BLOG.GOV:
WINNING DIGITAL HEARTS & MINDS?

Professionalization, personalization and ideology in foreign policy communication

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

Blog.gov: Winning digital hearts and minds?
Professionalization, personalization and ideology in foreign policy communication

Discussions of blogging as a form of political communication have mainly centred on the context of election campaigns, national domestic issues, citizen political blogging and mainstream media blogs. The rise of government blogging as an alternative news source in the aftermath of the 2003 war in Iraq, however, is much less addressed by scholars.

This thesis examines the case of the US State Department blog *Dipnote* in order to study the dynamics of blogging as foreign policy communication and public diplomacy. The focus of the analysis is on posts relating to the Middle East, towards which US foreign policy attention was primarily geared after 9/11. The broader research question of this thesis attempts to determine the relative importance of professionalization, personalization and ideology in influencing the content on the official foreign policy blog of the U.S. government, in order to advance the theoretical understanding of blogging in the context of foreign policy communication and public diplomacy.

A content analysis of blog posts was conducted between the period of September 2007, when the blog was launched, and March 2010. In addition to this, several interviews were conducted with the management of the blog at the State Department. Furthermore, by comparing the blog content under the Bush and Obama administrations, this study was able to trace patterns of continuities and discontinuities over time. The analytical framework is adapted from Farrell and Webb's (2002) professionalization framework, and as such it breaks down the blog's elements into technical, resource, and thematic developments.

First, it is argued that the utilization of the blog as a cultural space is a new interpretation for foreign policy communication not previously considered in studies of government blogging in political communication or public diplomacy research. Second, blogging enables a new form of official yet casual communication which serves to legitimize American activities and presence in the Middle East through personalization and de-ideologization of content that make the blog a source of soft power. Third, the blog is a "protected space" (adapted from Gumbrecht, 2004) where the government maintains editorial control, low immediacy, low interactivity and low engagement.

Overall, the findings point to the classic contradictions that the government faces both offline and online in the digital era; between openness and control, as well as secrecy and transparency, especially in the foreign policy context. In conclusion, the analysis suggests that blogging is part of an evolution and does not amount to a revolution in political communication and public diplomacy. I thus argue that in their adoption of new technology, the government moves from a *new technology experimental phase* to a *new technology consolidation phase*.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Force is never more operative than when it is known to exist but is not brandished ~ Alfred Thayer Mahan

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AWC = Afghan Women's Council

BCT = Brigade Combat Teams

DCC = Digital Communications Center

DoD = Department of Defense

FSO = Foreign Service Officer

FSS = Foreign Service Specialist

MSM = Mainstream media

PRT = Provincial Reconstruction Team

PD = Public diplomacy

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Chapter 1: **INTRODUCTION CHAPTER**

Discussions of American power in the 21st century are not without controversy. In a post-9/11 world, the United States is still the biggest military power. Economically, the U.S. economy is also still powerful despite claims of economic decline and heightened competition from rivals such as China and India. Within this discussion, media power is an important element in today's globalized era, and political science and international relations are finally beginning to incorporate media and communications into assessments of societies and individuals. Over the past decades, the study of media and communications has made great strides as an academic discipline and has become an increasingly important field of research. The rhetoric of globalization, which once focused primarily on economic inter-dependence, is shifting its emphasis to recognize the way in which modern media mediate political, economic, cultural and social relations across the globe (Rantanen, 2004).

The impacts of media on policy making have also become a subject of focus for political communication and international relations scholars alike. Beyond traditional media, the Internet has also increasingly engendered changes in the way foreign affairs are conducted, conceived, and reported on. While there was doubt whether the Internet was having any impact on foreign policy at the beginning of this project in 2007, by 2011, in the aftermath of Wikileaks, the study of online activity by governments has become increasingly pertinent for

making sense of the challenges and interactions that take place in the information age, and has increased the impetus for conducting this research.

Today, we live in an era abundant with Internet-enabled communication technology, and political communication has had to tailor its messages to fit the tools available.

When I began looking into the role of the Internet in various aspects of political communication, the main discussion revolved around e-government, and after 2004, around blogging. To date, however, as will be explored in the literature review, most of the political communication literature concerning blogs has focused on the context of domestic election campaigns or on national domestic issues, citizen political blogging and mainstream media (MSM) blogs. The Second Gulf War marked the advent of blogging in government when soldiers began blogging from the battlefield to recount their own narratives of the war; it was not long before the government entered the blogosphere to set up its own version of events. In general, a growing number of researchers are beginning to look at the impacts of social media on government, but official blogs still account for a minute proportion of the research. To address this gap, this project explores foreign policy communication from the prism of the State Department blog.

After setting this study within a brief historical context of American political communication, and recounting the story of the advent of government blogging, this chapter highlights the initial aims and objectives that made this research worth pursuing. The theoretical framework for this inquiry is articulated within the multi-disciplinary field of political communication, a domain of study that

systematically examines the structures and interactions of media and communications within the larger political actors and structures in society; and public diplomacy, a growing field in its own right that seeks to advance the communication of a country's foreign policy, not only to foreign audiences, but also to domestic audiences. The main assumption here is that domestic and foreign policy are becoming increasingly inter-linked in political communication.

This research is important because of the advent of blogs and blogging as a new arena for politics and political communication in which the state is beginning to play an important role. While some argue that new information and communication technologies are revolutionizing or transforming the way politics is conducted, others emphasize that the new form of communication enabled by new media retains old patterns of political communication. This thesis is located within the latter part of the spectrum and adopts a critical view of so-called cyber-optimism. It conceives of new media and the blogging medium as a tool that enables a new style of communication, through personalization, but which retains limited capacity for transformation of political communication.

This research's originality further lies in the theorization of government blogging in the context of foreign policy. In the 21st century, this means discerning how the conduct of foreign policy has re-adapted to the information age and professionalized to keep up with global communication advances, while non-coercively maintaining domination through its discourse. Although the political communication literature has been steadily increasing its focus on blogs and

blogging, it has overwhelmingly focused on the domestic election campaign context and needs to widen its scope of exploration to public diplomacy.

The role of ICTs in diplomacy and international relations is still being explored today but it has become clear that the new public diplomacy has quickly adapted to the social media era – otherwise commonly labelled as Web 2.0 – and, as will be argued, has become part of the practice of public diplomacy. It was thus necessary to contextualize the case of the State Department blog within the literature on public diplomacy and foreign news management. Social media provide the capacity for engagement and participation, which poses interesting questions as to how far the government can implement and balance these with its own interests.

In an attempt to make some claims about the entrance of the government to the blogosphere in the realm of foreign policy, the research question of this project is to determine the relative importance of professionalization, personalization, and ideology in influencing content on the foreign policy blog of the U.S. government. The related concepts of professionalization and personalization have been studied in political communication but have seldom been considered in the context of public diplomacy. In addition to contributing to our understanding of these processes in this case study, this research will contribute to the related theories of soft power and hegemony in the digital era. It is important to note that technological development impacts all three concepts outlined here. Indeed, personalization is encouraged by the diary-format of the entries of the blog (to be discussed further in the subsequent discussion on blogging as a genre),

professionalization is relevant to the application of the blogging technology as a tool for publicity, and in terms of ideology, a blog is another technological medium to spread the message in a new format. The concepts put forth here, specifically professionalization and hegemony theory, have proven to be problematic in the context of understanding the underlying processes of foreign policy communication in the blog context. In light of the results of the study, I will in this thesis propose new ways to further a more complex and nuanced understanding of digital diplomacy.

1.1   Foreign news management: A brief historical context

In order to grasp the evolutionary process of American political communication in the context of foreign policy, it is important to contextualize the research within the historical development of foreign news management strategies from past administrations. In 1917, President Wilson's Committee on Public Information controlled the news about WWI (Maltese, 1994). Even before the advent of radio, which became a key disseminator of political communication to the public, messages were disseminated through performances of the so-called "Four-Minute Men" (Maltese, 1994) around the country. In the revised literature, two major events stand out in discussions of media influence on foreign policy: the *Spanish-American War of 1898*, with the advent of the Yellow Press that evidently stirred public opinion (Craig & George, 1983; Seib, 1996), and the Vietnam War, with the advent of television as a medium for war coverage (Culbert, 1998; Hallin, 1986; Hammond, 1998). Preliminary research on the period between *WWII* and the *Vietnam War* suggests that the media were largely compliant with the government's foreign policy news management (Casey, 2001;

Leigh, 1976; Steele, 1985). This includes the period of WWII under Roosevelt, the Korean War under Truman, the Cold War under Eisenhower, the Cuban Missile Crisis under Kennedy, and the Vietnam War under the Johnson-Nixon administration.

The Vietnam War occupies a large place in the memory of politicians and the media. Hammond's (1998) seminal study of military – media relations during the Vietnam War is a robust complement to Hallin's (1986) study of the U.S. media coverage of the Vietnam War. Both come to the conclusion that ultimately, the media were not responsible for the end of support for the war; it was the failure of policy in Vietnam, political divisions among the elites in Washington, and public dissatisfaction with the rising costs of the war, which pressured the government into ending the military operations. This is not to say that the media were passive or reactive; reporters in Saigon were a major concern for Washington, and the government was constantly preoccupied by news reports and interpretations of events which it was often unable to control. The media proved to be adversarial to the military command and to the government at important times, such as after the Tet Offensive, or in revealing the illegal use of napalm by the army on live television. However, the power over news frames largely rested with the elites and the media remained a subset within the larger mainstream establishment. Since Vietnam, a number of wars have attracted a large number of studies—from Cold War events to the first Gulf War and most recently the Iraq War of 2003, and the debate surrounding media-state relations has continued to rage.

Han's (2001) examination of the U.S. administrations' communication strategies from Kennedy to Clinton—with the coming of age of television—was a very useful starting point for historical comparisons of presidents' press relations.

> Each administration has a different game plan, but most administrations during the last half of the twentieth century seem to have built on those of previous administrations, usually learning something from the mistakes of other presidents or continuing activities that were successful. (p. 261)

Except for mentioning the Vietnam War under the Johnson-Nixon era, Han's focus on domestic policy nevertheless leaves out a crucial discussion of foreign policy. Han does not mention any important crisis fundamental to understanding the way present administrations handle communication strategies. Under the Kennedy administration, for instance, the Cuban Missile Crisis was the first major event to be announced directly to the nation on television without the media or the public having prior notice that a crisis was emerging. Another critique of Han concerns her reference to trends showing presidents going public more often over time; comparisons between Clinton and Bush reversed this trend. White House correspondent for the New York Times, David Sanger, reveals that in comparison to Clinton's era, the Bush White House is "more closed mouthed in general" (Jones, 2002, p. 9). Another journalist describes the tightly controlled information environment under President Bush and inserts a historical note that reflects on other periods in American history:

> ...The Bush administration is one of the most secretive—and Imperial—presidencies in recent memory. Members of Congress have complained— without much success—about the lack of access to information they are getting on failures at government agencies before 9/11...and the presence of biochemical weapons in Iraq. The war in Afghanistan was fought under rules for the news

> media that were even more restrictive than the
> tightly controlled pool reports from the Persian Gulf
> War—not to mention the relative openness of
> reporting from Vietnam and World War II. (Hall,
> 2003, p. 119)

That Vietnam and World War II were arguably less censored is a claim that deserves further research and is not the objective of this thesis. Indeed, it is enough to state that, after 9/11, national security concerns were able to overshadow all other concerns and silence many critics on the grounds of patriotism. The White House was able to manage the press successfully and cautiously, from using pre-packaged news reports (see Barstow (2008) for an examination of the *New York Times* 'Pentagon-TV analysts' affair) to staging scripted press conferences. When asked about the best way for the president to deal with the press during an interview, now former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice once made an interesting comment about controlling the message in the information age:

> He or she should try to get across a straightforward
> and simple message, and keep repeating it. The best
> example in this respect was Ronald Reagan. You
> couldn't spend a lot of time in the press spinning him,
> interpreting and analysing him, because he was what
> he was and meant what he meant. I think that's the
> best way to deal with the press. (Kralev, 2000, p. 87)

The reference to Reagan is revealing of the role of this historical memory in presidential-press relations. I use the term 'historical memory' loosely here to refer to the way in which the past is socially re-interpreted, and how presidents in this case retrospectively select and view important media-state relations events symbolically. Such 'memories' of the modern communication machine in the government include presidents' interactions with the press in WWII through to Vietnam, continuing through the Cold War, and today with the "War on

Terror". Foreign policy is indeed a central concern for the American government. For each administration, foreign policy is the centre-stage to presidential preoccupations, taking up "as much as two-thirds" (Hess, 2002, p. 17) of a President's time. In *Organizing the Presidency,* Stephen Hess (2002) argues that:

> This is true even if his interests had been mainly in domestic issues. He takes trips abroad, attends summit meeting, hosts heads of state at the White House...But he also turns to foreign policy because it is the area in which he has the most authority to act and, until recently, the least public and congressional restraint on his actions. Moreover, history usually rewards the foreign policy president, and the longer a president stays in office, the larger his place in history looms before him. (p. 17)

Of all the presidents since Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy's interactions with the press are largely documented as being the most harmonious. Perhaps this reputation survives upon the aura of his short-lived presidency. He was also the first president to appear on television. Despite the advancement in both technology and communication strategy, Kennedy still stands out as the "epitome of a successful president during the television age of politics" (Han, 2001, p. 8). Interestingly, the president who comes close to appealing in such a positive way to the media decades later is George W. Bush. Even before being elected and before 9/11, which many documented as being the patriotic catalysts for positive media coverage, "*Time* and *Newsweek* magazine covers ...praised candidate Bush as the 'Son Rising' in a new Kennedy style dynasty" (Hall, 2003, p. 116). Researchers are already beginning to re-assess this image in the media, which Bush was able to use to sway public opinion, especially in the light of his foreign policy debacles. When this thesis was written, Barack Obama rose to the stage of American politics and was elected the 44th president of the United States. Armed

with a media-savvy team that will undoubtedly reshape media-state relations, it was thus deemed interesting for this research to follow-up on the evolution of social media adoption under the Obama administration.

1.2   **Public diplomacy**

Scholars frequently attribute the term public diplomacy (PD) to Edmund Gullion, a distinguished career Foreign Service Officer and dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, who coined the term in 1965. Historically, however, some argue that the term and practice of public diplomacy dates back to the 1800s (Cull, 2006). Perhaps it has long been in practice under different names even before that, but what is of most concern here is not so much the history of the terminology, but more the debates around public diplomacy. The main controversy that has plagued the concept of public diplomacy is the heavily contested relationship between public diplomacy and propaganda, discussed in the next chapter.

During the Cold War, public diplomacy was actively pursued in the fight against communism, but when the Soviet Union crumbled it was cast aside because of the lesser perceived threat to American power. The terrorist attacks on the United States on 9/11 triggered not only a new foreign policy direction, but also a renewed deliberation around the value and application of public diplomacy as part of the quest to win hearts and minds. Perceptions of the United States in the Islamic world were a dominant focus of this attention and the Middle East was to become the stage of the U.S. "War on Terror".

The strategies involved in public diplomacy are important to consider because governments use diplomatic communication not only to speak to the world, but also to communicate their foreign affairs agenda to a domestic audience and the national press. As Wang (2006) effectively notes,

> with [a] changing global political and economic landscape, the proliferation of media and communication technologies, the emergence of new players in global affairs…and most of all, the complex confluence of these facets, the credibility and effectiveness of standard communication practices in public diplomacy is increasingly under challenge. (p. 92)

The full verdict on the Bush administration's communication strategies is yet to come out, but there is already a large amount of research on this. As Fritz et al. (2004) state, "The Bush White House features the most sophisticated communication apparatus in American political history" (p. 19). President Obama is likely to challenge this stance as his presidency coincides with the large-scale adoption of social media, as well as the incorporation of technology in the conduct of foreign policy, such as that discussed in this thesis. Nevertheless, this thesis is confined to the first year of the Obama administration, and is thus limited in scope with regard to administrational differences in the long-run.

1.3 New media meets politics

To keep up with the volatile information age and the advent of the Internet, the political sphere has had to adapt. Perhaps the most used term in the literature to describe current media-state relations is "media politics" (Holtz-Bacha, 2002). Since the Roosevelt era in World War II, public opinion and the press have been the subject of important research in foreign policy decision-making, but it is safe

to suggest that the degree to which presidents take into account the media in foreign policy communication is of a higher intensity today. As Perloff (1990) states, "politics is communicated much differently today than in earlier eras, in large part because the modern news media function not only as conduits for communication, but also as major power centres whose structures and routines powerfully influence the content and form of politicians' communications with the public" (p. 10). In today's media-rich environment, the structure and management of high-level foreign policy is thus constantly taking the media into account. To confront these large power nodes, the outlets for foreign affairs information are numerous: the White House, the State Department, the National Security Council, the Department of Defense, the CIA, the FBI, and the Department of Homeland Security. These are the key communications machines, although there are other branches of government that also source their own information on international affairs (Congress, for instance).

The past decade of research on communication and foreign policy interaction has assessed the implications of technological developments for the balance of power between the media and government. Although my research will not be geared towards this area of political communication research on war reporting, it was useful to review the scholarship on the so-called *CNN Effect* so as to further contextualize the research (e.g. Livingston, 1997; Robinson, 2002; Gilboa, 2005). Scholars have used various terms and definitions to describe this phenomenon, but for the purposes of this thesis a workable definition by Gilboa was deemed sufficient:

> *Mediademocracy,   medialism,   mediapolitik,
> mediacracy, and teledemocracy* are but a few
> fashionable terms coined to describe this new media
> dominated political system. Application of the same
> perception to foreign policy and international
> relations yielded similar terms and concepts such as
> *telediplomacy* and the *CNN effect*. (Gilboa, 2002a, p.
> 5)

Officials continue to claim that the media is increasingly powerful. Former UN

Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's reference to the media as the "16th

member of the Security Council" appeared in much of this literature (Boutros-

Ghali et al., 1995), but scholarly evidence is more supportive of the media

alignment with elites' points of view in foreign affairs coverage. During wartime,

the media follow their governments' line and report the news on foreign policy

from the angle of the decision-makers because of issues of access. Boyd-Barrett

(2004) notes that even if

> recent improvements in communication technologies
> have removed some of the physical impediments to
> multilateral coverage... there is little evidence so far
> of these being seriously put to use by mainstream
> media for the purpose of achieving greater balance
> and a broader perspective. (p. 29)

In sum, what is most relevant to media-state relations in the CNN-Effect literature

is that technological advances have important implications for the conduct of

politics, and more precisely for this discussion, foreign policy.

The environment in which politics functions today has been radically

transformed. Blumler (2001) argues that political communication has developed

into its third age; the first (late 1940s to 1950s) was marked by easy access to

mass media, the second by the power of media as an institution, and the current

third age by a multiplication of communication channels, beyond the mainstream

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media, where the Internet is a new player. Because of an increasingly omnipresent and powerful press, a decline in the appeal of political parties, and a fragmented yet media-sophisticated electorate, candidates are gradually more reliant on consultants to efficiently tailor their image to voters (Blumler & Gurevitch, 2001; Esser & Spanier, 2005; Swanson, 1997). An interesting paper by Fasce (2007) usefully traces political PR in the U.S. since 1939, showing that communication professionals over time helped build the image of the American way of life during the war. Today, public relations firms, media experts, advertising agencies, polling and political consultants have entered the political scene to boost election campaign performance. Political parties, particularly in the United States but also abroad, are currently facing this different campaigning landscape, and the only way to survive and appeal to today's party-alienated citizens is to alter their strategies according to a changing external environment (Gibson & Römmele, 2001). As a way of keeping up with the changing trends of modernity in the 21st century, elections are now treated as business-like (Gibson & Römmele, 2001; Scammell, 1995), and the political campaign is increasingly aimed at selling the candidate as a product (Newman, 1994). Once an election is won and the new White House staff settles in, Hess (2002) explains that the political professionals of the administration transfers newcomers' skills from the campaign trail to the way it conducts everyday politics: "they bring to their jobs an understanding of the president-elect, loyalty, and in some cases a set of skills that are transferable from the campaigns, such as *press relations* [own emphasis]" (Hess, 2002, p. 12). In this way, professionalization that is classically employed in the analysis of election campaigns can be transferred to an analysis outside of the election campaign.

The literature on the Internet and politics was a preliminary ground for understanding the transformative features and insights of the electronic government age. In general however, the literature on e-politics is overly descriptive and was only useful to the extent that it provided a context for the study of how governments are facing the digital age (Axford & Huggins, 2001; Bridgmon & Milewicz, 2004; Chadwick, 2006; Norris, 2000). Blogs and blogging were mostly excluded from the discussions of Internet politics, and when they were discussed (as in Chadwick, 2006, p. 305 for instance), there was no mention of government blogging. The government has been keeping up with the change in technology by gradually adopting social media. Indeed, "the transformative power of the social media on the government is often described as a paradigm shift" (Soon Ae et al., 2010, p.5). Research is still on-going into the way in which social media as a disruptive technology has been making changes to service allocation, decision and policy making, administration, governance and the larger implications for democracy. In this thesis the focus is on foreign policy communication and public diplomacy.

