship can be seen between the content passed on from the embassy and the ObamaoutofBrazil campaign and protests of American imperialism.

Focusing more closely on the interaction between those that retweeted content from the Embassy, many of whom appear in the red network above. Analysis of embassy communication can also focus on those who retweet Embassy content. The figure above shows the connections created by individuals passing on information from one source to another. The figure below identifies the individuals at particular points in the network that were responsible for passing on information. Those individuals include maria_fro who is discussed in further detail in the later section.

In addition to individuals, the analysis can focus on clusters of information transmission between groups of users. In addition, there is also a cluster that exchanges information. The members of the cluster are identified in the box adjacent to the image. Through the exchange of information this group may have developed a shared understanding and interpretation of events. The cluster may also show the existence of a relevant shared interest or a shared occupation. In this case the cluster is related to the Central Union of the Favelas (CUFA), which runs a network of activists across Brazil who work with individuals living in favelas.
An analysis of the content shared within this cluster points to an offline event stirring negative conversation within the Twitter network. During preparations for the President’s visit to the Cidade de Deus (City of God) favela, CUFA, an influential NGO within Rio, withdrew from the event preparations after residents complained about the “improvement” of the favela. These improvements the residents claimed were made only to make it look more presentable.

In addition, residents criticized the security measures imposed by the White House’s security detail. In response to the controversy, collaborators within CUFA’s network of activists spread their messages of discontent via Twitter. For example, CUFA founder @celsoathayde sent this tweet, “I will send Twitter messages reminding the Consulate should not kick people out of their homes, nor register children for three years in their own homes.”
There are three key lessons from this example; first, unexpected offline events can create unexpected online trends. As digital media becomes more important to public diplomacy around the world, strategists must be aware of all potentially negative offline and online events that may impact their respective campaigns and establish protocols on how best to react to them.

Second, research techniques such as social media network analysis can allow communication strategists to react to emerging negative trends if needed. While there is less scope to respond in this way during short-term and single event campaigns, research techniques described above can empower strategists to respond with original content and messages to negative emerging trends or the spread of misinformation.

Third, strategic decisions can be made about which parts of the network to focus communication effort and evaluate how far positive messages travelled.
Tone - Content Analysis and Social Media Monitoring Tools

Researchers also used a social media monitoring tool, Radian6, to identify mentions of US-Brazil relations and the Presidential trip in the Brazilian Portuguese blogosphere and Twittersphere. Researchers used Radian6 to construct a “topic profile”, a collection of search terms and phrases in Portuguese, to identify blogging and Twitter influentials who talked about US-Brazil relations before, during and after the trip. The basic criteria for the tool in recognizing so-called influentials includes frequency of content creation that fits the topic profile, number of “followers”, number of “views” and the number of comments or retweets of their postings. The purpose for using such software tools to find influentials is to supplement the network analysis.

As mentioned previously, the social media monitoring tools are calibrated to find mentions of the President’s trip and US-Brazil relations within the Twittersphere. Researchers purposely did not require the presence of #ObamainBrazil or @EmbaixadaEUA. Out of the top twenty twitter influentials, the Radian6 search algorithms identified two blogs that also appeared within the network analysis, Maria_fro and LeisecaRJ. In InterMedia’s upcoming report the data collected from both research methods will be synthesized.

Once influentials were identified via the Radian6 tool, researchers conducted a content analysis of their blog and Twitter posts to indicate how Brazilians were talking about US-Brazil relations. Conducting such an analysis before the launch of a digital campaign would inform client strategists about the issues and concerns that a target audience regularly discusses in the online sphere. This will feed into the type of content that strategists develop for the campaign and prepare them for potential flash points that may arise during the campaign.

Subsequently, content analyses of this type during the implementation of a campaign may trigger mid-course strategic content or tonal changes. They can also inform strategists about how best to frame specific policy or political issues in the future. Comparing the conversational content of influentials before and after a digital campaign is a way to evaluate the campaign’s impact. For example, did the tone of conversation among influentials shift in a more positive direction? Are the influentials showing a better understanding of US foreign policy?