1.4   Government Blogging

Following the advent of radio and television, the Internet has more recently been incorporated into the apparatus of political communication. Specifically, blogging has emerged as an increasingly vital forum for political debate and analysis in the United States. It has now become "part of the style, content, form, and function of politics and public affairs" (Perlmutter, 2008, p. xv). Compared to the traditional definition of a blog as "personal webpage diary" (Ward & Cahill, 2007, p. 2), an

official government blog "tends to tell the story of a specific government agency, or a single official's point of view and experiences" (Griesen, 2008, p. 1). As Griesen (2008) keenly notes,

> [Particularly in the past year] more and more federal government officials and agencies are blogging and using other forms of social media to communicate directly with the public. Most are posting multiple times per week - if not daily - and publishing comments that meet criteria defined in published commenting policies. (p. 1)

Research on government blogging is, however, still in its early stages, and our understanding of the phenomenon is therefore limited. It is not very clear, for example, what underlying processes shape the content on the blog. In this thesis I will attempt to shed light on issues of power, and the role of ideology at the heart of government blogging, in order to contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon of government blogging in the context of foreign policy.

Figure 1 - *Dipnote* **homepage (2007)**
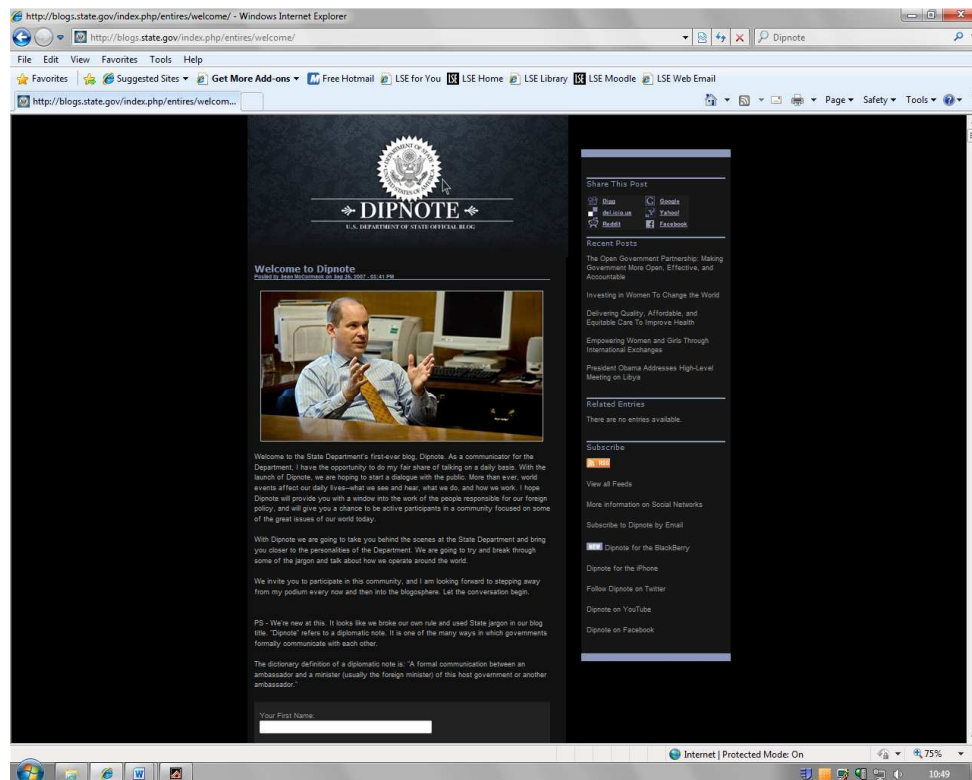
Dipnote is a good example of blogging as a tool of public diplomacy because it is the official foreign policy blog of the American government. Before delving into the proposed case study, it is important to explore the government's motivations for entering the blogosphere and make a few points about the context of the blogosphere. In the vast blogging community, and within a media-saturated environment, official blogs have the potential to tap into this new landscape to contribute their own posts and links to information. In more general terms, blogging enables the government to "generate buzz and interest, encourage repeated visits to the blog and associated websites, and increase page ranks with the major search engines" (Wyld, 2007, p. 69). This allows the government to add its influence in the blogosphere by including its comments and views on the

issues discussed therein. In the new Web 2.0 era, Wyld (2007) published the first and only reports on the government in the context of the blogging revolution.

Blogging is a subset of a large sea of web activity and interactions. The size of the blogosphere is increasing each day and it is often hard to make any projections or definite claims because changes take place in only a couple of months. According to Technorati's (2008) report, there were, at that time, 133 million blogs. In the United States, blogging as a publishing industry has been growing exponentially, as has its political impact. Its political importance derives from two major trends: the efforts of candidates to campaign in the blogosphere since 2004, and the fact that in 2006, the U.S. government provided legal rights to bloggers which translate into an official recognition of the medium by the political establishment:

> In March 2006…the FEC [Federal Election Commission] extended blogs the same exemptions afforded to newspapers and broadcasters…Some state courts and legislatures have also granted bloggers the same right given to mainstream journalists to protect their sources…[and] the First Amendment provides bloggers with constitutional protection of free speech. (Reynolds, 2006, p. 9-11)

In summary, these developments signify the rise of blogging and bloggers on the political scene and make the subject an important one to research. Much media attention has been centred on "warblogs" in which so-called war bloggers comment on current political events related to conflict and war, addressing post-9/11 events and issues (Herring et al., 2007). Even more interesting for the subject of foreign news management is that blogging grew in prominence in reaction to a foreign policy decision to enter the war in Iraq in 2003. Johnson and Kaye (2007) argue that, while newsgroups enabled individuals to share news and

personal information during the first Gulf War, blogs flourished in the second Gulf War, enabling sharing of news about the war, and soldiers to keep in touch with their families.

During the war, journalists began relying on war blogs for analysis that provided an alternative to mainstream news sources. It was also during this time that the mainstream media began their own blogging sites to express their views on the war and the situation in Iraq. The government's frame of the war was also being challenged by the war blogs; in fact, the military censored or shut down several "milblogs"—blogs posted by soldiers in Iraq—because of fear that they could contradict the military's official version of events or breach operational security (Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2006; Johnson & Kaye, 2007). Also around this time, the media ecology began to adapt in response to the prominence of blogs, greatly affecting media-state relations. Chadwick (2006) argues that the media environment changed during the Iraq war, as a result of the Internet's use by both terrorist groups within Iraq, and the larger Al Qaeda network, and by the same anti-war movements that propagated alternative news about the war online.

In the face of this new online news and information challenge, blogs thus emerged as a forum of political discussion. To confront this transformation, the government had either to publish or lose its own version of the story; it effectively decided to take on the digital sphere. In January 2007, America.gov, geared towards foreign audiences, was launched by the State Department, although the site had stopped publishing any new material by March 2011 and has since directed all of its audiences to the State Department website. The first

blog post by the State Department was documented as being posted by John Bellinger III, Legal Adviser to the Secretary of State, in a guest blog entry on Oinio Juris, a blog about international law and international relations (Dale, 2009). By 2007, the State Department had launched its blog as an adaptation to this new information age. The regional focus of the Middle East on *Dipnote* to be analyzed here will thus enable an analysis of the kind of messages and versions of events that are circulated in the online world by the State Department. Most importantly, it will clarify exactly how this government blog was used in a particular foreign policy context.

In its approach to the challenges posed by war blogging, the government acted in the same way that mainstream media first handled bloggers, by attacking them. Tremanyne (2007) described the pattern by which the media handled the blogging challenge:

> First, mainstream media attacked the blog. They were insignificant, filled with errors and lacking in credibility. Some of this continues but this stage is mostly finished. Second, mainstream media embraced the blogs…evidenced by nearly universal adoption and incorporation of the word "blog" on major newspaper and broadcast news websites. (p. xvi)

The American government is arguably at the second stage, that of enacting its own official blogs. After first trying to suppress soldiers from publishing blogs, it met a storm of criticism from the blogosphere, and decided in response to develop new formal blogging regulations for online content, which do not interfere with operational security, and it incorporated new rules for reporting blogs to officers in the Army, in order to monitor activity. This move symbolized

the shift from seeing new media as a threat, to exploiting its use by soldiers for the purpose of advancing the Army's story, in order to win hearts and minds during wartime.

It is important here to understand how the technology of blogging has been transforming the operations of news management. As a case in point, *Dipnote* was launched as the first-ever official blog of the U.S. Department of State:

> Blog.state.gov offers the public an alternative source to mainstream media for U.S. foreign policy information. This blog offers the opportunity for participants to discuss important foreign policy issues with senior Department officials. (U.S. Department of State, 2007a)

All of the contents since 2007 are neatly archived in this government blog, making the data easy to access. This wealth of information thus presents research scholars with a formidable opportunity to delve into the content of government blogging, beyond the national election campaign and in the context of foreign policy. My research considered other U.S. government blogs (USA.gov, 2009) but *Dipnote* was most relevant for my original research motivations, focusing on foreign policy and public diplomacy. Other agencies that could have been included in this category are not directly relevant and are beyond the scope of this study. Examples are the Department of Defense (2008) blog, which focuses on soldiers and the Army, and the Department of Homeland Security (2008) blog, which focuses on a multitude of issues of border security.

In terms of social media policy and regulations, the U.S. government does not yet have an official template to follow and therefore each department acts of its own

accord. The literature largely attributes the move towards social media adoption as a response to President Obama and the "Transparency and Open Government Memorandum" (Obama, 2009) which called for an "unprecedented" level of participation, collaboration and transparency, even though efforts began under previous administrations (most notably, the blog of the State Department and the Department of Defense, began under President Bush). With the Obama administration however, there is a new professionalism of the social media strategy, in terms of the setting up of the White House Office of New Media, the Federal Web Managers' Forum, and the General Service Administration's Office of Digital Government (GSA) (Mergel, 2011). The State Department has a social media policy that was published in 2010 (roughly two years after *Dipnote* started operating) in the 'Foreign Affairs Manual' (5 FAM 790: Using social media 2010) alongside other manuals for federal websites and the office of the Secretary of State. The manual recognizes that "social media provide an important means for the Department to fulfil its lead role in conduct of U.S. foreign policy" (ibid). It provides guidance on the following areas and addresses its use for public affairs and public diplomacy activities which I propose to explore in this thesis:

> (1) Conduct internal and external collaboration within State and between the Department and other Federal Government agencies;
> (2) Conduct diplomatic activities with non-U.S. Government organizations and individuals on controlled-access Web sites that are not available to the general public;
> (3) Use for official consular, public affairs and public diplomacy activities on Web sites that are available to the general public 5 FAM 790: Using social media 2010)

The State Department has a Digital Communications Center (DCC), operating under the Bureau of Public Affairs, that maintains its official blog *Dipnote*, as well

as other social media platforms and networks such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Flickr. By comparison, the official website of the Department is operated by the Office of Electronic Information and Publications, also under the umbrella of the Bureau of Public Affairs.

1.5   Aims and motivations

The aim of this doctoral thesis is to conduct an in-depth examination of an official government blog, and thereby contribute to our understanding of the recent entry of the State into the blogosphere. It will assess the potential of the blog as a new tool for foreign policy communication, and ask how this technological tool facilitates the emergence of a new way of presenting foreign policy activities to the public, and how power and ideology are articulated through the blog content. In ideological terms, the content on the blog is understood in this study as a form of communication that advances certain narratives and policies and undermines or neglects others. It will also contribute theoretically to an area that has not been able to provide a theoretical framework for understanding government blogs compared with other types of blogs. In the existing literature, blogs have been theorized as emerging agenda-setters in their relationship with the mainstream media (Wallsten, 2007), as "soap boxes" to spread the message (McKenna, 2007), and as "information cocoons and echo chambers" for those with similar ideologies (Sustein, 2007). The debate in political communication is mostly about the blog as a forum for debate or tool of governance and the democratic implications therein, or blogging as political communication during electoral campaigns. Some of this literature applies to government blogging, but I sought to delve deeper into the management of blogging to understand the

governmental context better, as well as to explore the content in the context of foreign policy.

The attempt at theorizing federal or government blogging was a daunting one due to the dearth of research on the topic. This thesis thus critically reviews the literature from several disciplines in an effort to conceptualize government blogging within them. Blogs were originally platforms mainly occupied by private citizens and later the mainstream media, and have garnered scarce but growing attention from academic research. The State Department's *Dipnote* , the official foreign policy blog of the U.S. government, was chosen among other official blogs as a case study because it publishes foreign affairs content for the American public and international audiences. In 2007–2008 when this research was begun, federal agency blogging was just beginning to flourish, and by 2011 almost every federal department in the US government maintained a blog. The latest findings suggest that "[a]lmost every month USA.gov posts several new federal blogs aimed at some part of the public" (Mahler & Regan, 2011, p. 3). In the area of foreign policy and international relations, there is also a major presence of blogs for every Department in the U.S. government, including most prominently the State Department and the Department of Defense, but also the Navy and others (for a full list see (USA.gov, 2011)).

An additional motivation for carrying out this empirical study is to provide a historical record that contributes to our understanding of the evolution of foreign policy communication and of the assumed role new media technologies play, not only in terms of the distribution of messages to the public but potentially also in

engaging the public. Existing assumptions about the blog's capacity for fostering participation, engagement, and interactivity will be critiqued. It will assess how the state is using the blog as a digital platform, and how it is able to adapt or not to the Web 2.0. era and the type of content emitted. It will allow for an understanding of the framing of Middle East foreign policy on *Dipnote,* which sets itself out to challenge the blogosphere and mainstream media in the context of the blogging era. In the context of blogs, as will be discussed in the methodology chapter, which issues are discussed will be indicators of how the American foreign policy blogs frame the discussion of the Middle East, how the narrative is personalized, and how this relates or not to the main ideological framework of each administration. What will also be important and interesting is which issues are not mentioned, as this will help derive a holistic understanding of the purpose of the blog for foreign policy communication.

The Middle East was chosen as an area of focus because it has been the foreign policy priority of both administrations since 9/11. As Dutton et al. (2011) observe, through their research on the larger public diplomacy initiatives of the State Department, "the past five years have witnessed innovations in American public diplomacy methods towards the Middle East, moving from one-way communication through broadcasting and the print media to a more interactive model in which the government joins the conversation" (p. 1). It is important to note here that, although the State Department's blog falls under the umbrella of public diplomacy, this study focuses on *Dipnote* as a tool of engagement with the American public more than with foreign audiences (although foreign audiences do visit the site). The insights from the study of public diplomacy are very

relevant to the study of government blogging and have been useful in the conceptual framework. The Middle East was a battleground where active and latent wars were/are being waged in this period of time, and it is an important subject for which the American public holds the United States government accountable. Knowing the sources, variety, and influences of content about the Middle East published on the blog helps this project to understand how the government makes use of this platform as a tool both of persuasion and information during a time of war. To contextualize this research within a field of research, the themes set forth here will be revisited in the literature on media-state relations in the theoretical chapter.

Chapter 2:   **Theorizing Foreign Policy Blogging**

Foreign policy communication is a multi-disciplinary subject. The aim of this chapter is therefore to make a theoretical case for why professionalization, personalization, and ideology are relevant factors shaping official foreign policy blog content and management, and what existing literature predicts in terms of the strength of the relations between these concepts. Reviewing the literature on blogging as a new genre has further helped the understanding of the way in which the interactions and content are enabled by the format. At the time this research was conducted, there was no proper category for blogs run by the government in the literature on blogging, political communication and public diplomacy literature. This is due to the fact that it is, relatively speaking, a new phenomenon. Though the blogosphere, the media, and political elites are increasingly referring to government blogs as a category in their own right, academic research has only recently been interested in the way in which the government is using social media. Because of the dearth of research, the few studies that have been conducted are mainly descriptive and thus have not been thoroughly conceptualized theoretically. When government blogs were mentioned, they were subject to structural similarities and differences with regular blogs, but not recognized as a distinct platform for online publication containing a particular type of content. The lack of theoretical understanding of government blogging thus made the case for this research even more pressing.

2.1   **Public Diplomacy**

Public diplomacy as a field of study has been growing but is still under developed. As Brown (2004) explains, "there is little awareness of it in the theoretical heart

of IR, but it can be found in the endless American studies on the reorganisation of the State Department, in the studies of the operation of NGOs, and in the comments of diplomats and foreign ministers" (p. 14). Most of the works on the subject are thus written by practitioners and career diplomats, and have enriched the discussion but have not elaborated on the theorization of the concept. The literature review suggests that, because of its relative infancy within international relations, this field is still riddled with disagreements over the distinction between public diplomacy and PR, propaganda, marketing strategic communication and advertising (Brown, 2011; Gilboa, 2008).

Of particular interest here is the contested relationship between propaganda and public diplomacy. Some scholars argue that there is no difference between the two concepts, exemplified for instance by Richard Holbrooke's statement after 9/11: "Call it public diplomacy, or public affairs, or psychological warfare, or -- if you really want to be blunt -- propaganda" (Holbrooke, 2001, p. B07). This thesis differs from this position because propaganda is a loaded term that has proven difficult to define; it can be argued that it encompasses almost any information designed to change the opinion of a group. Essentially, the same tools are used in both public diplomacy and propaganda, contributing to the confusion over the differences between the two, but the point to be emphasized here is that propaganda is associated with deceptive techniques and overt manipulation. As John Brown (2008) puts it, "it demonizes elements of the outside world and claims the nation it glorifies can do no wrong" (p. 1). The distinction to be made here is between the deceptive nature of propaganda and the informative nature of public diplomacy to explain a country's foreign policy, engage with audiences,

and promote international understanding. Perhaps the line between deceiving and persuading is very thin, certainly in foreign policy, but it is there nonetheless. It is argued that the emergence of a new public diplomacy in the light of new global realities is a separate form of diplomatic practice that is not necessarily propagandistic (Brown, 2004 ; Melissen, 2005). Brown (2004) defines new public diplomacy (NPD) as originating from "[f]irstly, processes of political change that have pluralized global politics and secondly, the emergence of a global communications infrastructure" (p. 16). In this thesis, blogging is thus conceived as an instrument of new public diplomacy, public diplomacy 2.0.

As noted earlier, the overwhelming focus of blogging research has been on political communication in the domestic context. In the context of foreign policy, the rise of military blogging during the outbreak of the 2003 war in Iraq spurred many studies and prompted the government to begin creating its own content and mark its presence online, first as a counter-weight to the mainstream media. The relationship between media and politics has been theorized using various models, which have been able to capture the importance of foreign policy communication during wartime. To understand *Dipnote* as a blog that partly seeks to challenge the mainstream news media, the theoretical background can be traced back first to the concept of hegemony, linked to soft power, and second, to framing as an important instrument in political communication. These concepts are riddled with constraints, which will be acknowledged below and in the next chapter. As such, they should be read as a starting point for thinking about foreign policy blogging not as a fixed theoretical proposition.

2.1.1 Hegemony

The origins of the concept of hegemony in relation to political theory date back to the Gramscian articulation of power in society, whereby dominance of one group over another is acquired and maintained through subordination rather than force. In defining hegemony, Cox (1983) relates the concept to international relations and helps differentiate its meaning in the field from imperialism, which is restricted to the relations between states. In the context of foreign policy, "[t]he economic and social institutions, the culture, the technology associated with this national hegemony become patterns for emulation abroad" (Cox, 1983, p. 171). The United States gained superpower status after the end of the Cold War through its political-military might, and also through the export of its cultural industry. Given the context of new media in this research, and blogging in particular, the focus here is on cultural hegemony.

The main underlying assumption here is that hegemony is dynamic, not in a fixed, stable state of dominance (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). There is thus no hegemony without counter-hegemonies, against which the hegemon defines itself.

One of the ways in which the hegemon asserts itself is by presenting something that is highly ideological as common sense, unquestionable, and beyond critique. Common sense takes holds when "ideology triumphantly becomes 'banal'" (Sutherland, 2005, p. 194), primarily through the medium of language. In the context of foreign policy, the focus of the analysis in this thesis is on hegemonic discourse as a tool of legitimation. The use of discourse as a salient instrument in the production of both social power and resistance, and the link between

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hegemony and discourse theory, will inform the textual analysis of blog posts and comments, as will be reviewed in the methodology chapter.

Perhaps the most predictable critique of hegemony is that it is a concept that is outdated for understanding processes in an era when the Internet has become a central force in political communication. While this critique has to be taken seriously, I argue that hegemony is still a useful concept to understand current social and political phenomena in international relations and the role of the new digital landscape in them. Scholars are only beginning to unearth how offline forms of dominance mesh with new technological tools. The US control over the management of the Internet through ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers), or what some call "America's Internet Hegemony" (A tussle over America's Internet hegemony, 2005), is a case in point.

Another classic criticism of hegemony in the cultural industries is that the receivers of content are presumed to be passive. The theoretical framework in this study leaves room for resistance as outlined by Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) understanding of hegemony mentioned above. However, this study looks at the production of hegemonic narratives not at effects of reception. A logical follow-up critique would then be how one can speak about hegemony without studying reception. It is argued here that focusing on the production side will still provide us with an important insight on how foreign policy and public diplomacy are adapting to the digital context and the precise role of discourse embedded in the content, but does indeed not allow us to make any claims on how these discourses are decided.

This thesis' theoretical propositions rely upon neo-Gramscian perspectives that have reinterpreted Gramci's concept of hegemony for a variety of contexts and purposes and that can usefully inform the understanding of power dynamics in the context of digital foreign policy. Neo-Gramscian theorists (Bieler & Morton, 2004; Cox, 1983; Iseri, 2007) apply a critical theory framework to international relations whereby historical materialism is a key approach and whereby the hegemon constitutes a 'historic bloc' or societal class that is able to dominate through institutions, ideas, and material capabilities (Bieler & Morton, 2004). In this context neo-Gramscians argue that a neoliberal historic bloc promoted by the United States has taken hold since the 1970s in the world. Lears (1985) further argues that cultural hegemony takes hold when the world view of a historical blog appeals to many groups in society and to do so must show shared interests across society:

> Whether one imagines hegemony to be relatively open or relatively closed, the essence of the concept is not manipulation but legitimation. The ideals, values, and experiences of dominant groups are validated in public discourse; those of subordinate groups are not, though they may continue to thrive beyond the boundaries of received opinion. As Gramsci understood it, the hegemonic culture depends not on the brainwashing of "the masses" but on the tendency of public discourse to make some forms of experience readily available to consciousness while ignoring or suppressing others. (571)

In light of this interpretation, this study aims to make some generalized claims about how hegemony operates in the context of blogs through the case study of a government blog by precisely attempting to examine what is ignored or suppressed, compared with what is presented. It does not, however, pretend to

speak for all dynamics of hegemony, for which future studies are needed. The concept of cultural hegemony adds values to the analysis of government blog content production by enabling it to go deeper into the power relations that may or may not be reflected in this new platform. The essence of its value to this study lies in exposing how the US government uses the blog as a tool of legitimation. It is thus possible to make claims about hegemony from the case study of the official foreign policy blog of the U.S. government by studying how the Middle East is portrayed, mainly through a focus on the language and the issues it raises. As will be argued, the government's legitimation of foreign policy draws upon the "symbolic architecture of power" (Chadwick, 2001) reflected on the blog.

Cultural hegemony can be achieved through any non-military means, including culture and the media. "Coercion is always latent but is only applied in marginal, deviant cases" (Cox, 1983, p. 164). It thus depends upon intellectual, moral and cultural persuasion or consent without resorting to any type of force (Iseri, 2007). The source of power grounded in non-coerciveness intimately links the concept of hegemony and that of soft power. The term soft power, normally attributed to Joseph Nye (1990; 2002; 2004), has been analytically used and disputed in many discussions on American power and public diplomacy in the 21st Century. According to Joseph Nye Jr., soft power is the "power of attraction that is associated with ideas, cultures, and policies" (Nye, 2002, p. 60). Along with political values, moral authority, and culture, a country's communications resources thus further reinforce soft power (Sriramesh & Verčič, 2003).

Related to cultural hegemony, soft power as a concept has been plagued by many weaknesses. On the one hand it covers anything that does not fall under military or economic power, rendering it all-encompassing and malleable in different contexts. Such vagueness has attracted much criticism from scholars across international relations. Many have refused to differentiate fully between soft power and hard power, suggesting that both are co-dependent, or that without military force a country cannot have influence in soft power (Gilboa, 2008). The theoretical limitations of the concept have led Brown (2004), for instance, to argue that it "is incoherent as it combines several separable mechanisms that need to be treated separately" (p. 22). It is indeed hard to distinguish between what is at play, whether it be soft power or other elements. Nye himself attempted to address the criticism of the concept by putting forth a new concept of "smart power" (Wilson III, 2008), to combine both hard power and soft power.

These issues are yet to be resolved but at this point being aware of these limitations helps to make use of the concept in this study to inform the theoretical framework and also revisit their validity for the results of this study to perhaps move the concept forth into new horizons. It should be acknowledged here that soft power is only 'powerful' if and only when it is backed up by hard power, but soft power plays an important role in not having to resort to hard power and so it is a crucial tool in relation to hegemony. From this position, it makes sense to analyse soft power without denying the importance and presence of hard power; they are in reality complementary. The extent of attraction of US foreign policy in the Middle East is considered in this study through the case of the State Department blog. In this new cyber-stage of politics, the blog is an outlet among

others where a state exhibits its soft power. In this context the concept is useful as it helps frame the discussion of how language and design in the age of internet amount to a display of power.

2.1.2 Framing

Related to hegemony, ideology plays a key part in foreign policy practices. Augelli and Murphy (1998) argue that ideology serves to legitimize the role of foreign policy makers as well as guide their foreign policy implementation. What is of relevance in the context of the Middle East is the perceived decline in American legitimacy in response to President Bush's " War on Terror" doctrine after 9/11, which resulted from a distinctly more unilateral approach to U.S. foreign policy, especially relating to the war in Iraq. Ideology also informs the framing of foreign policy in the mainstream media. At the same time, framing is one of the devices through which political elites sustain hegemony.

The continuum of debate in the literature ranges from the view that elites ultimately have power over media (Chomsky & Herman, 1988; Bennett, 1990; Hallin, 1986; Mermin, 1999; Hafez, 2007) to the view that media have increasing power over policy-making (Meyer, 2002; Culbert, 1998; Cook, 1998).

The literature on post-9/11 media-foreign policy dynamics in the United States is rich yet still in its infancy. As a whole, the scholarly evidence casts doubt on the independence of the media and focuses on the predominance of the White House frame in foreign affairs coverage (Gershkoff & Kushner, 2005; Kern, Just & Norris, 2004; Coe et al., 2004; Finnegan, 2007; Levenson, 2004; Entman, 2003; 2004;

2007). The fact that the Bush administration so successfully justified its foreign policy after 9/11—especially the claims on the war in Iraq which were largely uncritically reported by a number of mainstream media sources—fits within a dominant elite framework.

> For the media have typically failed on numerous counts: to probe state proximate causes of conflict, to prise out deep-level causes, to avoid complicity with state propaganda machinery, to follow and make accurate sense of strategic changes in the course of war, to fully determine the factors explaining the ending of wars, and the aftermath and other implications of war. (Boyd-Barrett, 2004, p. 39)

It is important to note here that the media's rally behind officials is not the result of conspiracy, but is due to the fact that editors, reporters, and employers in the media have political and ideological positions that are similar to the establishment thinking. To explain the salience of the "War on Terror" frames in the news media, Coe et al. (2004) for instance found that the media frequently repeated the binary discourse of the Bush administration after 9/11 (i.e. "good and evil," "security and peril") because of their stylistic, journalistic, cultural, and aesthetic appeal.

The media's role during wartime is intrinsically problematic because of the classic tensions faced by both the military, who must balance national security with public information, and journalists, who must balance reporting the state's foreign policy with critical verification of the facts. The literature on media-state relations during wartime was helpful overall, especially Hallin's (1986) work on elite consensus and the media in Vietnam, Herman and Chomsky's (1988) classic propaganda model, Robinson's (2004) media-policy interaction model, Bennett's

(1990) study of press-state relations in the U.S., and Mermin's (1999) indexing hypothesis. These authors constitute the main theorists in the study of media-state relations, and although they differ along the continuum, their works are systematic and well analyzed. Hudson and Stanier's (1997) examination of the Gulf War on television, and Carruthers' (2000) work on the mass media in modern warfare, were useful, but to a lesser extent because of their lack of account of public relations and the advancement of strategic communications in the U.S. government. The penetration of intelligence sources in the mainstream media, mainly the C.I.A., has been alluded to by many scholars (Allan & Zelizer, 2004; Boyd-Barrett, 2004; Keeble, 2004) but unambiguous evidence of this is limited because of the covert nature of the subject. Official secret documents are usually declassified decades later, and only then will historians be able to verify these claims.

The discussion of framing in the literature refers to the convergences and divergences of media frames vis-à-vis the elite frames, and it is relevant for linking ideology with framing. The ways in which elites frame policies or events should be seen as attempts to present their ideological views as common sense to the public, and the media is a key arena for achieving this goal. Journalistic norms, as well as wider cultural contexts, are responsible for the way foreign news in the United States is framed. Graber (1997) explains that the "problems of producing domestic news are magnified for foreign news making" (p. 355). These include access to the area, financial costs, and availability of correspondents. Reporting foreign policy in the American news must also be understood in the cultural context of American political culture and the habitual

dominant frames that are understood by the audience. Cultural resonance (Entman, 2003; Wolfsfeld, 1997; 2003) thus plays an important role in shaping the frame over media conflict.

Carruthers (2000) goes further to explain that there is a "boundary-blurring process of domestication whereby foreign news is hung on a domestic peg [...] the audience is imagined to share a 'common interest' with their ally" (p. 234). After the 9/11 terrorist attacks on American soil, media coverage remained an important driver in the framing of foreign policy to the public, as the Bush administration dedicated a national campaign to promote the "War on Terror". The government successfully implemented communication strategies to promote the foreign policy agenda, such as framing, which are now fully formatted to fit foreign policy information management. Though these communication strategies are more advanced today, they essentially evolved from previous administrations and onto new media such as blogs.

2.2   Blog genre

2.2.1 Brief overview

Although genre analysis is not one of the methods I use in the research, it was useful to review the literature on blogging as a genre in order to better appreciate this new type of content. It further led me to derive the concepts of interactivity, participation, collaboration, engagement, and transparency which are important in the analyses and the theoretical framework outlined in the next chapter. The literature on blogs as a genre has been limited but has grown considerably since

around the year 2000. Blood (2002) and Herring et al. (2005) were among the first to conduct empirical examinations of the blog's characteristics with respect to the larger genre of the Internet and other offline genres. Interactivity, through links and comments, and collaboration, through the possibility for the reader to become a creator of content, were distilled as the main elements that differentiate the blog as a new genre. Advances in new media, and especially the ability to generate feedback from the public through comments, have opened the door to the possibility of a feedback loop of participation to policy makers and a potential impact over policy-making. The potential for the government to incorporate feedback into its policy formulations is one of the key themes in the literature:

> Emerging Web 2.0 technologies make the process of engaging citizens in policy-making easier and less costly than ever before by providing tools to support knowledge creation and community building; two core aspects of digital-era policy-making...The promise is that digital-engagement technologies will support a policy-making process that integrates policy development and implementation into a seamless and flexible practice of continuous engagement, improvement and innovation. (Tapscott et al., 2008, p. 15)

The excerpt here is techno-optimistic in nature, as is much of the literature that reflects upon the potential for the democratic characteristics of the blogosphere to make an impact on policy, which I would like to attempt to dispute by pointing to the case of federal blogging. What I am critiquing here is the study of blogs in general and the blog's capacity for engagement and transparency, which may have been exaggerated. This research will critically assess what this means for the case of a government blog and add to this area of political communication.

Government blogs are not mentioned in the genre categories, probably because it was only after 2007 that they began to flourish, and even in the last few years into this project, a survey of the literature suggests indeed that "overall, the governmental blogging practices remains one of the most unstudied areas of political blogging" (Criado, 2009, p. 7). The strand of blogging research that focuses on genre analysis attempts to theorize the weblog as a genre from a general stance (Herring et al., 2005; Krishnamurthy, 2002; Miller & Shepherd, 2004). Most of these works fail to mention government blogging in their elaborate typologies, perhaps because it had not yet come of age by the time they were written (i.e. before 2007). Some devoted attention to blogs as a subgenre of political communication and marketing (Sanz, 2007), shedding light on their use during election campaigns, which turned out to be the most frequent context in the study of blogs, as will be reviewed below.

Sanz's (2007) analysis of the generic structure of political weblogs was useful, even when considered outside of the electoral campaign context, as it indicates how the increasing reliance on blogs by elites in media and politics has pushed political communication research to reassess the impact of this new medium. Woodly (2008) notes that the process of political communication itself is changing with the advent of blogs because it is a different genre of communication: "they [blogs] are an immediate, horizontally linked dialogical space, which has the effect of expanding the scope of public space and providing a structure that is closer to conversation than any traditional news medium" (p. 110). He further makes an important distinction between the purpose of blogs as compared with the mainstream media; while the mainstream media can provide

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broad coverage of news, blogs are sites where particular forms of argumentation, persuasion and dialogue can take place.

This point is vital to remember in the context of government blogs. Entries are posted in an effort to *persuade* and draw specific attention to an issue or event, not to offer a news service in traditional terms. This will be the main issue investigated through interviews with the *Dipnote* management, about how they see the use of an official foreign policy blog beyond the advertising value that it can have. The content analysis will aim to break down the framing of the posts by measuring issue selection, to understand exactly how the State Department is using the blog to send particular types of frames and messages about the Middle East.

Within the scant literature, Schmidt (2007) proposes an analytical framework for blogging practices, drawing from sociological theory and blog research based on rules, relations, and codes "where a blogger uses specific software to attain specific communicative goals" (p. 3). The sociological nature of this framework made it difficult to apply to a political communication study because my focus here is mainly on the analysis of content and discourse, not the software. The blogging genre literature was thus useful to the extent that it provides a general backbone to the analysis in this project – the essential blog features such as authorship, interactivity through links, and engagement through comments are measured. Other blog features that make blogging a genre include the presence of RSS feeds, permalinks, and interactive features, which will be referred to in the analysis of the data (Sanz, 2007).

2.2.2 Technical interactivity vs. Social interactivity: Participation & engagement

In this section I want to clarify how I will approach the concepts of interactivity, participation and engagement, because the literature has provided different understandings of each which may confuse their operationalization in this thesis. First, I would like to distinguish between technical interactivity, which is mainly an assessment of the type of links on the government blog, and other notions of interactivity understood as social interaction. Essentially, links make up the blogosphere because "the blogosphere feeds upon, dissects, links to and largely echoes the mainstream news coverage of politics" (Ward & Cahill, 2007, p. 6). Social interactivity, on the other hand, concerns elements of participation, and government engagement with the comments.

The majority of research on blogging focuses on the democratic implications stemming from the possibilities enabled by participation, and how blogs as a participatory medium can create a new arena of public deliberation. This thesis draws on the notion of participation put forth by Carpentier (2007) as "politically-ideologically contested." It refers to the fact that participation is an empty signifier and that different actors will fill this void with different definitions and conceptualisations of what participation entails; for some it is co-deciding, for others consulting for example. The distinction I want to clarify here is between participation and engagement. This thesis focuses on the level of participation as assessed from the analysis of the comments section in the

government blog. It seeks to define the degree and nature of participation, as well as the boundaries of this participation and its ability to affect outcomes.

With regard to engagement, the literature suggests that blogging has emerged as a new tool for civic engagement (Kerbel & Bloom, 2005). This concept is mainly linked to the American understanding of online civic engagement or civic participation, which refers to action by individual(s) on a public issue(s). "Civic engagement can take many forms, from individual voluntarism to organizational involvement to electoral participation" (APA, 2011). In contrast to this definition, this study of engagement instead focuses on how the *government* engages with its audience by responding or not to the comments on its platform, thus relating engagement to power. It refers to the extent to which government is responsive to citizens in creating a dialogue, collaborates on content production, and whether it is able to socially interact with the public for policy input.

2.3 Personalization

2.3.1 Narrative style & immediacy

Another characteristic of the blog genre that was encountered in the genre literature, and also in the political communication literature, has been the personalized, narrative style of blogs. Research suggests that personalization is approached in three distinct ways depending on the context and field of discussion: personalization as a trend in political communication, personalization as a narrative style, and personalization in technological terms (i.e. the ability of users to customize a news page based on personal preferences, for instance). The

first two strands are most relevant for the study at hand. Personalization has its roots in the political system and in political communication it "tends to be more candidate-centered in majority systems like the U.S. and more party-focused in nations that employ proportional representation" (Perloff, 1990, p. 11). Personalization in this context emphasizes the role of a politician's personality in shaping the image of the political party or an emphasis on behaviour and actors, and it is linked to the professionalization of political campaigns (Downey & Satnyer, 2010; Greenstein, 1969; Mancini, 1996; McAllister, 2005). Closely related to personalization, a literature review of political communication revealed another less reported trend of presidentialization (Poguntke & Webb, 2005). It effectively refers to the increasing power of party leaders in democracies, and the personalization of election campaigns in order to appeal to the public.

In the context of online journalism, as Wall (2005) notes in her study of blogs as a new genre of journalism, "the personal outlook of ... bloggers is a key characteristic of how they frame the news" (p. 162). Scholars in general disagree about whether it was the media or the changes in institutions over time that have caused the process of personalization. Wall (2005) argues that the move toward personalization encompasses a larger societal tendency as the "notion of personalized story forms has been identified as a new trend in documentaries...and within magazine journalism" (Wall, 2005, p. 165). The literature on personalization as a distinct feature of the narrative of blogging is also regularly mentioned in works investigating blogs in general, which made the

case for a focus on this style in the context of government, where information offline and on the website is usually of an official and depersonalized nature.

The focus on personalization as defined here is not so much on the subject or personality of the emitter of the message or on the customization of the content, but on style as a way to shape the angle of the content from a personal perspective. Bjerling's (2011) elaboration of personalization differentiates between personification, orientation towards person, and intimization, defined respectively as a person embodying an idea, principle or entity, the orientation towards references to personal attributes, and the trend towards invoking personal attributes in the private realm of the individual. In the wider context of blogs, it is the interaction between private and public information, which informs the theoretical framework.

During the second Iraq War[1] blogging became popular as an alternative news source through bloggers such as Salam Pax and others, mostly because, as Johnson and Kaye (2010) argue, of the personalized narratives that put a face on the eyewitness reporting of war conditions and events. One of the most interesting findings of these studies was that the textual elements of a blog, not the visual elements, create intimacy and spontaneity in the content. The immediacy, or the capacity of blogs to be published and updated immediately, and their reverse chronological order, is accompanied by what is often termed "semantic immediacy" (Miller & Shepherd, 2004), which relies primarily on the use of the present tense, as well as the date and time on each blog post. Wall's

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[1] *The 2003 war in Iraq is referred to by some as the third Iraq war, the first being the Iraq-Iran war in the 1980s.*

(2005) analysis further showed that blogs are recounting stories through "postmodern fragments rather than cohesive reports" (p.113). Essentially, blogging is indeed about telling stories, particularly personal stories. These stories are a central element in the quest to win hearts and minds. As Funcken (2009) argues, blogs can be used not only for the expression of personal thought, but also to express ideology at the abstract level. One is thus able to deconstruct the narratives on *Dipnote* from the perspectives of power and persuasion.

In a study of narratives of war blogs during the Israeli-Lebanese war, Fadda-Conrey (2010) introduced the concept of the cyberblog as a testimony. In the context of war, which is applicable to the research at hand, the concept of testimony in the study of personal blogs adds to the immediacy enabled by the genre and personalizes the experiences of war.

> By drawing the reader into the "now" of the war, thus implicating him/her in the experience of trauma, the cyberblog-as-testimony changes the topography of the war experience, both at home and abroad, thus broadening the impact of this experience and the way it affects its subjects, whether directly or indirectly. (Fadda-Conrey, 2010, p. 164)

This function of testimony is adapted in the context of government to understand how it humanizes the experiences of men and women on the ground. These experiences are not typically included in mainstream media coverage or in official government communications.

2.3.2 Blogging as political communication

In spite of the growing interest in and adoption of political blogs, government blogging has not drawn much research attention and many questions remain

unanswered regarding characteristics of government blogs, which departments within the U.S. government are using blogs, what specific strategies are used in political blogs, and what impact the public and the government expect from blogs. Two of the most prolific scholars on the subject are Julianne Mahler and Priscilla M. Regan. They have enabled my research to compare findings with those of other federal blogs. Related to framing, one of their studies examines message control on the web (Mahler & Regan, 2006); their framework was adapted to the context of federal blogging in this thesis.

Editorial control over *Dipnote* was an important variable in this study; a set of influences on online content were fleshed out from Mahler and Regan's (2006) study, and were partially adapted to guide the sub-questions in the professionalization framework. Political and institutional influences were found to be important for the content of government websites, but as Chadwick (2011) notes, little research has explored the internal institutional variables in the study of electronic government in general. In this thesis I investigate their importance in the context of a government blog operating under the umbrella of the State Department to flesh out the tensions that arise. With regard to the message, adapting from Mergel's (2011) study, I will investigate to what extent control over the message is centralized, decentralized or is part of institutional dynamics.