In this analysis, a linguist with Portuguese native language capabilities was used to code and translate Twitter and blog content that took place during the week surrounding the trip (March 16-23). Using a native language speaker instead of automated translation software proved instrumental in light of a large amount of sarcasm and slang used that would not have been recognized otherwise. This is InterMedia’s preferred method of coding online content, as it is crucial that research analysts have a nuanced understanding of the target audience’s linguistic habits. Findings from this content analysis should inform communication strategists about the conversations that were spurred during the trip and the sentiment around them.
The influential blogs identified by Radian6’s search algorithms represent a variety of different content creators. There are multiple bloggers/columnists featured in the list who are employed by or associated with mainstream media outlets such as the weekly newsmagazine Veja. The columns posted by these individuals often elicit hundreds of reader comments highlighting their ability to spur conversation. Another interesting blog is Vi O Mundo a website started by Luiz Carlos Azenha, a well known journalist and blogger. The website features a rotating set of journalists/bloggers and touts itself as providing the reader with “O que voce nao ve na midia” (What you will not get in the media). The remainder of the blogging influentials are individuals who post a combination of news articles and personal opinion.

As might be expected, a wide range of topics were being discussed among the recognized key blogs. The two most frequently referenced topics involved domestic politics as they relate to the US and President Obama’s trip, and third-party foreign policy (US and Brazilian relations with countries such as China and Iran). Posts focusing on domestic politics comprised about 21 percent of all posts, versus some 26 percent for posts about third-party foreign policy. Six percent of the foreign policy posts referenced US actions in Libya, which began during the President’s visit.

This is enlightening, considering that the purpose of President Obama’s trip was to reinvigorate bilateral relations. The evidently heightened public interest in foreign policy may also be the result of the increased presence of Brazil in major international events during the administration of former President Luis Ignacio Lula de Silva. When they expressed personal opinions, the sentiment of these foreign policy blog posts were split between neutral and negative. While only 27 percent of all of these posts were coded as being negative, if we remove those blog posts that are simply reposts of news articles that percentage increases to 45 percent, with the remainder being neutral. (A five point sentiment scale was used for this analysis: very positive, positive, neutral, negative, very negative)
The discussion surrounding domestic politics and how it relates to the trip was quite complex. Issues discussed ranged from the politics of identity and how it relates to the types of events and entertainment that were arranged for the Obama family, to the controversy of former President Lula’s absence from the trip’s proceedings. Further in-depth analysis, to be published at a later date, will provide communication strategists with insightful information about the effects of this trip on domestic discourse, which can be used in both online and offline communications.

The next-most-popular topics (16 percent of posts each) are Inter-American relations and discussion directly about President Obama’s Brazilian site visits such as the Municipal Theatre in Rio and to Cristo Redenter. The prevalence of blog posts about the visit sites was not surprising, as there was considerable controversy domestically over the cancellation of a speech by President Obama in the Cinelândia Square and the reported disruption of his visit to the Cidade de Deus favela.

A slightly less popular topic of discussion was US-Brazil economic relations. at 12 percent of all blog posts. However, a large number of these posts were reproductions of news articles or provided little personal
opinion. For this category, the major points of discussion revolved mainly around trade issues, particularly barriers to trade. The identity and behaviour of Twitter influentials were markedly different than those found in the Brazilian blogosphere. Of the twenty so-called influentials, seven of them were news aggregators or the Twitter feeds of mainstream news media simply passing along the title and url links to news articles. Other influentials not affiliated with mainstream media organizations acted as private news aggregators who consistently tweeted news articles. In fact, the Twitter user “Obama Capizaba” almost exclusively tweets news articles that discuss President Obama in some fashion. This Twitter account continued to post such material after the President’s visit.

Another interesting group of Twitter influentials were political activists who can be generally categorized as left-of-centre politically and includes the aforementioned Maria Fro. This group of Twitter users was less likely to simply retweet news articles but to converse between users of similar perspectives and tweet links from other like-minded bloggers.

For example, one particular blog post by Maria Fro was consistently passed along among both the activist strand of influential Twitter users and blogs. The post was an interview with a widely known economist affiliated with the Workers’ Party, Maria da Conceição Tavares.

The interview is rather candid and addresses a number of topics including the global economic downturn and President Obama’s inability to create social and political change in the United States relative to the US Republican party and American Conservatism.

The difference between the two above groupings (news-oriented and political activism blogs) highlights the role of Twitter during moments of heightened political awareness such as the President’s visit to Brazil. Mainstream news organizations and news aggregators will play a significant role within the Twittersphere due to their high level of followers and ability to continually create content. However, there is little discussion taking place between these Twitter users. Where much of the discussion between Twitter influentials is taking place is within smaller clusters of private individuals that are often the result of similar professional or private interests.

Understanding what these clusters of individuals discuss and how they operate will allow communications strategists, whether they are with the U.S. State Dept. or a marketing company, to identify whom they wish to target and what types of content might address their interests or concerns. Within these clusters there are key influentials who drive discussion such as Maria Fro. By recognizing who they are and engaging with them, strategists have the opportunity to expand their reach within a target audience without overextending resources.
Network structure - Mapping the Digital Environment

Information Flows via Twitter: Pre-Event

In order to fully evaluate the effectiveness of the State Dept.’s use of Twitter, we collected public data before, during and after the President’s trip. The key mechanism for this process is the collection of all tweets that mention the most prominent hashtags (#tag) used to reference the visit and mentions of the embassy’s Twitter account, @EmbaixadaEUA.

For this study, researchers collected data the day prior to the visit (March 18) in order to map the pre-event Brazilian Twittersphere. In general, by collecting data prior to a planned outreach campaign, researchers can identify potential network influentials that may have an impact on the interpretation of the campaign, creating an opportunity to reach out to these users. The resulting map from our study showed the flow of information between individuals who referred to President Obama on Twitter (Figure 1). Information flows or connections are created and identified by researchers when one individual passes on (Retweets) information from another individual.

Research Note #2: Using Network Analysis to Inform Outreach Design

The purpose of the present study is post-event evaluation. However, the same research techniques and approach being used may also be deployed to inform outreach strategy pre-event or campaign. Using the same network mapping techniques well in advance of a planned event or campaign, researchers would be able to provide actionable recommendations as to how the client can target network influentials within their target audience. This raises the potential that the client’s message will reach those who have the greatest interest in it and will be passed along to others with similar interests i.e. expanding the client’s ROI.

In the days before President Obama arrived in Brazil, the #tag #ObamainBrazil became an increasingly popular method of identifying content relating to that trip. The advantage of using a #tag is that individuals do not necessarily have to know each other to be able to access and share the same content. This method of sharing information about a particular event or topic also allows researchers to better monitor information flows through larger networks and assess the sustainability of a campaign.
The resulting map, above, from our pre-event data collection is shown here. Each red arc represents the transfer of information from the user that produced the original tweet and those who passed it on through a retweet. This image reveals two large distinct clusters of Twitter users, with only a few links between the two clusters. They differ specifically in the typical sources of information that flows within each cluster. The users in the left cluster were more likely to be associated with information from more traditional American news sources. The members of the right cluster appear to be more interested in the visit to Brazil within a Brazilian context as they more frequently pass along sources of information of Brazilian origin than American origin.

By identifying key nodes or influencers within each cluster, such as those in Figure ??, the embassy has the opportunity to reach out individually to Twitter users who may pass along information or if needed monitor misinformation.

Bites of intelligence such as this about the State Dept.’s audience would theoretically help them tailor their tweets to each cluster. In addition, the analysis of the networks which pass on (Retweet) content, allows the identification of users who produced content with which others engaged. Recognizing these users is important, given that they both read tweets and think it
worth to pass on to others. This distinguishes between people with whom others engage and those that produce a high volume of content but are totally ignored by the network.

**Research Note #3- Research Constraints**

The collection of web-based data presents both opportunities and constraints. While collecting such data has the advantage that it is generally unobtrusive to content creation and creators themselves, researchers are constrained in their analysis by the format and structure of the content being analyzed. To overcome this challenge researchers here used supplemental research techniques that mitigate these constraints.

- For example, the Twitter analysis conducted here uses collected data found via the use of official and unofficial #tags. This method, in reality, will not collect absolutely all tweets that discuss the President Obama’s trip. This is the result of user behaviours that do not fit standard user conventions such as not including #tags in tweets or using unidentified unofficial #tags.

- Similarly, different forms of link analysis can be hindered by bloggers or other content creators who fail to provide hyperlinks to the website where they found information, which may result in an incomplete network map. There are various ways to mitigate these constraints on data collection, notably by using multiple research methods or tools to collect data.

- For example, in this study we used supplementary methods beyond collecting tweets that mentioned official and unofficial #tags or mention the name of the US Embassy’s Twitter account. Researchers also used the social media monitoring tool Radian6 to create a “topic profile” - a collection of key words and phrases that searched the Portuguese language Twittersphere for tweets that refer to US-Brazil relations or the President’s trip. With this second research tool we were able to account for Twitter users who failed to use the identifying #tags.