Mergel (2011) recently conducted interviews with social media directors in government organizations in order to understand adoption decision-making; her findings point to the lack of formal guidelines and the importance of interpersonal networks through public challenges that encourage adoption of

social media applications. Although Mergel (2011) includes blogs in this category, the bulk of the research is on YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter. Beyond e-politics, the literature on political blogging is overall immature and domestically-oriented, but is nonetheless an established sub-field in its own right. In general, there are three research tracks dedicated to the study of the blog: examining blogging as a social narrative, blogs as organizing tools, and blogging as a participatory medium (Lawson-Borders, 2005). Blogging as a phenomenon is mostly researched in the context of domestic election campaigns (Lawson-Borders, 2005; Meraz, 2007; Tremayne, 2007), national domestic issues (O'Brien, 2004), citizen political blogging and mainstream media blogs (Barlow, 2008; Tremayne, 2007), and, most relevant for the research at hand, blogs of war (Johnson & Kaye, 2007; Wall, 2005).

As so-called media pundits are entering the blog scene to express their own take on a variety of issues, with few instances when they have been able to influence the news agenda (such as the infamous Trent Lott and Dan Rather stories for instance), the mainstream media has set up its own blogs, or, in many cases, incorporated political bloggers into media organizations. The political communication literature has been slow overall in responding to these rapid transformations. Indeed, this field of study still overwhelmingly focuses on mainstream news media's impact on political thought and actions. As Ward and Cahill (2007) explain, this focus on the mainstream news media

> was defining and quite legitimate in an age in which mass circulation newspapers and broadcast television were the principal sources of information, and in which mainstream, and in which mainstream political communication had a 'straightforwardly

top-down' character…But the 'top down' influence of newspapers and broadcast media appears to be waning in the face of a an 'explosion' in the amount and types of information available via the Internet. (p. 3)

In the existing literature there is a discernible division between those who herald the dawn of the blogging era whereby free information empowers citizens, and those more sceptical of technological determinism, who temper the prevailing optimism by pointing to the capacity of governments and mainstream news media to remain an important influence in shaping messages and public discourse, both online and offline. My research is situated at the latter end of the spectrum; the impetus for this research is based partly on my scepticism of the professed inherent democratic qualities of new or social media.

Certainly, the emergence of the blogosphere as a publishing platform presents citizens with access to a new information environment, once securely gated by mainstream news media and government: it is inexpensive to produce, provides free access to a high number of channels for anyone with an Internet connection, allows inter-linking between web pages, enables the dissemination of political ideas to large audiences, and has displayed an impressive growth in readership since the outbreak of the Iraq War (Farrell & Drezner, 2008; Perlmutter, 2008; Reynolds, 2006; Tremayne, 2007). Thus, to the uncritical eye, it seems as though citizen 'journalists' are able to fully challenge the mainstream media. However, it must be acknowledged that the power of blogging is also limited by major constraints: only a small fraction of the population uses or is even aware of political blogging, the blogosphere lacks any ideological consensus, and the distribution of political blogs has been shown to be heavily skewed toward a few

elite bloggers commanding the attention of readers—these top bloggers are referred to in the literature as the "A" list (Farrell & Drezner, 2008; Herring et. al., 2007). Scott's (2007) content analysis of four leading political blogs further challenged the notion of citizen journalists. His results concluded that, "rather than vigilant muckrakers, bloggers were activist media pundits, raising questions about their true role in political communication" (p. 39). Whether or not blogging empowers citizens is not the subject of this thesis, but the fact that the government is also slowly but surely inhabiting the blogosphere is a development which raises questions about the assumed democratic implications of this technology.

Overall, there is little consensus in the literature between the optimists and the pessimists except in the acknowledgement that "blogs play an increasingly important role as a forum of public debate, with knock-on consequences for the media, politics, and policy" (Farrell & Drezner, 2008, p. 16). The importance of blogs is reflected in their consumption by elites—both in the media and politics. Farrell and Drezner's (2008) study on blogging provides evidence for the strong links between the mediasphere and the blogosphere. These include the material incentives of publishing free content online to encourage web traffic, the pre-existing social and professional ties between early bloggers and journalists that helped blogs to attract attention, the expertise of bloggers on important issues whose blogs become an informational resource to journalists working on a developing story, and finally, the "first-mover advantages in formulating opinions":

> The comparative advantage of blogs in political discourse is their low cost of real-time publication. Immediately following an event of political consequence—a presidential debate, a terrorist attack—bloggers have the ability to post their immediate reactions before the other forms of media can respond. Beyond initial reactions, bloggers can also respond to other blog reactions before the mainstream media has time to react. (p. 24-25)

Together, these reasons explain why journalists are avid readers of blogs, not at the expense of 24/7 news channels, which are still important, but as a complement to reaching new audiences rapidly through social media. Political actors have by now begun to understand the link between the media and blogs, as they have also become important consumers of blogs. Political professionals regularly consult blogs to extract information that enables them to predict any outcomes on the news cycle, in effort to control the message online and offline, giving them "the ability to develop strategies to counter or blunt the influence of blogs before the media groundswell develops" (Farrell & Drezner, 2008, p. 28).

2.4   **Professionalization of Foreign Policy Communication**

Increasing government influence over the news media in the United States (which is now arguably spreading to other countries) is best understood through the prism of professionalization. Because of the "mediatization of politics" (Mazzoleni &Schulz, 1999), politicians are better able to package issues to the media that fit both journalistic criteria and cultural standards. An ever growing class of professionals in the government is able to tailor a message that is guaranteed to be picked up by the media. Callaghan and Schnell (2001), for instance, contend that "when skillful media manipulators [in the government] impose their dominant issue frames and symbols on the media, the 'outputs'

(issue coverage) may not deviate in any significant way from the 'inputs'" (p. 188). Esser and Spanier's (2005) definition of professionalization, as "increased specialization and use of experts to manage the greater centralization of communication activities" (p. 41), was deemed sufficient for the purposes of this review, although a debate is on-going about precise definitions of the term. To date, there is no consensus in the literature regarding either the exact definition of the term or the labelling of this phenomenon:

> One obvious problem is that the word 'professionalization' is used very freely and in different ways in the political communication literature...The word 'profession' and its derivates—professional, professionalization, professionalism—have been used in different ways: the professionalization of political communication, source professionalization, the professionalization of politics, professionalization of media relations, the professional model of modern campaigning, professional advisers, to note a few. (Lilleker & Negrine, 2002b, p. 311)

The picture readers get from this convoluted set of terminologies is an ill-defined, yet all-encompassing definition. What is at stake here is attempting to understand the changes this term seeks to capture. Lilleker and Negrine (2002a; 2002b) call for a historical perspective that goes beyond stating the evident changes since WWII, and which focuses on how we come to comprehend and elucidate those changes. Transformations in political communication, they argue, have come about as a consequence of specific technological advancements, not a general process of professionalization. They suggest that media *practices* have largely remained identical since WWII and note that the term professionalization

> ...implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, labels earlier practices as unprofessional and amateurish without reference to the actual level of skills employed in the past, or today...To label the media-handling as

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> amateurish or part of a pre-modern era is to fail to analyze the levels of skills used at any particular moment in time and in respect of particular media, and to replace historical analysis with a view that the present is, in essence, simply more 'modern' and more professional than the past. (Lilleker & Negrine, 2002b, p. 310-311)

Indeed, media-state relations in the matter of foreign policy have always been geared toward news management practices that attempt to manipulate the press (for an account of early history dating back to Lincoln and the press, see Perloff, 1990). The fact that professionals are being hired today to blog foreign policy information and views to the public is a response to an increasingly mediatized political sphere, but it is perhaps not a new practice as such. In this thesis I define professionalization as political communication through the medium of the blog that encompasses the technical / technological aspect, which incorporates the use of the newest genre, technology and content, following from Lilleker and Negrine's (2002b) understanding above, and the social process, which deals with the management of the blog and the selection of output for the blog. In the literature this process is centred on and made possible by the expertise of consultants, following Esser and Spanier's (2005) earlier definition.

Political communication is best summed up as a "complex managerial endeavour" (Newman & Verčič, 2002, p. 3). Information to the public on foreign affairs is increasingly organized, administered, and directed by experts in the field of media and communications. As Commissioner Harold C. Pachios (2004) of the United States Commission on Public Diplomacy stated before the House of Representatives, "the process for unveiling new foreign policy goals...needs to be

coordinated and communicated by skilled public relations professionals who serve and have access to the President and other administration officials". The Bureau of Public Affairs under the State Department is the main vehicle of communication for foreign affairs to the American public (see Figure 10). *Dipnote* is currently managed by a team of bloggers who are responsible for the uploading of content, and by the Digital Communications Center (DCC) under the Bureau of Public Affairs. The DCC is responsible for the technical management of the site as an information portal, as was mentioned in the preceding chapter. Under the Obama administration, the DCC has also aligned its objectives directly with the Secretary of State's new media objectives, which will be further reviewed in the following chapters as they relate to the context of the findings.

The vast majority of the political communication literature discusses professionalization in relation to national or domestic issues, especially in the context of political marketing during election campaigns (Blumler & Gurevitch, 2001; Gibson & Römmele, 2001; Lilleker & Negrine, 2002a, 2002b; Newman, 1994; Scammell, 1995, 2001). Mancini (1999) addresses professionalization in decision-making but confines the discussion to party politics and think tanks. The proposed research outlined here has thus sought to synthesize those works which particularly focused on professionalization vis-à-vis foreign policy, political communication being an important tool of foreign policy (Davidson, 1963). As Esser and Spanier (2005) note, "strategic political communication is an inherent part of the political story—not only in the context of election campaigns...but in all areas of professional public relations" (p. 41). Many of the tools used by the government to influence the content of news are similar for domestic and foreign

policy, rendering the bulk of the literature adaptable to the study of news management of foreign policy.

For the purposes of this thesis, the history of professionalization is insightful for brief contextualization. An interesting take on the evolution of communication strategies is presented by Kernell (1986), who argues that the professionalization of the Washington press corps under Franklin Delano Roosevelt united the Washington press and the presidency, but that advances in communications and transportation enabled the presidents to communicate directly to elites and the country. In other words, "going public would become a routine matter" (Kernell, 1986, p. 67) for the presidents after FDR. The presidential-press relations evolved and "as technology transformed the 'press' into the 'media', the press corps lost its corporate identity" (ibid.). In relation to the research question and topic of this thesis, this development relates the process of mediatisation to the development of professionalization.

> Because of the modernization of technical means of media and communication and the advent of the modern political publicity process, formerly close personal ties between press secretaries and journalists have been replaced by political marketing methods and strategic communication planning. (Pfetsch, 1998, p. 2)

Political public relations thus became a key component of presidential communication management of foreign policy. Newman and Verčič (2002) note four dimensions of political public relations fundamental to news management: *managerial*, *operational* (proficient implementation), *educational* (candidates need training), and *reflective* (ideas). The field of public relations has been incorporating blogs into its practice in order to communicate with its audiences

directly. Going back to the context of foreign policy, Signitzer and Coombs (1992) further found conceptual convergences between public relations and public diplomacy, which form a part of the theoretical framework for the study of the State Department blog, and which are reviewed in the next section.

Overall the concept of professionalization as introduced here has been proposed by scholars as a way to explain the processes of change in domestic electoral politics. The limitations of the concept are all the more apparent once we consider the role of technology rather than experts. The difficulty in defining what exactly professionalization encompasses nevertheless made a useful starting point for attempting to understand to what extent external expertise was introduced outside the electoral campaign and into the year-long foreign policy campaign. Farrell and Webb (2002) succinctly break down the historical evolution of party campaign professionalization into *technical*, *resource*, and *thematic* developments, as will be discussed in the theoretical framework. I found this typology useful to structure the data because it helps breaks down the development of blogging by the government through a set of organizational and technical dimensions, which help explore the internal management, as well as the content, of the blog.

Ahead of the interviews with the management what I sought to understand is the progression of change in foreign policy communication in the digital context and to what extent professionalization can help explain that, all the while being aware of its limitations, which will be addressed in the conclusion. In terms of the blog more specifically and as it regards content, what I wanted to find out is whether

professionalization could also explain any process of change in the architectural elements as well as promotional contents from Bush to Obama.

2.5   Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to revise the relevant literature that informed the theoretical framework applied in the study of the government blogging of foreign policy. Drawing mainly on the field of political communication, the literature review found that the domestic context far outweighs discussions of the foreign policy context. Not many scholars have dedicated their attention to government blogs, which motivated me to conduct an in-depth study of this emerging field, which, in this project's focus on the U.S. State Department, is arguably becoming an   important   platform   for   the   communication   of   foreign   policy. Professionalization, personalization, and ideology, with a focus on the inter-linked theories of hegemony and soft power, emerged as key indicators for the empirical analysis of the content of blog posts, which will be operationalized in the theoretical framework in the subsequent chapter. Professionalization and personalization   have   been   a   key   trend   in   the   evolution   of   political communication, but the concepts adapted here have a different context. Instead of personalized party politics or a professionalized electoral campaign, this thesis considers the context of foreign policy communication marked by a focus on professionalization through a study of the blog's techniques, resources, and themes, and the personal experiences on the blog with an emphasis on emotions, the mix of private-public information, and the informality of the language. As for the   concept   of   hegemony,   it   is   studied   primarily   through   the   discursive dimensions of the blog posts, and by exploring the way in which ideology is presented. In sum, these elements will help build the argument for the blog's use

as an instrument of soft power in the digital age. After gathering the results of this study, it will be possible to further push ahead with how these concepts can or cannot explain government blogging.

Chapter 3: **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: Bringing Together Professionalization, Personalization, & Ideology Theory**

In this chapter, the concepts derived from the literature review in the previous chapter are systematically operationalized to construct the theoretical framework that will directly inform the analysis of the findings. From a theoretical point of view, the study of blogs advances our understanding of the blog form of political communication in the digital era, as well as the theory of public diplomacy. While the field of political communication has widely covered blogging in the context of the election campaigns, the conceptual framework set forth here goes a step further to focus on the government blog in the context of a "permanent campaign" (Blumenthal, 1982) of foreign policy communication. The conceptualization of professionalization derived from the context of the election campaign, and the concept of personalization derived from the blog genre literature, tackle the analysis of the changes in the form and content of foreign policy communication, and are highly pertinent to public diplomacy 2.0. In terms of public diplomacy theory, the related concepts of soft power and hegemony seek to advance our understanding of the government blog as an ideological instrument. The combination of these three concepts has not been explored before in the analysis of blogging, and the originality of this framework will deepen the study of blogs in the context of political communication and public diplomacy.

The central research question that combines all concepts is: *What is the relative importance of professionalization, personalization and ideology in the shaping of the content on the official foreign policy blog of the United States government?*

For analytical reasons, I have separated aspects of professionalization, personalization and ideology in each empirical chapter. It is important to note here, however, that these aspects are much more inter-related in the real world. In the discussion chapter, I will thus attempt to flesh out the way in which they work together but can also contradict each other in their interaction. Figure 2 graphically illustrates the way in which they are operationalized within the key areas fleshed out from the theoretical chapter. The following sub-questions relate to each concept and will be answered in the empirical chapters in consecutive order:

Professionalization

- What is the nature of professionalization on the government blog?

Personalization

- What is the nature and level of personalization on the government blog?

Ideology

- How is power and ideology articulated through the content on the government blog?

Figure 2- Graphical representation of the conceptual framework
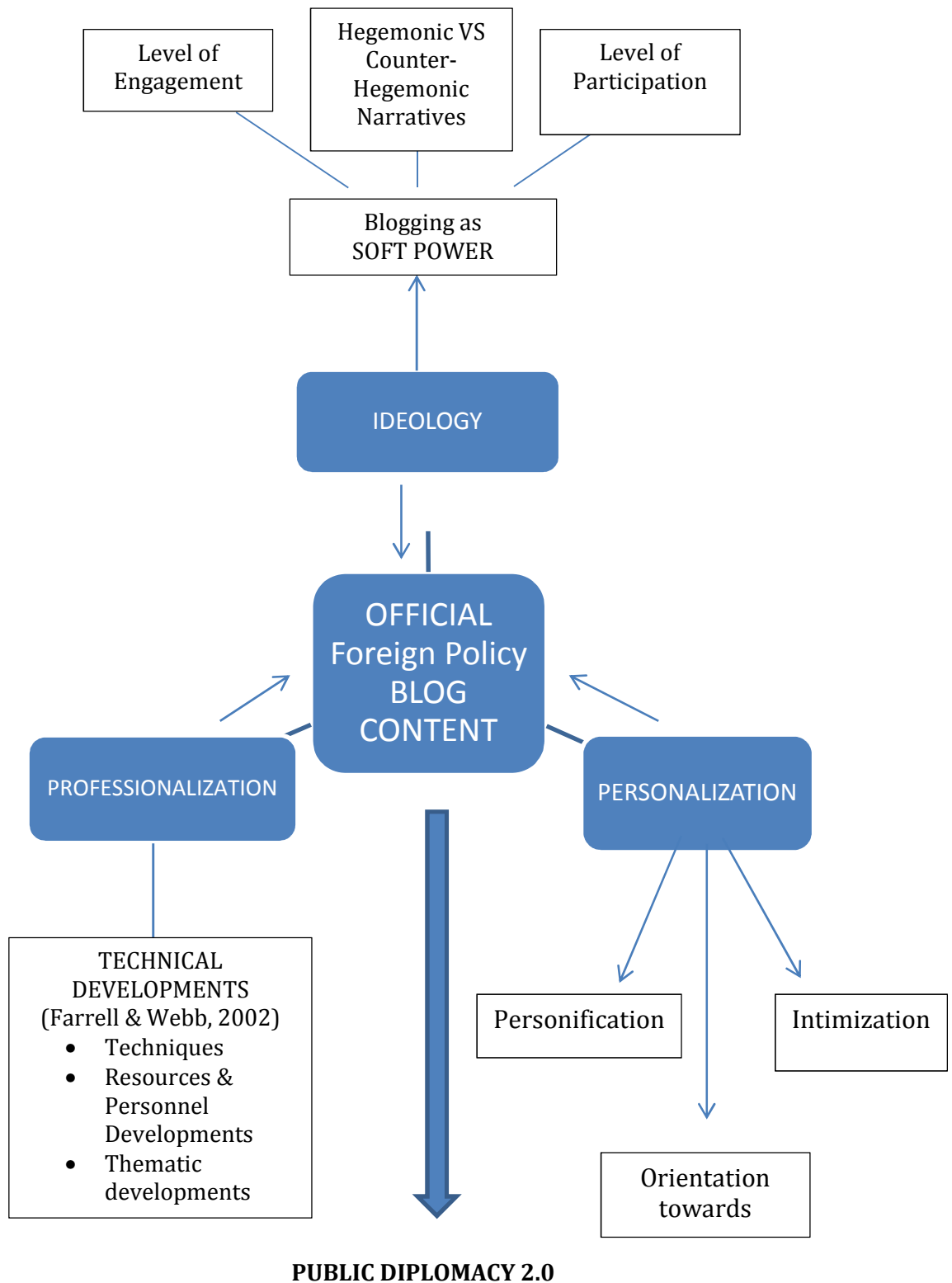
The biggest dilemma I faced while constructing the conceptual framework was in trying to view the State Department's blog, which is a tool of public affairs, through the prism of public diplomacy. The first challenge lay in justifying

government blogging as a public diplomacy initiative when the primary target audience of *Dipnote* is the American public, not foreign audiences. The resolution to this first roadblock was achieved through an understanding of *Dipnote* as a platform through which diplomacy is portrayed publicly, and recognizing the traditional public diplomacy as "domestic public diplomacy" (Melissen, 2005). This has become a necessity because "[i]n an international environment where the gap between foreign and domestic policy is gradually closing, reputation management has shifted from elites to a broader mass market" (Melissen, 2005, p. 5). Indeed, domestic public diplomacy increasingly involves public affairs initiatives that target the domestic audience to garner its support of foreign policy. Figure 3 locates the State Department blog *Dipnote* at the intersection of public affairs and public diplomacy.

Figure 3 – *Dipnote*: The intersection of public diplomacy and public affairs
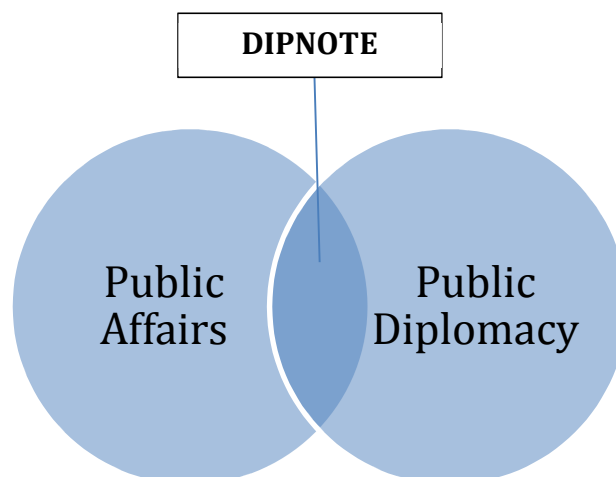
In contrast to many studies of public diplomacy, it is important to define at the outset that this thesis will not be looking at any effects or impacts of the messages on any audiences, either domestic or foreign. Instead, my focus is on the

dynamics involved in the production of content in a government blog and the management of the blog. Brown (2002) explains that "[v]ia its public diplomacy programmes broadly defined the State Department plays a central role in efforts to shape perceptions of the United States" (p. 43). These perceptions are arguably important for both domestic and foreign audiences. Furthermore, it is very hard to divide information based on audiences because of the global information environment encouraged by ICTs today. This means that public diplomacy 2.0, in the age of the Internet, applies as much to the United States as it does to those outside the United States.