The US State Dept’s strategy can also be seen from a wider lens by looking at Brazil’s overall digital environment. This wider approach to evaluating the flow of information surrounding President Obama’s visit to Brazil identifies how different digital entities (websites, social media platforms, blogs, etc.) link between each other. Such digital network analysis can be deployed to better inform digital media outreach before, during and after a campaign. Similar to the type of network analysis used to evaluate Twitter networks.
Through this research approach, we were able to map and evaluate the State Dept.’s various web properties before and after President Obama’s visit to Brazil. The very short length of the visit did not warrant a network analysis while the President was in-country. This decision seems to have been correct as we have already found that Twitter users rather quickly stopped using the official #tag and mentioning the State Dept. account name.

**Research Note #4- Mid-Course Corrections and Measuring Impact**

By mapping the network of a client’s web properties during the campaign planning stage, researchers are able to identify key nodes (websites, platforms) or clusters of nodes that are key consumers and producers of information within their network. This gives the client an opportunity to formulate an engagement strategy that targets this potentially like-minded audience.

Depending on the length of time a digital campaign is planned to take place, conducting a series of network analyses during campaign implementation would give a client the information needed to make mid-course corrections to which social media platforms to emphasize or the tone of their content.

Once the tasks of a digital campaign are complete, it is important to evaluate its effectiveness and potential structural impact on the client’s web properties. In addition to evaluating website and social media platform analytics, it is important for clients to understand how their position within their digital environment may have shifted as a result of their campaign. Are more people linking to their content? Have they become a strong go-to source for information on a topic? How influential are the people linking to the client’s content?

**Obamabr.org**

The State Dept. as part of its outreach strategy created a standalone website, www.Obamabr.org, devoted exclusively to the President’s visit. Using that website as a starting point, we were able to identify the links between clusters of information about the trip. The first step in the process is identifying “inlinks”, which are website urls that are themselves linked to www.Obamabr.org. Through these links we were able to identify the channels of information and sites that exist within the site’s network. Following these links are important because past research into internet user behaviour has shown that users often explore more deeply into a particular search result, such as clicking on “Related Links” or embedded hyperlinks, before they return to their original list of search results to try a new start search point. As a result, the identified links are effectively the channels in which a user may pass down from one site to the next as they seek further information.
The official State Dept. and Embassy websites are in the centre of the network, as the figure indicates. Bloggers and commentators, encircled in the figure, have also gravitated towards the centre of the figures as they connect with numerous different sites.

From a strategic perspective, Obamabr.org appears to have received little support from other relevant US Government sites, specifically State Department, Embassy in Brazil and the White House. If sites are created in the future to act as a focal point for a specific visit, this decision must be made with the expectation of support from the other sites. The risk, otherwise, is that interest will drop rapidly after the visit – as shown in the twitter data – while the site is still trying to establish itself within the digital environment.

Combined the analysis shows the visit of President Obama created numerous opportunities for interaction via social media and the development of longer term relationships with key nodes within communities in Brazil.

Despite making material available though online hubs for information communication, neither the Twitter account nor Obamabr.org website successfully became lasting go-to resources. As a result, the State Dept.’s campaign seems to have missed the opportunity to re-position their digital presence within the wider social media networks, when there is a heightened awareness of US-Brazilian relations both on and offline.
Key Research Findings - #ObamainBrazil

- **Short-lived Interest** - Through a network analysis of the use of the official trip hashtag (#ObamainBrazil) and the Embassy’s account name ‘EmbaixadEUA’, InterMedia found that volume of use was highest for the days of the visit to Brazil (March 19th and 20th). Equally, while there were individuals interested before the visit, any engagement which may have happened around this tag was short lived. The Embassy was unable to turn the increased interest into sustained engagement in this instance.

- **Unexpected offline events can create unexpected online trends** – For example, the withdrawal of an influential local NGO from preparations for an Obama event at the Ciadade de Deus favela stirred negative conversations within the Twittersphere. As digital media becomes more important to public diplomacy around the world, strategists must be aware of all potentially negative offline and online events that may impact their respective campaigns and establish protocols on how best to react to them.