The second challenge consisted of defining public diplomacy, given the lack of a universal definition of public diplomacy and the theoretical inconsistencies encountered in the literatures. The operational definition of public diplomacy in this thesis follows Robin Brown's (2004) understanding of "new public diplomacy" or "public diplomacy 2.0" (PD 2.0):

> Firstly, [w]e are seeing diplomacy—understood in the broad sense as the conduct of international relations—taking place in public and involving the public. Secondly, that the central instrument of this new diplomacy is actually public diplomacy—that is communication. (p. 15)

This paradigm is pertinent to how a virtual form of public diplomacy in the information age can take place. Putting aside the disagreements between scholars about a neat definition of public diplomacy, the focus here is on a point of agreement across the literature, the increasingly central role that communication plays. I will argue that blogging is an important tool for PD 2.0 and this is where I shall attempt to locate my contribution, in this niche of political communication

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research. Signitzer and Coombs' (1992) graphical representation of what constitutes public diplomacy (Figure 4) was a helpful organizing tool for this study, as it helped break down the areas of focus in order to understand how the findings on *Dipnote* fit into the appropriate context of the larger structure of public diplomacy, so as to be able to discuss these findings appropriately

Figure 4 – Conceptualization of Public Diplomacy (Signitzer & Coombs, 1992)

TRADITIONAL DIPLOMACY

PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

TOUGH-MINDED
-TO INFLUENCE FOREIGN ATTITUDES via persuasion and propaganda
-FAST MEDIA [radio, TV, newspapers]

TENDER-MINDED LINE
-TO CREATE A CLIMATE OF MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING
-SLOW MEDIA [exhibitions]

IN COMMON

-TO EXPLAIN GOVERNMENT POLICIES
-TO PORTRAY THE NATIONAL SOCIETY

POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

CULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS

-FOREIGN MINISTRY
-EMBASSY

-CULTURAL SECTION OF FOREIGN / OTHER MINISTRY
-SEMI-AUTONOMOUS BODY

CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

CULTURAL RELATIONS

CULTURAL AGREEMENTS

CULTURAL COOPERATION

While traditional diplomacy can be conceived as relationships between states, public diplomacy fosters cooperation between state and citizen. There are three

main areas of activity in PD: information activities (which include the official

content of speeches, press releases, and the like), educational exchanges, and

cultural activities. In trying to break down the type of posts on *Dipnote* and in

constructing the categories, the content analysis aimed to understand the

purpose of each post.

3.1 **Operationalization of professionalization**

The sub-research question for the empirical chapter on professionalization asks:

What is the nature of professionalization on the government blog? The literature

on professionalization is mainly confined to the context of campaigning in

political communication. Within this discussion, the debate has mainly centred on

the changing campaign techniques at the systemic level. While most scholars

study professionalization without a consistent framework, Farrell and Webb

(2002) provide a useful operationalization of the concept of professionalization

that helps the understanding of the evolution of campaigning over time, at the

internal and organizational level, in response to technological changes (Figure 5).

Figure 5 - Three stages in the development of election campaigning (Farrell & Webb, 2002)

	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
Technical developments			
Campaign preparations	Short-term; *ad hoc*	Long-term; specialist committee established 1-2 years in advance of election	'**Permanent campaign':** establishment of specialist campaign departments
Use of media	'Direct' & 'indirect' Direct=party press, newspaper ads, billboards. Indirect=newspaper coverage	Emphasis on 'indirect' Direct=ad campaigns Indirect=public relations, media training, press conferences	Emphasis on 'direct' Direct=targeted ads, direct mail, videomail, cable TV, Internet Indirect=as before
Resource developments			
Campaign organization	Decentralized Local party organization Little standardization Staffing: party/candidate-based, voluntary	Nationalization, centralization Staffing: party-based, salaried professional	**Decentralization** of operation with central scrutiny Staffing: party/candidate-based, professional, contract work; growth of leader's office
Agencies, consultants	Minimal use; 'generalist' role Politicians in charge	Growing prominence of 'specialist' consultants Politicians still in charge	**Consultants** as campaign personalities International links 'Who is in charge'?
Sources of feedback	Impressionistic, 'feel' Important role of canvassers, group leaders	Large-scale opinion polls; More scientific	Greater range of polling techniques **Interactive** capabilities of cable and Internet
Thematic developments			
Campaign events	Public meetings; Whistle-stop tours	TV debates; press conferences 'Pseudo-events'	As before; events targeted more locally
Targeting of voters	Social class support base; Maintain vote of specific social categories	Catch-all Trying to mobilize voters across all categories	Market segmentation; Targeting of specific categories of voters
Campaign communication	Propaganda	Selling concept	**Marketing concept**

The third stage of development of election campaigning, also coinciding with the so-called third age of political communication (Blumler, 2001), is where I would like to consider and locate the development of foreign policy communication in response to blogging. This stage is especially characterized by a permanent campaign, decentralization of operations, the increasing importance of consultants, interactivity, and political marketing, which will be discussed in the analysis of content and interviews.

This breakdown helps consider the government blog from an organizational perspective in order to make claims about foreign policy changes that the blog medium does or does not enable, instead of focusing solely on the technological aspect of the blog that was deemed insufficient for understanding professionalization. In the context of foreign policy communication, the blog is, in this thesis, conceived as a tool of the 'permanent campaign,' or year round communication of public diplomacy / foreign policy. Based on Farrell & Webb's (2002) three main categories, the sub-research questions are formulated to understand the dynamics at the internal level in the State Department and the management of *Dipnote* and to help illustrate the move from theory to operationalization in table 1 below:

Table 1

Operationalization of the concept of professionalization

Professionalization developments (Farrell & Webb, 2002) Context: *Election campaigns*	Professionalization developments Context: *Government blog*
TECHNIQUES	- What does the State Department's blog change in communications *techniques*? *Use of the blog* - What type of content is published on the government blog? (Post types)
RESOURCE & PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENTS	*Blog organization* - *Institutional context:* To what extent is blogging a new technological platform / new media practice for the State Department? - Who manages the government blog? - Is there centralized control over communications on the government blog? - What is the level of immediacy on the blog? What is the level of interactivity on the blog?
THEMATIC DEVELOPMENTS	*Foreign policy communication* - Has the government blog become a vehicle for the dissemination of the State Department's official messages? - Is the control over content shared among actors outside *Dipnote* in different divisions and levels in the Bureau of Public Affairs? - What role does marketing play in the logic of government blogging?

3.2   Operationalization of personalization

The following research question will guide the analysis of the findings:

What is the nature and level of personalization on the government blog?

As introduced in the theoretical chapter, the concept of personalization derives from the mediatisation of politics, and it is driven by professionalization. Mayerhöffer and Esmark (2011) make a further distinction between personalization in the different contexts of media reporting, political campaigns and voting behaviour. Personalization is defined as a "focus on the personality of individual politicians [that] can be contrasted with alternative forms of communication centred on political institutions, issues, ideologies" (p. 3). What I want to add to political communication theory is an understanding of personalization in the context of foreign affairs communication, and, in particular, online through the case of the government blog.

Bjerling (2011) provides an analytical model that distinguishes between three dimensions of media personalization, thereby capturing the multi-dimensionality of the concept (see Figure 6).

Figure 6 - A conceptual model. Three dimensions of media personalization (Bjerling, 2011)
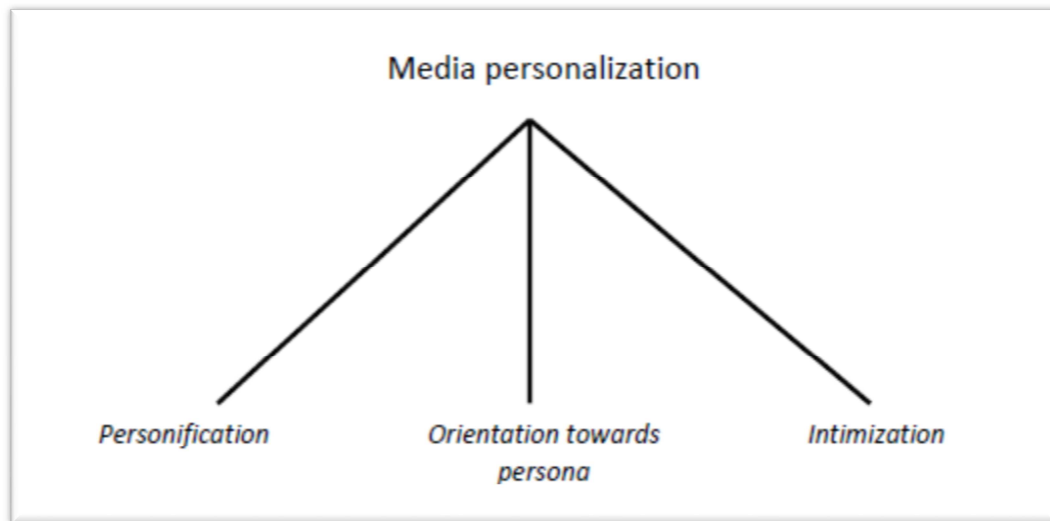
Adapting this framework to the context of blog personalization allows for a more complex analysis which has informed the sub-research questions (Table 2).

Table 2

Operationalization of the concept of personalization

Dimension	Sub-research question
Personification	How does the blog embody the State Department?
	What individuals within the State Department are more prominent on the government blog?
	Who are the authors of the blog posts?
Orientation towards persona	What personal attributes of bloggers are presented in the content on the blog?
	Are there references to family?
	Are there references to emotions?
Intimization	What kind of private vs. public information do the bloggers convey to readers?
	Are there references to everyday life?

The priority in the foreign policy agenda during the period under study was the Middle East, where the war in Iraq and Afghanistan were still on-going. In the context of war, I want to consider the style, form, and content of personalization within a larger legitimation strategy of the government by adapting Chadwick's (2001) conception of the federal website as part of the "symbolic architecture of power", which "allows for a new 'electronic face' of government which has previously been unavailable" (p. 436), to the context of the official blog in the age of the Internet. Though Chadwick (2001) studies the White House website, which is still the main electronic face of the U.S. government in the blogging era, I apply his

insights to an in-depth study of the State Department government blog to advance and deepen the concept of legitimacy in the context of the government blog. This has been particularly helpful in order to shed some light on whether aspects of personalized content legitimize American foreign policy, especially in the context of war. This approach enriches our understanding of the concept of personalization of political communication in the context of political communication outside of the domestic election campaign. It also adds a previously ignored dimension of personalization in the development of digital public diplomacy. I will explore the nature of personalization in the context of three domains related to the three core strands of public diplomacy: foreign policy, diplomacy, and culture in the Middle East. Following Bjerling's (2011) breakdown above, the discourse analysis and the content analysis will explore the facets of personalization on the blog to address the sub-research questions. Relating back to the concept of the blog as a testimony of war experiences in the literature review, the operationalization is performed through an exploration of how the format of the blog enables a type of testimony (post types in the content analysis design in the methodology chapter) on the government blog.

3.3   Operationalization of ideology

3.3.1   Hegemony, soft power & framing

The adaptation to the Web 2.0 era by governments and the content produced in that process cannot be studied in an ideological vacuum. The role of ideology is essential to legitimizing decision making in foreign policy, as it is in the communication of public affairs and public diplomacy. What is more intriguing

for this study is flushing out any contradictions that emerge in the study of new media and in the way in which American foreign policy is being communicated across new platforms in cyberspace. Blogging came into prominence during the Second Gulf War in Iraq, and it was around this time that the virtual arena, partly occupied by the blogosphere, became a pivotal stage in foreign affairs. In the case of the State Department, the decision to start blogging (late 2006) came at a time when the United States was waging a "War on Terror" in response to the events of 9/11. This war was at the same time a war of manoeuvre and a war of position, to paraphrase Gramsci; coercive hard power in Afghanistan and Iraq was combined with soft power, the latter mainly characterised by a war of ideology in what was presented to the American public and the mainstream media, as good versus evil.

While the United States' foreign policy is diverse and complex, it was useful here to outline the general objectives of U.S. foreign policy in the Greater Middle East under Bush and Obama. For this exercise I consulted each administration's relevant documents, mainly the National Security Strategy, a document prepared for Congress which summarizes the national security issues as well as the strategy for addressing them on the ground.

In a nutshell relations between the United States and the Arab world, Israel, and Iran have historically been deeply embedded with long-term strategic interests in the region. The main focus has been on oil, the Israel-Palestinian conflict, and Iran's development of nuclear energy.

The timeframe of this research begins in 2007, under the Bush administration. At that time, the predominant American foreign policy aims were concerned with combatting terrorism. In the 2002 State of the Union speech, President Bush declared a new front in the "War on Terror." Whereas the offensive against terrorist organizations such as Al Qaeda was declared after 9/11, it began to include the nation-states of Iraq, Iran, and North Korea as comprising the "Axis of Evil." According to the 2006 U.S. National Security Strategy the main goals of foreign policy were to:

> Strengthen alliances to defeat global terrorism and work to prevent attacks against us and our friends…Prevent our enemies from threatening us, our allies, and our friends with weapons of mass destruction (WMD)…Ignite a new era of global economic growth through free markets and free trade…Expand the circle of development by opening societies and building the infrastructure of democracy… (National Security Council, 2006, n.p.)

The military involvement in Iraq that began in 2003 carried on and escalated, and the objectives of winning the war seemed ever more elusive by 2006 – 2007 when this research began. In regards to Iran, the main concern was the nuclear program. As for US foreign policy in the Middle East process, President Bush stirred much animosity for agreeing with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to deny Palestinians the right of return. The present study will thus look into how these objectives and countries are discussed on the blog as far the Bush sample is concerned.

When Obama took over the reins of the White House, the foreign policy objectives of the United States in the Middle East also changed. In contrast to

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President Bush's broad "War on Terror" offensive and "Axis of Evil" speech, U.S. foreign policy strategy after 2010 emphasized that the war was specifically against Al Qaeda:

> ...this is not a global war against a tactic—terrorism or a religion—Islam. We are at war with a specific network, al-Qa'ida, and its terrorist affiliates who support efforts to attack the United States, our allies, and partners. (National Security Council, 2010, n.p.)

First, Obama committed to the stabilization of Iraq and the eventual US withdrawal from the country. Second, the administration aimed to minimize involvement in Afghanistan. Third, in regards to the Middle East process, Obama intended to freeze Israeli settlements. Finally, the US was to hold open talks with Iran about its nuclear program, a position that stood in contrast with Bush's refusal to open dialogue. There is thus a clear shift of objectives from Bush to Obama towards more diplomacy and less force but the main focus in the analysis will be on how this transition is expressed in the data and the extent to which the blog mirrors the different priorities of US foreign policy in the region.

In this information age, the U.S. government runs a campaign for its policies all year round, reminiscent of what Blumenthal (1982) calls the "permanent campaign". One of the mechanisms for the government to control its message to the media is through framing, which is a feature of the concept of soft power through the framing of policies. Over the decades, the study of framing has evolved to an empirical scholarly endeavour in media research, but also in other disciplines such as political science and psychology. "Essentially, frames set the boundaries of public policy debates" (Callaghan & Schnell, 2005, p. 2), the most

illustrative current example being the "War on Terror" frame that has spread across the media. Entman's (1993) widely accepted definition of framing explains that,

> *to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating context, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.* (p. 52, original emphasis)

The content analysis and textual analysis presented in chapter 4 explore how the Middle East is framed on the blog through looking at which issues are salient, what themes emerge, what the focus of content is geographically, and how this can help our understanding of the use of a blog in the context of official foreign policy communication. It will measure to what extent government blogging is challenging the mainstream media during a critical time for both administrations, as the war in Iraq became increasingly chaotic. The stories that successfully attract the most comments and media attention will be explored in depth.

Beyond political communication, framing as a methodology has been useful in international relations and foreign policy (Brown, 2004). Indeed framing is very much "an exercise of power, particularly as it affects our understanding of the political world" (Reese, 2001, p. 10). What will be most useful for the content analysis in this project is Mintx and Redd's (2003) definition of "purposeful framing" as "an attempt by leaders and other influential actors to insert into the policy (or into a group deliberation), organizing themes that will affect how the targets themselves as well as the public and other actors (e.g. media) perceive

an issue" (p. 193-194). This allows a study of how the content on *Dipnote* is presented and where the emphasis lies. What will also be important is what is not included in the information presented.

The concept of hegemony was fitting for the context of the analysis of the government blog in this thesis, as justified in the previous chapter, and will mainly be subject to a thematic analysis. In this study narrative is not the content of the blog posts alone, but the construction of a particular version of events in the Middle East. In particular during the war in Iraq, the legitimacy of the United States' presence in the country was linked to fighting the terrorism of an ideological enemy. Crank et al. (2008) outline the main tenet of the "War on Terror" narrative after 2005, when no weapons of mass destruction had been found in Iraq to legitimize American presence:

> [1.] Terrorists will take over Iraq if we do not win.
> [2.] They will establish an Islamo-Fascist empire
> [3.] We defeat the forces of Islamic fascism by establishing a democratic regime in Iraq. (Crank, Hoffman, & Conn, 2008, p. 38)

The main probe here is to what extent the blog was used as an ideological device, operationalized through the following sub-research questions:

- Does the "War on Terror" narrative that dominated official discourse also dominate on the government blog under the Bush administration?
- Does the government blog under the Obama administration focus more on cooperation in the Middle East, ending the war in Iraq, and the new strategy in Pakistan and Afghanistan?
- How is military involvement in the Middle East (i.e. hard power) justified or explained through the blog (i.e. soft power)?
- Do counter-hegemonic narratives emerge on the government blog?

- To what extent has the *organization* of foreign policy communications been transformed by government blogging to promote a certain ideology?

The operationalization of the concept of soft power, as part of a larger conceptual framework of professionalization and personalization discussed in the previous chapter, provides a valuable framework for the study of government blogging and enriches the theory on soft power. The case is bolstered considering Nye's (2004) framework of soft power as originating from three main sources within a country. This work in itself goes beyond the scope of this thesis, but it is used as an organizing tool for the analysis of the data: "its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values such as democracy and human rights (when it lives up to them), and its policies (when they are seen as legitimate because they are framed with some humility and awareness of others' interests)" (p. 126). Applying this framework to the content of the State Department blog guided the analysis of narratives that aimed to capture the ideological underpinnings, as well as informing the construction of the coding frame to count key terms that are associated with American values in the official foreign policy. Because narratives are stories and blog posts tell stories, the importance of the values around which these stories are recounted serves either to reinforce or resist the hegemonic discourse.

3.3.2 Participation and engagement

The other facet of the blog I want to explore in the context of hegemony is the level of engagement of the government, as well as the level of participation, through a content analysis of the comments published. The potential for

participation has been covered in the literature on blogging and has been widely studied as a measure of the democratic potential of the medium (Cammaerts, 2008; Carpentier, 2006). The form of participation taking place in the blogosphere that will be analysed here is the public discussion on the blog site. The main sub-research question asks: *What is the nature and level of participation on the government blog?* The nature of the comments on the blog is assessed in this research, to define to what extent the blog is able to legitimize its presence publicly online.

More than the idea of civic engagement as discussed in the literature review, the concept of engagement is an important concept in public diplomacy, more relevant to the study at hand: "U.S. engagement in the world and the Department of State's engagement of the American public are indispensable to the conduct of foreign policy" (State, 2008, n.p.). New public diplomacy in the context of the social media, most importantly, involves listening but also engaging in a conversation. One of blogging's pivotal characteristics is the availability of comments from the public and the potential for engagement through comments. The literature on engagement vis-à-vis blogs however, states that "comments are largely ignored in current studies of large amounts of weblog data, typically because extracting and processing their content is somewhat more complex than extracting the content of the posts themselves" (Mishne & Glance, 2006, p. 1). In the context of a government weblog, the study of comments was key to studying engagement with the readership. The following sub-research questions will thus inform this last part of the ideology chapter: *What is the nature and level of engagement on the government blog?*

With regard to engagement, the main units of analysis are the comments, and the social interaction between blogger and commenter. The objective here is not to assess the success or failure of the blog in promoting online discourse from a normative framework of a particular model of democracy. As noted in the literature review, the bulk of the research on blogging and government blogging focuses on the democratic implementation of comments and how blogs as a participatory medium can or may create a new arena of public deliberation. This thesis, on the other hand, includes comments as an indicator of the level of participation and engagement within a government blog, and in this particular case, whether or not the State Department succeeds in engaging with citizens, as they claim to in their mission and in the interviews.

3.4 **Summary**

Blogging in the foreign policy context falls under the fields of political communication and public diplomacy. The literature has defined a number of concepts that are combined here to construct the theoretical framework: professionalization, personalization, and ideology (hegemony and soft power). Studying professionalization or personalization separately, as has often been done in political communication studies, misses out on the complexity of the interactions at play. At the same time, the prism of ideology is central to any discussion of public diplomacy and foreign policy. My main argument in this thesis is that considering them together adds a more holistic understanding of foreign policy communication in the digital age, by adding the foreign policy context to political communication studies concepts of professionalization and

personalization, rethinking them, and linking them to the role of ideology in public diplomacy 2.0. The following chapter on methodology will outline the steps taken in the design of the study, as well as provide a justification for how the methodologies are used throughout the research project.

Chapter 4: RESEARCH DESIGN: Studying the Production and Content of Government Blogging

4.1 Research Strategy Justification

The first part of this chapter will justify the research strategy to be used, while the second will outline the sampling procedures and research design that enabled this project to link theory and data. While the theoretical framework in the previous chapter operationalized the concepts of professionalization, personalization, and ideology (through hegemony and soft power), the methods used are elaborated upon here. To analyze the differences in content, focusing on the Middle East posts under the two administrations, a number of variables were derived from both content itself and the theoretical framework, as well as from the thematic analysis of the elite and blogger interviews, which served to guide the construction of the code book outlined in the next section. Interviews were conducted at the State Department with blog members from both administrations, to better understand the editorial dynamics of the blog, as well as the management of *Dipnote*, as part of the institutional dynamics of the State Department. As Mahler and Regan (2009) state, "the organizational setting in which the communication occurs is critical to understanding communication patterns and practices" (p. 3). The thematic analysis of interviews further helped to contrast and compare the claims put forth by the management of *Dipnote,* with the data and the narratives emerging from the posts.

The main unit of analysis is the blog post because, as will be explained in detail in the next section, the research questions focus mainly on what kind of messages are emitted on the blog and how these are shaped. Comments on the

blog are also critical to the success of a blog because they denote the level of social interaction and reveal much about the functioning of a blog as a forum of debate. The analysis of comments was thus included in the scope of this study but it was of secondary importance as the comments were only key to measuring the nature and level of critique, the degree of government engagement with the public, and the overall volume of interactions. The theoretical framework of this project is more geared toward government output and management in order to gauge the level of professionalization, personalization and ideology; it is less about the blog as a public sphere of debate or about citizen engagement, which would invite a different theoretical framework and an altogether different research design based on the comments as a unit of analysis. The analysis of the comments in this project were thus useful for understanding how effectively the government puts its objectives of engaging with the public in action and what it allows or does not on its virtual space. The blog posts, however, were the main the foci of attention.

This research project has focused solely on the State Department blog because the interest is on foreign policy and public diplomacy. It is arguably also pertinent to study the Department of Defence blog, which is also a foreign policy vehicle, but the focus there is mostly on the army and was thus not fitting for the study at hand. The White House blog is another outlet, but it was not created until Obama took over the presidency so the comparative element would have seriously limited the findings. Overall, while a broader study of other federal blogs would have expanded the scope of the research design to include all foreign policy-related federal blogs, I chose to focus on *Dipnote* as a case study

of an in-depth analysis of blog content within the historical context of two administrations. Precisely because there is limited research on government blogging, it was deemed essential to contribute to the literature a holistic, in-depth investigation of one major foreign policy blog instead of mapping out the federal blogging landscape, which would deserve a thesis of its own.

The State Department blog covers all the regions in the world but this thesis focuses on the Middle East in particular. As a policy area after 9/11, it was where the United States foreign policy priorities lay given the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan but also the main battleground for the fight against terrorism. To understand how the blog was used in relation to foreign policy in such a strategic area, the focus on the Middle East enabled an in-depth look at how the blog operates in the context of military intervention and foreign policy in the region. Looking at other regions would not enable such an in-depth approach since the foreign policy varies for each region.

At the start of this research project, *Dipnote* was one of 39 government blogs (USA.gov, 2009). In three years since and by 2010, *Dipnote* reached almost 30 million views (Forgerson, 2010). The blog's focus on foreign policy made the case study methodology an appropriate one. Posts on a variety of topics and regions by State Department officials are uploaded to the site, comments—although subject to review by the editors—are allowed, and the threshold of tolerance to criticism is high, with the exception of obscene language. *Dipnote* has been the subject of little research up to now; the literature review was helpful to situate this research vis-à-vis other projects, and served as a

comparison for the empirical analysis. The research conducted on *Dipnote* reviewed here focuses mainly on public participation through *Dipnote* (Gilpin & Palazzolo, 2008; Hamilton, 2008; Hayden, 2007). Evidence suggests that *Dipnote* encourages interactions among readers, but only a small interaction between blog authors and commentators. The most detailed study of *Dipnote* was conducted by the Consortium for Strategic Communication's scholarly journal called COMOPS. A group of researchers examined the site for general trends: the blog's management, the content of the posts, a content analysis of comments, and recommendations for the improvement of the site (Corman & Palazzolo, 2008). Overall, the study was well-grounded but remains descriptive rather than analytical or critical. There is no regional focus to the study but rather a mechanical distribution of number of posts by entry. COMOPS was due to release a White Paper considering blogging as a tool for public communication, which I was not able to locate, but as yet, no other research has addressed the entry of the government into the blogosphere.

In terms of the politics of Bush and Obama, my own position with regard to the American foreign policy in the Middle East of each administration may have influenced my analysis. I was not a supporter of President Bush's "War on Terror" and was not in full agreement about waging a war on Iraq without sufficient legitimate reason or backing of the United Nations, which may have influenced my focus when deciphering the narratives of the "War on Terror" on the blog platform. In general, I was not in agreement with U.S. intervention in the Middle East, which in my view was not aimed at spreading democracy. When President Obama was elected, I was more supportive of American foreign

policy in the region and in general more optimistic about his approach towards new media, especially in the moves towards transparency and openness. This may or may not have materialised on the blog, and my research seeks to assess precisely what the convergences and divergences are between both administrations' use of the blog. My research design sought to be as objective as possible, but it is important at the outset to express my own views on the underlying subject of this study. One way in which I attempted to counteract possible biases was by combining the content analysis, the interviews, and the textual analysis. This triangulation of methodologies enabled me to verify my findings in order to make the qualitative analysis more credible and overcome intrinsic biases.

4.1.1 Content Analysis

The Internet is a vast resource of information for scholars, and blogs in particular serve as repositories of valuable research data. Indeed, "fortunately for political scientists, blogs provide a uniquely rich set of data that can be exploited in order to explore a variety of research questions" (Farrell & Drezner, 2008, p. 29). Blogging has thus been attracting scholarly research using a variety of methodologies. Over the past couple of years, "research has examined blogs as a new communication genre, using content analysis […] rhetorical analysis […] and ethnographic interviews…to characterize the forms, functions and audiences of blogs as well as people's motivations for blogging" (Herring et al., 2007, p. 3). For the particular question of this research proposal, content analysis was chosen from among other text-based methods in communications research, to analyze the structure, purpose, and themes on the official State

Department blog site. The broader research question of this thesis attempts to determine the relative importance of professionalization, personalization and ideology in influencing the content on the foreign policy blog of the U.S. government. To operationalize this research, a number of variables were deemed relevant for answering the research question (as will be outlined in the following sections) and in determining the presence or absence of each of the concepts in each post.

In past research, content analysis was effectively used in the study of blogs to identify and quantify their structural and functional properties (Herring et al., 2007; Scott, 2007). An official blog such as *Dipnote* would be categorized as a "high-profile blog" (Herring et al., 2007), and content analysis is a suitable method for the identification and quantification of its structural and functional properties. The network of all of the published blogs connected by links is collectively called the blogosphere. Since "it is difficult to generalize about the blogosphere because of its size, diversity of content, and variation in format" (Tremayne, 2007, p. vii), it is essential for this research to explicitly state which part of the blogosphere is under investigation and which type of blogs are being examined. Because all government blogs that address foreign policy cannot be studied in depth, this thesis uses a case study approach, which is "unparalleled for its ability to consider a single or complex research question within an environment rich with contextual variables" (Morgan & Smircich, 1980, p. 5). The case study as a research strategy is commonly used in the social sciences to capture the complexities inherent in a phenomenon (Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1991; Hamel et al., 1993; Yin, 2003). Case studies are particularly appropriate

because the findings can be generalized to draw on the larger theoretical propositions of personalization, professionalization, and ideology that I propose here. In this project, the case study is the blog of the Department of State, *Dipnote.*

In the next section, the analytical categories are defined in detail; these variables are first coded in the sample and then counted using statistical software so as to generate broad patterns of meaning. Content analysis satisfies the criteria of objectivity and reflexivity; the concrete procedures are explicitly stated and, as such, the research set out here can—in principle at least—be replicated by other researchers. Through its methodical application to texts, it is possible to flesh out key characteristics and trends from the content. As Bauer (2000) best summarizes it, "the systematic classification and counting of text units distils a large amount of material into a short description of some of its features" (p. 133).

No research method is without limitations, and content analysis is no exception. The main aspects of the method's weaknesses revolve around issues of data validity and the interpretation of meaning. The fallacy of content analysis, as it is commonly known in research circles, refers to the false "idea that one can infer any particular intention of a communicator or any particular reading of an audience" (Bauer, 2000, p. 133). Thus, it is important to remember that texts can be read in a multitude of ways. When I reviewed the blog posts of *Dipnote* before setting up the coding frame, I ensured that I kept all the possibilities of interpretation for the purpose of a post in mind. For instance, when it was a

personal story, I tried to understand how it could also be a subtle and indirect

form of public relations. Krippendorff (1980) expresses this point well when he

says that "content is not identifiable in the same way as one might identify

fingerprints" (p. 18). Related to this is the notion of objectivity, a major concern

for methodologies in the social sciences. The objective is to conduct systematic

and replicable content analysis:

> Content analysis, of course could never be objective
> in a 'value-free' sense of the word: it does not
> analyse everything there is to analyse in a text (no
> method could, nor would there be any purpose in
> trying) – instead the content analysts starts by
> delineating certain dimensions or aspects of text for
> analysis, and in doing so, he or she is of course also
> making a choice – subjective, albeit generally
> informed by the theoretical framework and ideas
> which circumscribes his or her research – and
> indicating that the dimensions chosen for analysis
> are important or significant aspects to look at.
> (Hansen et al., 1998, p. 95)

I thus hired three independent coders to make sure the date is replicable and

the research design systematic. Hansen et al. (1998) further critically assesses

content analysis for failing to, "capture the way in which meaning arises from

the complex interaction of symbols in texts" (p. 123). Content analysis indeed

entails fragmenting the texts and separating the words from the context. Thus,

its quantitative characteristics are its strengths but also its weakness, because

they will always fall short of a completely objective positivist ideal. Since

"grasping patterns in a text always has to be carried against a cultural

backdrop" (Parker & Bolton Discourse Network, 1999, p. 4), content analysis

alone cannot explain the dynamics of government blogging. In order to

transcend the quantitative limitations of content analysis and provide

contextual in-depth insights to quantitative data, I also carried out thematic

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analysis of interviews. Below, I discuss how I came up with the themes and codes for analysis before and after the pilot.

Content analysis is also often criticized for describing rather than analysing the data. In the empirical chapters of this thesis, the analyses aimed to go beyond simply describing content on the official blog. The categories in the code book have also been formulated according to their analytic value. Defining appropriate content analysis categories for the coding frame was as much a question of immersing oneself in the textual material prior to the construction of categories, as it was of deriving category ideas from the theoretical framework and questions which guided the research project. Designing the coding frame was thus a multi-stage process. Overall, I found that this combination of approaches has rendered my analysis more holistic; using the methods of interviews and thematic analysis in my research to "provide techniques which could build on content analysis up to higher levels of meaning" (Parker, 1992, p 67).

4.1.2 Qualitative content analysis: narrative analysis

To complement the content analysis of blog posts and comments, some tools of discourse analysis were used for textual analysis. In social constructivist thought, language constructs reality in addition to reflecting it. Linking back to the concept of hegemony discussed in the literature review, the discourse on the government blog is intrinsically a product of relations of power, dominance and also resistance in U.S. foreign policy. It has the capacity to create narratives, which are a form of discourse, and thus related to wider social, political, and

cultural contexts. It is important to remind the reader that the term 'narrative' is interchangeably used with 'discourse' in this thesis. Discourses / narratives are interpretive devices, and blogging is conceived as a form of storytelling whereby Foreign Service Officers provide their version of events on the ground. The blog in the context of government further constructs the identity of the State Department online. In the larger context, the Under-Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy stated that his responsibility is to "tell the world the story of a good and compassionate nation and, at the same time, to engage in the most important ideological contest of our time – a contest that we will win" (State, 2008).

Discourse theory is particularly suitable for understanding the role of ideology in determining the content on a government blog, because textual content functions as a tool for legitimizing military intervention, and demonizing the enemy, through a set of linguistic features. Imagined boundaries, through narratives, can thus create symbolic power relations between the "we" and the "others" (Whitlock, 2000). It is thus in relation to the other that the self can be defined. This discursive 'process of othering' is essentially a "strategy of polarisation involving 'positive ingroup description and negative outgroup description'" (Van Dijk, 1998, p. 33). In this research, I am most interested in the types of narratives that emerge about the Middle East on the official foreign policy blog *Dipnote*, focusing on how the 'self' (understood here as the United States) is constructed versus the 'other', and how these are used to legitimize how alliances are made and justified. The main linguistic features addressed are

vocabulary and deconstructing the implicit assumptions in the text in order to make sense of the context of the text.

4.1.3 Interviews

The use of interviews as a field technique for gathering data was deemed especially appropriate because of the political nature of this research project. Talking to people who are directly involved in the management of the State Department blog enabled me to gain a deeper insight into the power dynamics at play and to supplement the data emerging from the content analysis. "Interviews contribute towards the research goal of triangulation where collected data is cross-checked through multiple sources to increase the robustness of the findings" (Tansey, 2006, p. 4). In the context of this thesis, interviews directly informed the content analysis by unearthing the motives and assumptions behind the management of the blog site, which could complement the content analysis.

Looking beyond my own research objectives, interviews as a research method offer a host of benefits. They are a tool to establish how and what people in a certain context believe, and they present researchers with the opportunity to gather original or unexpected information. "As opposed to surveys, interviewing allows researchers to ask open-ended questions and enables the respondent to talk freely, without the constraint of having to answer according to fixed categories" (Tansey, 2006, p. 5). This method thus prevents the researcher from imposing his or her framework, and allows the interviewer to request particular points to be elaborated upon during the interview.

The characteristics of elite interviews render them different from standard interviews. The main difference is that the former is applied to people with a prominent or privileged status, compared to a random member of the population. In a standardized interview, the interviewer seeks answers to well-defined questions and problems "within the bounds set by his presuppositions" (Dexter, 1970, p. 5). In an elite interview, in contrast, "the investigator is willing, and often eager to let the interviewee teach him what the problem, the question, the situation, is—to the limits, of course, of the interviewer's ability to perceive relationships to his basic problems, whatever these may be"(Dexter, 1970, p. 5-6). I conducted semi-structured interviews. Before embarking on the interviews, research was conducted on the blog itself, and on the coverage of *Dipnote* in the mainstream media and blogosphere, to gauge public reactions in the United States with regard to issues of foreign policy.

Notwithstanding the advantages of interviews, there are also many challenges in conducting them—the most obvious of which are issues of access in the case of elites. Overall, I had a very positive and welcoming experience with the State Department. They responded very quickly on several occasions, although it was unfortunate that I was not able to reach the management of *Dipnote* for follow-up questions after multiple requests. Since the time of my interviews, in 2009, up until the completion of this project in 2011, and especially after the Wikileaks fiasco, the State Department might have grown more wary about being open to outside queries.

The first set of interviews took place at the State Department main building on C Street in Washington D.C. Although I was not allowed to enter the main control room of the blog, I was led into a conference room where I was able to set up my recorder. The management team entered all together at the same time, so I was not able to interview each of them alone. However, I did get a chance to ask each one the same question, and thus had a response from each member to each question in the questionnaire. For one management team member who worked at *Dipnote* under the Bush administration, and who no longer worked at the State Department, I conducted a recorded Skype-to-phone interview. As for the bloggers, I met each of them separately in the vicinity of the State Department, in the same neighbourhood called 'Foggy Bottom,' at a coffee shop. I was reminded by the interviewees, as well as by the bloggers, that they were representing the United States government, and that they could only tell me so much.

Other more crucial limitations of the interview method are general concerns about reliability. Indeed, some interviewees may have provided statements that are inaccurate or untrue; they could have bolstered their own position, or that of the Government in the case of political actors. "Problems of control arise more frequently in elite interviewing than in other types of interviewing because when you interview elites, there can be many clear markers that you are, in fact, the 'status subordinate" (Delaney, 2007, p. 215). The researcher cannot do much to avoid such unintentional or indeed intentional false statements by interviewees, but there are ways to overcome reliability

limitations. Tansey (2006) explains that the following specific criteria must be met in order to weigh the reliability of the elite interview:

> That the information obtained should be from a first-hand witness, and not based on hearsay…That the level of access of the interviewee to the events in question should be known, with senior level elites to be viewed as more reliable…And that, if possible, the interviewee's track record of reliability should be established, with a proven record of reliability ideally established before recollections are taken at face value. (p. 7)

During the phase of analysis, it is essential for the research to recall the speaker's purposes and circumstances in the evaluation of the data collected. The range of the interviewees and their position in *Dipnote*, as well as the place and mode of the interviews, is detailed further below.

After transcribing the interviews, a thematic analysis was applied to analyze the text in order to bridge the interviews with the content analysis. Themes are defined as units derived from patterns such as "conversation topics, vocabulary, recurring activities, meanings, feelings, or folk sayings and proverbs" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1989, p.131). This method enables multiple, close readings of the texts to identify patterns and emerging narratives. For the purpose of the research at hand, the main objective of the thematic analysis is to delve deeper into the professionalization, personalization and ideological dynamics that emerge from talking to the *Dipnote* management team. "Themes that emerge from the informants' stories are pieced together to form a comprehensive picture of their collective experience" (Aronson, 1994, p. 1). More about other dynamics behind *Dipnote* will be included later in this thesis, in an effort to link the theoretical framework to the data. At this point, it suffices to state that the

professionalization of foreign policy communication framework (i.e. exploring the view of the *Dipnote* management on blogging as a new technique and resource) initially informed the interview questions. Using NVivo, the text of the interviews was broken down into a set of themes, some from the theoretical framework (engagement, interactivity, administration change, etc.), allowing for new themes to emerge (such as information sensitivity).

To ensure the validity of the analysis, the decisions taken in the application of the method are justified and outlined further below. Any decisions made to select a particular text in relation to the research question and guiding questions will also be justified. At this stage it is important to ensure coherence. The extent to which the themes that emerge in the analysis help explain the coherence of the content analysis data, and how the participants (i.e. interviewees) relate to these themes (i.e. what is their orientation for or against the themes that emerge) will be explicitly stated.

4.1.4 Ethical Considerations

As for any serious research, integrity in the conduct and analysis of the project is a fundamental factor. In the case of interviews, a number of ethical considerations must be taken seriously to avoid future discontent and potential legal problems. The LSE Research Ethics Committee guidelines were a useful guide to these considerations. The first is the right to privacy. Confidentiality was also a key consideration for this research. I was aware that some elite interviewees may not want to disclose certain sensitive information, and I took this into consideration, obtaining prior authorization (in the form of a written

consent form; see appendix C) to use an interviewee's name in my research as well as to record the session.

The second consideration concerns the issue of informed consent. The interviewees were fully aware of the research objectives and understood the implications of their participation in the research. Prior to the interview, a consent form was signed by each interviewee and a copy was given to each participant. I decided to err on the side of caution by making the interviews anonymous in this thesis, although the rank and position of each interviewee has been included to add weight to the quotes. Finally, the interviewees will be kept informed about the outcome of the research project; a copy of my findings and the thesis will be sent to them.

The third ethical consideration for the research at hand was related to the analysis of blog posts. It is important to acknowledge here that the blog posts were not originally posted as research material and that I used them taking into account the public nature of the blog. In order to avoid decontextualizing the various elements, I took the utmost care not to remove the blog content from its context.

4.2   Sampling / Data selection

The following graph represents the triangulation of methodologies used in this project (beginning with interviews).