- **Two central types of twitter influentials emerged around the President’s trip - news feeds or aggregators, and political activists.** Analyzing the way messages travelled through the social media networks, the difference between the two types of influential highlights the role of Twitter during moments of heightened political awareness. Mainstream news organizations and news aggregators will play a significant role within the Twittersphere due to their high level of followers and ability to continually create content. However, there is little discussion taking place between these Twitter users. Where much of the discussion between Twitter influentials is taking place is within smaller clusters of private individuals that are often the result of similar professional or private interests. This reality means that strategists must be astute at targeting specific target populations or clusters and identify potential aggregators that feed into these populations.

- From a strategic perspective, **Obamabr.org appears to have received little support from other relevant US Government sites**, specifically those of the State Department, the U.S. Embassy in Brazil and the White House. If sites are created in the future to act as a focal point for a specific visit, this decision must be made with the expectation of support from the other sites. The risk, otherwise, is that interest will drop rapidly after the visit – as shown in the twitter data – while the site is still trying to establish itself within the digital environment.

- **A small number of users took inspiration from #ObamainBrazil to protest using #ObamaoutofBrazil to communicate the tone of their comments.** There was little overlap between the two networks passing on positive and negative tweets.

- **Analysing the wider flow of information the State Dept.’s digital campaign yielded little impact on the position of its web properties in the Brazilian infosphere.** Through the digital network mapping of these properties before and after
the President’s trip researchers found that even though the two websites may have been publicity hubs for information about the visit online, neither of the websites has successfully become go-to sources for information beyond that. This may not have been the intention of the State Dept.’s campaign strategies but seems to have been a missed opportunity when there is a heightened awareness of US-Brazilian relations both on and offline.

**Report Recommendations: Analyzing Social Media**

- **Consider using network analysis at different points in a communication campaign** - Network analysis research techniques are highly flexible and can be used to provide actionable pieces of research to inform communication strategists at every stage of a digital media campaign including planning, implementation and post-campaign evaluation stages.

  - **Planning Stage**: Conducting a network analysis before the launch of a digital campaign would inform client strategists about the issues and concerns that a target audience regularly discusses in the online sphere. This will feed into the type of content that strategists develop for the campaign and prepare them for potential flash points that may arise during the campaign.

  - **Implementation Stage**: During longer communication campaigns, compared to the example provided here, network analysis can be conducted ad hoc as needed, allowing researchers and campaign strategists to make mid-course corrections on engagement strategy and content development.

  - **Post-Campaign Stage**: Once the tasks of a digital campaign are complete, it is important to evaluate its effectiveness and potential structural impact on the client’s web properties. Through these forms of network analysis clients can understand how their position within their digital environment may have shifted as a result of their campaign.

- **Analyze both the behavior of individuals and their position in the network architecture** - Social media research has to balance the interrelated ‘real-time’ and ‘structural’ analysis. This is because:

  - Individual behavior within online and offline networks takes place within a pre-existing structure of connections and relationships. This structure has influence on their behavior.

  - However, individuals are not trapped within their network structure. Structures can evolve due to the real-time behaviour of individuals giving their behavior at any given moment importance.

  - Combine insight from trends and information flow for most effective analysis.
• **Identifying Influentials within Your Target Communities** - New media researchers have the ability to identify through multiple research methods so-called “clusters” and “influentials” within a given thematic or client network. Understanding what and how individuals communicate within these clusters of individuals will allow communications strategists to identify whom they wish to target and what types of content might address their interests or concerns. Within these clusters there are key influentials who drive discussion. By recognizing who they are and engaging with them, strategists have the opportunity to increase the efficiency with which reach within a target community can be increased.

• **The Need for Native-Language Understanding** - Despite recent advancements in text analysis software, the ObamainBrazil project demonstrated the importance of human intervention in the analysis process. This ensured local and cultural knowledge was integrated into the process allowing the linguistic nuances instrumental for uncovering underlying meaning and sentiment to be picked up. For example, the large amount of sarcasm and slang used by Brazilian bloggers and Twitter users may not have been recognized otherwise.

• **Recognize Research Constraints** - The collection of web-based data presents both opportunities and constraints. While collecting such data has the advantage that it is generally unobtrusive to content creation and creators themselves, researchers are constrained in their analysis by the format and structure of the content being analyzed.

• **Online engagement** – These recommendations are concerned with the application of techniques to evaluate digital diplomacy. For recommendations for engagement see: Susan Gigli & Ali Fisher, *Networked Audiences*, *The Channel*, Issue 2, 2011.