Figure 7 – Graphical representation of methodologies used

1) Interviews:
Dipnote
management team
(4) & Dipnote
bloggers (2)

2) Quantitative
Content Analysis:
Dipnote Middle
East posts (158)

3) Qualitative
Content Analysis &
textual analysis:
Dipnote Middle
East posts (158)
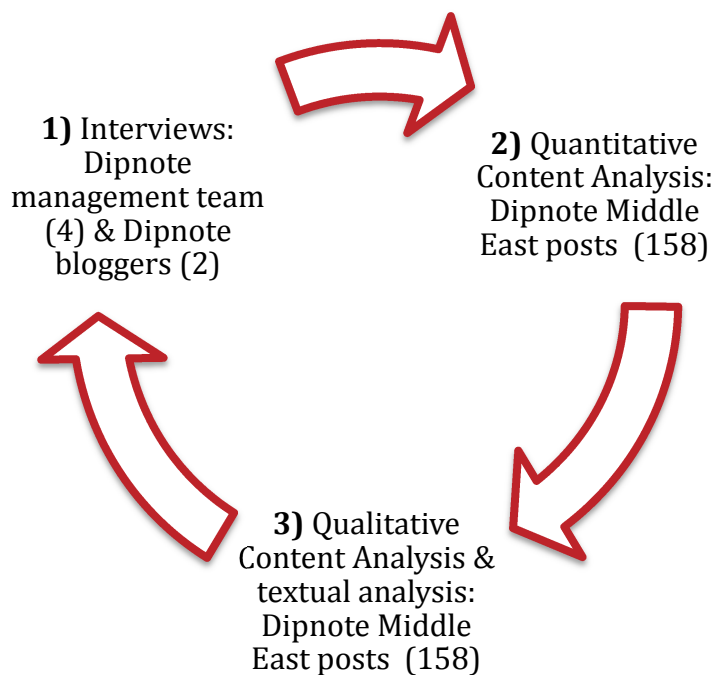
In addition to the sample of blog posts and interview transcripts, the analysis also drew upon a number of primary documents in the form of speeches and official documents from the State Department website, in order to contextualize the findings. This approach is often used in the social sciences to support data analysis.

4.2.1 Conducting Interviews

There are a number of practical steps involved in setting up and conducting interviews. The interview guide design (Oppenheimer, 2000) involves *questionnaire planning*, *question working* and the *flow of topics*. Based on the literature review and the research questions, I designed an interview schedule

that attempted to directly address the goal of the proposed research on the influences of content and the professionalization of foreign policy communication as it relates to government blogging (see Appendix D for the questionnaire). In the light of the research questions, the interviewees were asked about the following issues: their role in the management of *Dipnote*, their media and blogging exposure, their perception of the advent of government blogging and their participation (if any) therein, their perception of *Dipnote*'s motivations, their view of *Dipnote*'s interaction with the blogosphere and MSM, challenges faced in the blogging effort, the editorial independence of the blog content, and the comment design. In order to test the efficiency of the interview as a research tool, a pilot was undertaken with a friend who is a member of the Foreign Service, and the questionnaire was tweaked accordingly. This helped assess whether the questions were meaningful and suitable to participants, to figure out questions of timing and recording techniques, and to re-consider the organization of themes in the questions.

Drawing up a list of interviewees for this project required research into the relevant actors in the blogging site who could provide information about official blogging. The sample size for the interviews (6) is a small yet exhaustive sample, as it included all of the key management people involved in the blog, as well as two of the most prolific bloggers. Like most of the government's digital diplomacy initiatives, *Dipnote* does not employ many people.

The first category of people I interviewed formed the *Dipnote* management team under the Bush and Obama administrations. For the purposes of confidentiality,

all of the interviewees were given interview numbers that match their position in *Dipnote*, which the reader can refer back to:

> **Interview 1:** Managing Editor of *Dipnote*; male; Bush and Obama
>
> **Interview 2:** Senior Technology Adviser for New Media; male; Bush and Obama
>
> **Interview 3:** Senior Web Manager & Blog Team Member; male; Bush and Obama
>
> **Interview 4:** Editor-in-Chief; female; Bush

The two main bloggers were chosen because their posts drew most attention from the media and the public. They were:

> **Interview 5:** Aaron Snipes, Public Diplomacy Officer for the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Al Muthanna Province
>
> **Interview 6:** John Matel, PRT leader in Iraq

4.2.2 Content Analysis Design

One of the main tools used to research *Dipnote* content was content analysis. To gather the sample, archives on the site were easily accessed. To make the study as exhaustive as possible, all of the Middle East posts under the Bush administration (September 2007 – January 2009) were selected and all of the posts under the Obama administration were selected, controlling for the same length of time (January 20th 2009 – March, 2010). In the Bush sample there were 53 posts in total, while under Obama there were 105. The posts were archived on the blog site under 'Middle East', but to make sure that I did not

miss any posts, I went through all of the posts in the archives one by one to pick out any post about the Middle East, from the start of the blog up until March, 2010. Since the Middle East section on *Dipnote* also includes Pakistan and Afghanistan, it is important to clarify here that it refers to the Greater Middle East.

The blog posts from the sample were read in depth to get a general idea of their content and structure and in order to pilot the research. I tested the variables by coding a random sample of 30 *Dipnote* Middle East section posts, which were also coded by three separate coders during the pilot. After transcribing the elite interviews and inputting the data into NVivo, a number of thematic categories emerged that were useful in confirming the relevance of a pertinent coding frame. For instance, while I derived 'level of engagement' from the theoretical framework, the claim that the management was actively engaged with the audience prompted me to measure the response rate on comments requesting a response in each post, to measure the validity of this claim. The initial coding frame was thus applied to the pilot sub-sample, which helped shed light on the difficulties in the development of the coding frame. Many variables were amended after the last pilot, before analysis, in order to add coherence to the overall coding frame and subsequently to answer the research question.

The most significant change I had to undertake in response to the pilot had to do with the 'post type' variable. For example, before the first pilot, the categories distinguished PR content and personal experience; after testing the first pilot, it turned out that some posts contained both PR content and were about a

personal experience. This happened multiple times and so the categories were all put into separate variables and coded for 'yes' or 'no' depending on the content in each post. There was also some confusion on the part of the coders about the definitions of some variables, which I had to return to in order to be more explicit. For example, the difference between internal, external and non-issues was not clear and needed to be defined in the coding schedule. Surprisingly, the most problematic variable was the evaluation of the comments (positive, negative, irrelevant / neutral, and mixed). After going back to each comment, I realized that happened when the coder did not appreciate the sarcasm in some comments so they were coded as positive. This happened quite a few times, mostly because the first language of one coder was not English. The main task in code frame construction was to thus ensure that the variables were mutually exclusive and exhaustive. Once the coding frame was finalized, the data was recorded and inserted into the SPSS software. To uphold the transparency of this research, each category is defined in detail in the coding book (Appendix B). I was the main coder of the material and the three coders mentioned were hired to test data reliability. Each coder used an independent duplicate sheet to code the material. The ratio of inter-coder reliability (ICR) — or the ratio of agreed coding between coders—after coding frame amendments was 82% (added up all variables, see appendix F for ICR variables), which render the results acceptable and reliable.

VARIABLES

As cited above, the validity of the categories for the research means that each variable was identified for its pertinence and relevance in answering the research question.

Time

An important variable for this study and in answering the research question is the temporal dimension of the publication of the content. By 2007, when the State Department began its blog, the United States was still involved in active combat operations in Iraq, which had begun in 2003: "the response from many current events blogs to the information demand which arose as the USA decided to invade Iraq led some observers to characterize the second conflict with that country as the 'first true Internet war" (Wall, 2005, p. 153). The time period chosen for this project marks the launch of the U.S. government's social media initiatives under the Bush administration, which evolved into a more sophisticated form under the Obama administration. It was also around this time that the first governmental blogs began to appear. In 2007, the United States was ranked among the first states to embrace e-government —along with South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan, according to a number of studies of global e-government development (Egovblog, 2007). In this study, the frequency of blog posts over time will help to determine any differences in content output related to the Middle East between the Bush administration and the Obama administration.

> While the administrations of Bill Clinton and George W. Bush encouraged the use of the internet generally under OMB 1995 Paperwork Reduction Act and its amendments, the Obama campaign

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> brought the use of the internet to new levels with the use of social networking sites, YouTube and blogs... Furthermore, President Obama has pledged to maintain the online transparency created during his run to the White House with two-way communication with the public...and has created Chief Technology Officer and Chief Information Officer to support the pledge...This may result in an increase in the number of blogs and level of traffic on existing blogs. (Mahler & Regan, 2009c, p. 5)

There is a misconception in the literature and in the media that the Obama administration brought social media to the American presidency. It should be noted that it was under President Bush that the administration began blogging, two years before Obama came into power. In this study, each post's date will be coded and this variable will also be correlated with other variables and categories to identify any significant trends in the content. It will help map out the evolution of the blog over time and help this research contribute to the emergence and development of new technologically-mediated genres. In particular, the genre is considered in the context of the field of political communication, using this blog as a case study, and comparing two administrations. Since the overwhelming focus of blog research has been on the personal journal blog, as noted in the literature review, this study of government blogging will contribute to the study of the diversity and variety of this genre.

Post author characteristics

The post author is an important variable because it defines the sources of the content on the official blog and will determine the extent of the role of personalization as well as professionalization. The *author of the post* will help to

quantify the sources of *Dipnote* content over time, differentiating between elite

sources and personnel sources to explore whether the use of the blog is a

platform for sharing experiences across the State Department (as it claims to

be), or a mouthpiece of mostly top-level sources, similar to other traditional

media forms of communication with the public on issues of foreign policy.

Under each entry on *Dipnote* there are a few lines introducing the author of the

post and detailing his or her position, so I relied on this description. I was

grateful that a member of the Foreign Service was in London to give a seminar

at the London School of Economics while I was finalizing the coding frame, and

he was able to give me insights into the classification of categories for this

variable. While my original frame contained 8 categories ranging from elite to

non-elite employees of the Department, in order to compare the different

proportions of authorship in the blog, I was told that the titles in each post

alongside the name of the author are functional titles, so putting them in a

hierarchy would not make much sense or give valid results. He explained there

are several political officers of varying ranks in a large embassy, and the same

applies for all other kinds of officers. In the American embassy in London, for

example, within the public diplomacy section, there are eight public diplomacy

officers as well as Foreign Service Officers. They are led by the Minister

Counselor for Public Affairs, while the press section is led by the Press

Counselor and the Cultural section by the Cultural Counselor. I also learned that

in smaller embassies, these functions may be combined; for example in a small

embassy one person may be both the Consular and management officer. This

was extremely helpful to understand so I amended my coding frame to make it

more precise; after some research I went back to correct the hierarchies

(following the State Department structure in Appendix A), as well as to differentiate between Senior FSO, mid-level FSO, FSO, and Foreign Service Specialist (FSS).

From preliminary content analysis piloting, two sources, John Matel and Aaron Snipes, were most frequently publishing content on Iraq. Therefore, I created two separate variables for them, to measure their proportion of output to the total. Since the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 was a time during which blogs became an alternative to the mainstream news media, as pointed out earlier, it was particularly interesting and relevant to focus on how Iraq was framed on the official U.S. government blog. Although the content covers the period of 2007 to 2010, Iraq was still the main foreign policy priority.

In determining who publishes content, the objective is to determine the angle or perspective of each post to get an overall measure of whose agenda dominates the State Department blog. While a post author tells us who published the content, it also informs us of the angle from which the story is told. The results will help determine if the content is influenced mainly by personal-based narratives of civil servants or elites, or both, or perhaps another type of content. Linking back to the larger research questions, this variable helps garner an understanding of the use of the blog. For instance, if the perspective of the Secretary of State or President dominates the perspective of the posts, then the official blog is best understood as a mouthpiece of the regime in power and a tool of elites, rather than a blog for sharing experiences on the ground or of the personnel of the State Department at home and abroad.

Post type

The post topic is an indicator of the degree of professionalization of foreign policy communication, because it determines the way the blog is used as a tool. On a continuum, a post with a public relations story signals a high level of professionalization, while a post about management signals a low level of professionalization. The range of topics in government blog posts, adapted from Mahler and Regan's (2009) study on federal agency blogs, is: PR or public relations content (any content that publicizes a State Department event, initiative, program), agency-related policy, management (including policy about management), and other. From my own reading of the material, I derived other categories such as "personal experience of the situation on the ground", "content on the Secretary of State or President's travel activities", and "information content". Another post type, "position-taking content," accounts for the testimonies on the blog about serving and calls for others to serve overseas. Each blog post was examined to analyze whether it was in fact a new platform for traditional material, or whether it was a type of material that was different from that which the government usually produces. Measuring the purpose of each post will explain how the blog as a tool is used by the administration in power, how it influences the content of the blog, and whether the type of posts has changed between each administration.

Personalization: Word counts

To assess the level of personalization, apart from measuring whether the post is about a personal experience, the proportion of diary format posts indicate how much the blog puts a human face on the State Department by focusing on

personalized narratives, which can also be broken down into themes. A second measure of personalization was in the narrative. In other words, perhaps the focus was not necessarily on a personal experience but it was written in a personalized style. It was thus deemed important to also conduct a word count of all the mentions of 'I' 'myself, 'me' and 'my' in the content, to be able to make a deeper claim about how important the personal-based experience is on *Dipnote*. The level of emotion expressed was also measured through any indicators of feeling (i.e. 'happy', 'sad'). Finally, the level of references to everyday life, which emerged during the re-reading of the posts, was also measured (e.g. I just woke up).

Issue selection

This variable allows for the identification and analysis of the issues and themes most highlighted by the State Department blog under each administration since its inception. This will enable a measure of frames used to tell the stories and activities about the Middle East, and whether the issues are part of the main priorities of foreign policy outlined in the testimonies of the Secretary of State before Congress under each administration (archived online on the State Department website). Indeed, "blogs are promising vehicles for government agency members to address issues that may not be part of the official policy agenda, to raise complaints that cannot be delivered in person, and to collaborate across organizational or geographic boundaries" (Mahler & Regan, 2009, p. 2). I thus seek to measure to what extent *Dipnote* explores such issues. Of relevance to the research question is to determine whether the content relates to a geographical focus as it relates to foreign policy priorities (as will be

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discussed below), and / or to specific themes that are important to each administration depending on the priorities set forth by each presidency reviewed in the previous chapter. Framing research has been applied to media texts, press coverage of issues, and has been theorized by a number of scholars (Entman, 1991; Wolfsfeld, 1999), but for the purposes of this research, as was outlined in the literature review, it seeks to define the selection of issues as a means of framing U.S. foreign policy on the virtual space of a blog. From an in-depth reading, the posts were categorized into different issue topics: military issues, security issues, political issues, economic issues and reconstruction-related issues, cultural issues, and issues around the press and the media. Again, during the pilot, these were part of one variable, but because some posts contained more than one category, every category was made into a variable.

From the multiple readings of the sample I also generated key words that indicate the salience of the issues, and complement the broad categories and themes highlighted to measure differences in emphasis between administrations. They are listed in Table 3:

Table 3

Word frequency count (by major themes) in Dipnote blog content

Military issues	WAR – Mention of any military words: war, troops, landmines, ammunition, attacks, mortar attacks, bombings INSURGENTS – Mentions of insurgents, insurgency
Economic issues	RECONSTRUCTION – Mention of reconstruction, rebuilding ECONOMY – Mention of economy, index, prosperity, market
Political issues	FREEDOM – Mention of freedom, free, liberating, liberation TERRORISM – Mention of War on Terror / Terrorism DEMOCRACY - Mention of democracy
Security issues	SECURITY - Peace, safety DANGER - Dangerous, danger, violence
Cultural issues	WOMEN - Women's issues, woman
Humanitarian issues	HUMANITARIAN - Refugees, human rights, human trafficking
Religious issues	CHRISTIANITY - Christian, Christianity, missionaries ISLAM - Muslim, Islam JUDAISM - Jew, Jewish, Judaism

Geographical focus

With regard to geographical focus, given the context of war in the Middle East, it was useful to differentiate between the content relating to countries depending on their diplomatic relations with the United States. A strong focus on zones of war and military involvement, or a strong focus on experiences, diplomacy and non-combat zones, would clarify the purpose of the blog as a tool of public diplomacy. This links directly to how the Middle East is framed online in the context of blogging, and which areas are the subject of attention. The scale ranges from countries with good diplomatic ties (Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Egypt, Kuwait, Jordan) and the special relationship with Israel, to countries where ties are severed (Iran). There are different categories for countries where there are active troops on the ground (Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria briefly in 2008), where the United States is involved militarily only through missiles, bombings or covert operations but with no troops on the ground (Pakistan and Yemen), and where the U.S. is undergoing diplomatic negotiations or aid, as in the case of Palestine. The 'other' category includes allusion to the larger region, or an issue which is discussed within the context of the region as a whole.

External issues vs. internal issues

Another variable distinguishes internal issues and external issues. This enables further understanding of how the blog is used as a tool for either internal communication, or, as is expected, for external communication with the public. The framing of the issues addressing either an internal employee audience or an external US public would reveal the influences of content and the role of framing

in the latter. An internal issue in the State Department included posts where the content was directed to the State Department employees and Foreign Service Officers (under the Bush administration, this includes posts on serving in Iraq, the contentious row over a Foreign Service survey, and forced Iraq assignments under the Bush administration). External issues, which account for the majority of blog post content, were classified as issue-focused (military, economic, cultural, political, security, humanitarian, or religious issues) or non-issue focused (diplomatic trip(s), explanation of the role of an officer in the region, the support of U.S. policy or U.S. policy statements, and other events such as a commemoration or a Q&A). Determining the focus of a post on an issue or a non-issue helps to further understand what type of content is published. As Criado (2009) confirms, the information in each post enables us to get a better picture of the underlying role of framing issues on the government blog:

> Posts with non-issue information are more revealing. These may contribute to disseminate the blogger's position regarding key questions as well as records and goals, if talking about an agency. In this way, the information exchange performed within the blogger's political blog could be expected to follow different patterns depending on the particular post content. In this last respect we can categorize these possible variances by distinguishing between advertising posts, reporting posts, advancing posts [agency achievements], polling posts and position taking posts. (p. 4-5)

Interactivity: Links

Of interest here is whose voice the government blog echoes through the links in the blog posts. The latter includes links to State Department resources (such as website, press releases, briefing scripts and speeches), links to mainstream

media, links to a political blog, links to a US government website or resource, and links to NGO or IGO website or resources.

> ...blogging activities may create and reinforce external links to improve governance. Governmental blogging may look for the expansion of these relations into networks of knowledge supporting the core functions of the agency / bureaucrat involved. To this point, hyperlinks, blogrolls and banners are convenient means to achieve the networking tasks of blogging. Through the use of these digital instruments, the blogger can readily show media leanings and vinculums with social and political organizations, movements, groups, etc. (Criado, 2009, p. 5)

Another dimension of interactivity is the blogroll, a list of links to other blogs that gives an indication of the affiliations of a certain blog to other blogs.

> Blogroll links ... fulfil different purposes, for example recommending certain blogs, expressing personal acquaintance or friendship, or just being a sign of reciprocity if someone else blogrolled one's own blog. For this reason, they are also an important part of identity management since they can provide some clues about the blogger's interests and affiliations. (Schmidt, 2007, p. 4)

It was deemed sufficient to manually list the blogroll and compare any differences in linkages to the variety of sources over time. Assessing which links direct to which sources helps place the government blog in context with the larger blogosphere. Ideologically, it might be expected to link mostly to government or official sites and links, to create a feedback loop of the government version of events, framework, and point of view. Exploring the links can help to make claims, not only about ideology, but personalization (for instance, if there are links to personal pages) and professionalization, depending on how the blog is used as a resource to connect visitors to other

sources. In the content analysis, quantity of links and the type or nature of the links is measured in each *Dipnote* post, to assess the interactions involved. Herring et al. (2005) note that, "in terms of patterns of use, the prototypical blog is focused around links to other sites of interest (or other blogs) on the Web" (p. 145). The quantity of links will measure the level of interactivity over time and the nature of links will indicate the most-linked sources, providing a larger analysis of the State Department blog's interactions. In sum, links to mainstream media and blogs signal a higher level of interactivity, while links to government sources or no links signal a lower level of interactivity.

Engagement: Comments

Comment design is a key variable for measuring the level of debate on any blog. In the case of government blogging, authors generally either "require citizens to login to leave a comment in order to avoid anonymous flaming or they shut off the comment option altogether thereby losing the advantage of interactivity which often is part of the attraction for citizens to government blogs in the first place" (Kavanaugh et al., 2007, p. 420). *Dipnote* allows comments on its blog site and publishes both positive and negative feedback. Although citizen participation is not the main object of research in this project, comments were included in this study to derive a larger analysis of the amount and nature of interactions taking place on the government blog. External comments thus reveal ideas about the magnitude of the involvement dimension in governmental blogging. The content analysis will measure the quantity of comments on each post, the variety of contributors, and the amount of negative, positive and neutral or irrelevant comments.

Response rate

As a measure of engagement through interactivity, another measure in the comments will be the bloggers' response rate. This has been labelled the speed of response (Steuer, 1992), responsiveness (Rafaeli, 1988) or response time (Alba et al., 1997); it is regarded as a component of interactivity on the Internet. In this study it will measure whether the bloggers of the post actually respond to the comments published, hence indicating further the level of engagement on the foreign policy blog. As in any blog, the blogger has "the chance to engage in discussion…'taking the pulse' of [the]…potential audience" (Criado, 2009, p. 5). Overall, a high number of responses would signal a high level of engagement.

Immediacy

Related to interactivity, immediacy in the context of this study attempts to measure the extent to which the blog responds to foreign policy events. In the literature this has also been called 'synchronicity' (Johnson, Bruner, & Kumar, 2006). Unlike a press conference, the blog has the capacity for immediate publication and updating of content that makes possible the immediate publication of content. This will be measured in hours of the post in response to an event in order to gauge if the blog reacts in real time or if there is delay.

4.3   **Summary**

This case study of government blogging in this research is approached through a triangulation of methodologies. Interviews with the management were conducted and transcribed, then analyzed through thematic and narrative analysis. In addition, a content analysis was performed on all Middle East blog

posts during the time period set under both the Bush and Obama administrations, complemented by a narrative analysis of key passages and supported by primary documents from the State Department. The interviews with the management of *Dipnote* allowed for this study to delve into the dynamics of the government blog at the organizational level, while the content analysis explored the output and messages in the content.

Chapter 5: **Professionalization**

5.1 **Introduction**

The objective of this chapter is to trace the presence or absence of professionalization in the foreign policy communication context, specifically in the advent of government blogging of foreign policy. Adapting Farrell and Webb's (2002) framework from the context of domestic election campaigns helps break down the phenomenon of professionalization into quantifiable elements (techniques, resources, themes). The research question put forth in the theoretical framework asks: what is the nature of professionalization on the government blog? There are three sections to this chapter. The first section of this chapter explores the techniques used on *Dipnote* and the type of content on the blog through the content analysis of blog posts: how they fit into the blog as well as into the overall foreign policy communication. In addition, it was possible to correlate the date on which the content was published with the context of what was happening on the ground, to better understand the alternative versions of events on *Dipnote*. The second section considers the resource and personnel dimensions of the government blog. The interviews helped understand in what ways the content is managed on the official blog and the extent to which blogging can be seen as a new resource, by assessing the level of immediacy and the level of interactivity. Finally, the third section tackles the thematic development of the blog, which in this context is the extent to which the government had become a vehicle for the State Department's official message, and to what extent it can shed light on the changes in foreign policy communication, as well as the salience of the marketing concept in this context.

5.2   Techniques

5.2.1 Post types

The first breakdown of professionalization in Farrell and Webb's (2002) framework has to do with how one can conceive of *Dipnote* as a new communication technique. The type of posts can be conceived as a measure of understanding how the blog as a platform is similar to traditionally used communication techniques such as press releases and the State Department website, or whether it is different and in what ways. As explained in the methodology chapter, PR content in the blog posts was coded as any blog post that featured a State Department embassy event, initiative, conference or program. Table 4 breaks down the type of posts encountered on the government blog in the Bush and Obama samples. Instead of measuring for one variable, each post type was made into a separate variable after the pilot. For instance, a post can be a PR post *and* contain traditional official content.

Table 4

Post types in the Bush and Obama samples on Dipnote

Post Types	Bush sample (N=53)	Obama sample (N=105)
PR / Advertising	29%*	50%*
Traditional official content	60%**	92.5%**
Position-taking	30.1%**	7%**
Personal experience	75.2%**	50.9%**
Other	7.5%*	1.0%*

Note: *p< .05. **p< .01

While under the Bush administration PR content accounted for roughly 29% of the data; under the Obama administration PR content accounted for approximately 50% of the data (χ^2 (1) = 5.95; p < .01). Traditional reporting content, such as a speech transcript or a press release, also increased under Obama; under Bush, 40% of content represented traditional format and content, while under Obama, *Dipnote* became much more of an official channel for the dissemination of policy, with 92.5% ($\chi^2(1)$ = 1.62; p <.05) of the posts containing some information that derived from the traditional output of other channels. Under the Bush administration, *Dipnote* was more aligned to its initial objectives of presenting an alternative version of events to that reported in the mainstream media, and by publishing a higher percentage of content on the personal experiences of Foreign Service Officers that fitted the mission of the blog. 49% of the posts under Bush were about a personal experience, compared with 33% (χ^2 (1) = 9.42; p < .01) under Obama. Another interesting finding, which will be considered in the light of the discussion on the evolution of the war in Iraq, is that the position-taking content, such as testimonies to serve overseas, fell from 30% in the Bush sample to 7% (χ^2 (1) =15.7; p<.05) in the Obama sample, perhaps because by the time President Obama took office, the United States was already in the later stages of the war.

One of the findings, given the historical context, is that major events have been omitted on *Dipnote*, distancing the blog from being a news service and rather providing coverage of alternative stories about the war. For instance, the first major U.S. pull-out from Iraq took place in November 2007 (Rubin, 2007) , yet

there was no mention of that in the official blog. As events on the ground happened, *Dipnote* did not mention any attacks, deaths of U.S. troops, or policy considerations relating to the war. The main stories or posts about Iraq during November 2007 were instead about volunteering in Iraq; since the State Department was having a shortage of Foreign Service Officers to serve in Baghdad, as will be explained in detail in the next section, the blog was actually used in this case as a rally for support *within* the Department. As the war raged on between November 2007 and February 2008, more posts were published about how Iraq was not faring as badly as the media suggested.

At the time when the new administration took over the management of *Dipnote*, the first post was more formal in tone and announced Secretary Clinton's diplomatic appointments in the Middle East, suggesting an evolution to more professionalized output (*Dipnote*, 2007). The context on the ground again helps to understand the application of the blog within the framework of a larger foreign policy setting. In March 2009, the U.S. military announced 12,000 troops were to leave Iraq by September of that year (Shadid, 2009). The intensity of attacks against American forces on the ground increased and the death toll increased during the month of March. In contrast, the State Department blogged about the Secretary's travel itinerary, international conferences in which the United States took part, and State Department initiatives in the Middle East. As the next chapter on personalization will show, there was a discernible shift of focus from personal experiences under Bush to the Secretary of State's diplomatic trips under Obama. There was also a noticeable continuity in the two main salient themes during the observed period: accounts of Provincial

Reconstruction Team members and accounts of women's issues. These will also be explored in the following chapters in the context of personalization and ideology.

5.2.2 Online content vs. offline foreign policy

The timeline depicts some of the major events in Iraq in parallel to the blog posts on *Dipnote*:

Figure 8 -Timeline of major events in Iraq vs. posts on *Dipnote*

"Iraq: On the Ground"

"Blackwater: Investigation Update"

"My experiences as a Refugee Coordinator in Baghdad"

"An American Girl in Riyadh"

"A letter to my overwrought colleagues in Iraq"

"Why I volunteered to serve in Iraq"

"On the Annapolis conference"

"Christmas in Kabul"

"Behind the scenes: President Bush Visits Middle East"

"Ambassador Brinker's Reflections of the Middle East"

"Destroying Munitions in Northern Iraq"

"Iraq: Perceptions out of date"

"Hidden prosperity and the Banana Index in Iraq"

"Iraq: After the Dust Washes Off

"What is the Forum for the Future?"

"Human Trafficking in the Middle East"

September, 2007   *October, 2007*   *November, 2007*   *December, 2007*   *January, 2008*   *February, 2008*   *April, 2008*   *October, 2008*   *November, 2008*

-January, 2007 Majority of troops disapprove of war (Herbert, 2007)

-June, 2007: Attack on US troops growing in lethality, post-war chaos (Tyson & Anderson, 2007); -Iraq ranks 2nd on failed state index (BBCNews, 2007) -August, 2007: 63% of Americans disapprove of war (Dodge, 2007)

A State Department review of its own security practices in Iraq finds **"poor coordination, communication, oversight and accountability involving armed security companies like Blackwater USA".** (Schmitt & Rohde, 2007)

Foreign Service Officers' outcry over directed assignments in Iraq (USA Today, 2007)

The past year has been the deadliest for U.S. and NATO-led forces in Afghanistan since the Taliban regime fell in late 2001. (Synovitz, 2007)

Bombs rock Iraq; Iraqi civilian violence in 2007 still at 2005 levels (Shakir, 2006)

Top officer testifies forces are "stressed" by fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan (Shakir, 2006)

March, 2008: Millions of people in Iraq are still deprived of clean water and medical care (Nebehay, 2008)

President Bush said: "normalcy is returning to Iraq"(The Washington Post, 2008)

September, 2008: Al Qaeda remains a dangerous force despite a general decline in violence. (Kami & Roberts, 2007)

President Bush announced 8,000 troops will be withdrawn from Iraq in February (CBSNews, 2008)

3/11/2008 Iraq repeats insistence on fixed withdrawal date (De Young, Londoño, & Sheridan, 2008)

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Figure 9 -Timeline of major events in Iraq vs. posts on *Dipnote* (Obama)

"Secretary Clinton Departs for Middle East, Europe"

"International Community Committed to Helping Afghanistan"

"Reconstruction and Stabilization: Civilian Deployments to Hot Spots"

"Muthanna paintings depict lives of Iraqis"

"Secretary Clinton Addresses Embassy Baghdad Employees and U.S Troops"

"U.S. Holds Trilateral Meeting with Afghanistan and Pakistan"

"Working with Iraqi Farmers Reminds Me Why I Serve"

"A new beginning: President Obama speaks to the Muslims of the World"

"U.S. Embassy in Kabul hosts popular web chat"

"Secretary Clinton meets with Afghan women leaders"

"US-Iraqi relationship extends beyond security cooperation"

"Kabul holds international film festival"

"Iraq 2010: A year of Transformation and Transition"

"Secretary Clinton at London conference on Afghanistan"

"Secretary Clinton travels to Qatar and Saudi Arabia"

"Secretary Clinton addresses the US-Islamic World Forum"

"U.S. committed to fostering broad partnership with Iraq"

"Observing elections in Iraq" [immediacy]

"The Colours of Warka [exhibition] debuts in Washington"

March, 2009   *April, 2009*   *May, 2009*   *June, 2009*   *July, 2009*   *August, 2009*   *January,2010*   *February, 2010*   *March, 2010*

Wave of violence across Iraq (Shakir, 2006)

President Obama unveils a new US strategy for Afghanistan (Hayden, 2009)

President Obama visits Iraq (Parsons, 2009)

Increase in suicide attacks in Iraq (Shakir, 2006)

US-Iraqi Operation Targets Al-Qaida Cell (Shakir, 2006)

Iraq moves parliamentary elections to January (Reid, 2009)

Iraqi Committee to investigate prison abuse (Shakir, 2006)

Jubilation as U.S. Combat Troops Withdraw from Cities (Londoño, 2009)

Vice President Biden Arrives in Iraq (Quinn, 2009)

Documents show Saddam Feared Iran and allowed world to believe he had WMD / no dealings with Al Qaeda (Shakir, 2006)

Illusion of security in Iraq (Antelava, 2009)

Presidential and provincial elections held in Afghanistan but are marred by widespread Taliban attacks, patchy turnout & claims of serious fraud (BBCNews, 2009)

Iraq bars 15 political parties with Baathist ties from upcoming elections (Fadel & Mizher, 2010)

Baghdad bomb kills 36, Chemical Ali hanged (Kadhim, 2010)

Nato-led forces launch major offensive, Operation Moshtarak, in bid to secure government control of southern Helmand province (BBCNews, 2010)

Bombing mars first day of early voting in Iraq (Myers & Santora, 2010)

Bush officials reluctant to talk to British panel investigating Iraq War (Kamen, 2010)

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Under the Bush administration, the historical context further helps understand why the posts on *Dipnote* focused on getting volunteers for Iraq. Indeed, the *Dipnote* post that drew most attention in terms of comments in the first sample, as well as in mainstream media and blogosphere coverage, is in relation to the dispute over sending Foreign Service Officers to Iraq. The row in question resulted from a decision made in November 2007 by the US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, to send Foreign Service personnel to Iraq. A number of officers were asked to fill posts—referred to as directed assignments in official discourse—and told that they would be forced to volunteer when there was a lack of staff to serve in the American Embassy in Baghdad that was to open the following year. This stirred much controversy, as a draft of this kind had not been imposed by the U.S. government since the Vietnam War in 1969, when employees of the State Department were given jobs on the condition that they would be sent to Vietnam to fill posts. In the 1970s and 1980s, there were a few instances when "some officials were required to work in West African embassies in the 1970s and 80s, but on a much smaller scale" (Pilkington, 2007, p. 1). Of the 300 officials asked to fill posts in the new embassy in 2007, only 15 volunteered (Pilkington, 2007). Seeing Iraq as a death sentence, the outraged diplomats expressed their anger and resistance to the Bush administration's pressure in a town hall meeting which reverberated in the media. As the dispute escalated, *Dipnote* became the arena in which the debate unfolded publicly. A few days after the eruption of the dispute, in response to a mainstream media article, blogger John Matel published a post on *Dipnote* in which he speaks to colleagues in the Foreign Service who revolted against the possibility of being sent to Iraq. Entitled "A Letter From Iraq to My Overwrought Colleagues"

(Appendix E), the blog post is a non-formal statement providing an alternative positive view of serving in Iraq from an officer in the region:

> To my vexed and overwrought colleagues, I say take a deep breath and calm down. I have been here for a while now, and you may have been misinformed about life at a PRT...If these guys at the town hall meeting do not want to come to Iraq, that is okay...I would not want that sort out here with me anyway. We have enough trouble w/o having to baby sit. BUT they are not worldwide available and they might consider the type of job that does not require worldwide availability. (*A Letter From Iraq to My Overwrought Colleagues*, Nov 6, 2007)

The context of the deadlock over directed assignments is important in the light of the larger diplomatic endeavours of the State Department in the domain of new media, and the professionalization of the communication of foreign policy. During the second term of the Bush administration, in August, 2007, Condoleezza Rice introduced a diplomacy initiative termed 'transformational diplomacy' (Rice, 2008) (in contrast to Secretary Clinton's 'smart power', to be discussed in the ideology chapter). In practice, transformational diplomacy rests upon two main elements that are relevant to the discussion: repositioning American diplomats in the most strategic places in the world, and requiring them to serve in conflict areas such as, amongst others, Iraq and Afghanistan. Important re-shuffling was due to take place in order to implement collaboration with the military, sending diplomats on missions to serve in hardship posts. To achieve the aims of the American diplomacy in the 21st century, the Bush administration began taking into account the role of new technology, such as blogging, to further its strategic aims. In a speech presented before the Senate Budget Committee at Georgetown University, the Secretary of State said:

> Technology is collapsing the distance that once clearly separated right here from over there... Perhaps the newest and most cost effective way to adopt a more local posture is through a Virtual Presence Post. Here one or more of our young officers creates and manages an internet site that is focused on key population centres. This digital meeting room enables foreign citizens, young people most of all, to engage online with American diplomats who could be hundreds of miles away. This is a great way to connect with millions of new people across Europe and Asia and Latin America. (Rice, 2008)

Rice's call for the integration of new technologies to diplomacy thus paved the way for the application of Web 2.0. in a variety of ways over the following years, and launched the era of digital diplomacy. The Office of eDiplomacy, created in 2003 as part of the Bureau of Information Resource Management, provides the platform to share knowledge among the U.S. government's foreign affairs community and fosters the web to engage with the diplomatic community. These efforts include many projects: a Diplopedia wiki, the 'State Department's internal unclassified online encyclopedia' (US Department of State, 2007b), Virtual Presence Posts (mentioned in the quote above), an Enterprise Search engine for classified resources, and a host of social networking activities for communication among employees (Sifry, 2009).

When *Dipnote* was launched less than a year after Rice's speech, it was to be under the umbrella of the Office of eDiplomacy's projects called *Communities @ State:*

> This initiative enables and encourages Department personnel with shared professional interests to form online communities to publish information, connect with others, and discuss issues. Transcending organizational boundaries and geographic constraints, these websites use a simple

blogging tool to allow online community members to easily and quickly publish deliberative content. By choice of the community administrators, most of these online communities are available to members of the interagency foreign affairs community. (p. 16)

Effectively liaising between IT specialists in the State Department, diplomats and employees, the Office of eDiplomacy was set up to perform as a think tank for the application of new technologies to connect diplomacy to information technology. With regard to blogs specifically, the endeavours are noteworthy: "as of February 2009, there were over 60 existing and planned communities at State, with over 30,000 combined blog entries" (Office of eDiplomacy, 2009). In the case of the heat surrounding directed assignments, based on the textual analysis of the posts, *Dipnote* was mainly used by the State Department as a mouthpiece to defend the line of the administration on foreign policy matters indirectly through a Foreign Service Officer, to achieve credibility.

In this same context of internal State Department affairs, the mainstream media and blogosphere picked up on a related post in response to the American Foreign Service Association (AFSA) survey results released in January 2008. In this survey, the level of morale and satisfaction with the Foreign Service were measured. Overall the survey results expressed a largely negative picture: working conditions were perceived as worsening over time, and morale was rated as poor or fair by the officers (Businger & Anderson, 2008). In response to this general dissatisfaction of officers with the Foreign Service, *Dipnote* provided its own version of the survey results in a number of posts that increased the debate over directed assignments further (McCormack, 2008). The content of the published posts was directed against the *Washington Post*'s

news coverage on the subject. In the same way, the official blog was a channel through which the State Department would retort to unfavourable coverage in the media - but only under the Bush administration. The themes reviewed in the ideology chapter will help shed light on the way in which *Dipnote* actively used the blog as an arena for government contestation of the mainstream new media. Over time, the blog did not mention or include mainstream media in the content, and interestingly, *Dipnote* became more thematically aligned with official content (not necessarily official discourse) over time, instead of becoming more diverse and unofficial. The difference is that official content refers to content that is not casual in tone and resembles content found in press releases. Official discourse refers to the key phrases related to the policy of the administration, such as War on Terror.

5.3   Resources and personnel developments

5.3.1   Who manages *Dipnote*?

The institutional context of the blogging initiative of *Dipnote* was vital to fleshing out the inevitable tensions between the interests of the Department of State and the ideals of the blogosphere. Before doing so however, it is important to locate the *Dipnote* blog within the broader communication system in the Department of State. The Bureau of Public Affairs is the main vehicle through which the State Department maintains communication with the media (both domestic and foreign) and the public, as shown in Figure 10 below. Appendix A further locates the Bureau of Public Affairs within the larger organization of the

State Department, though the focus here is on the communication system and not on the implementation of foreign policy through the various Bureaus.

The main function of the Bureau of Public Affairs is to explain U.S. foreign policy to the public through a number of resources, such as press briefings as well as audio-visual packages for television and radio. Within the various branches of this Bureau, the Office of Electronic Information and Publications is in charge of maintaining the State Department website, while the Digital Communications Centre handles new media outreach through the *Dipnote* blog, in addition to other new media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, Flickr and Tumblr).

The blog's function is different from other communication channels because it aims to provide a forum to present and discuss policy-related information that complements videos on YouTube and pictures on Flickr. While Twitter and Facebook enable the public to connect with the State Department for updates, the blog is a space where the Department aims to provide an alternative version of events to mainstream media as well as promote a discussion surrounding U.S. foreign policy, which it also does through Facebook more recently.

Figure 10 - State Department Communications System


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                        US DEPARTMENT OF STATE

                        Bureau of Public Affairs
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| Press Relations | USAID Press | Foreign Press Centers | International Media Engagement | Public Liaison – Regional Media Outreach | Electronic Information and Publications | Digital Communications Center | Broadcast Services | The Historian | U.S. Diplomacy Center |

The Office of Electronic Information and Publications manages, designs, develops, and prepares information content for the State Department's main website at state.gov for all the policy bureaus within the Department.

The Digital Communications Center (DCC) expands the reach of U.S. foreign policy through new media and web-based communication technology. Working with the entire Department, the DCC team maintains the Department's official blog, DipNote (**http://blogs.state.gov**).

The office also maintains the Department's official presence on several new media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and Flickr. DCC also manages new media elements on state.gov, including the Secretary's interactive travel map, and state.gov video.

Source: Own graph, compiled with information from State.Gov

The American ideal of democracy has become heavily intertwined with the practices of blogging, and the democratic characteristics of the blogosphere bring interesting antagonisms with the interests of the state in penetrating this new arena. What emerged from the data as the most significant challenge was opening the traditionally closed system of the State Department to the new technology of social media, in this case blogging. What was most noteworthy was the degree to which some people within the Department resisted the entry into the blogosphere. Interviewees explained that it seemed to some like a threat and potential danger:

> "In terms of other people's approval and what they thought, I think a lot of people were really hesitant, like 'I don't know if we can do that kind of thing.' …A lot of old-timers at the State Department were terrified of it." (Interview #4, Personal communication, September 11, 2009)

The interviews also stressed that it was largely due to the eagerness of the Assistant Secretary of State, Sean McCormack, to "jump on the bandwagon" (Interview #3, Personal communication, September 11, 2009), that was crucial for the adoption of blogging by the State. McCormack was described as having been an exception, in an institution that was resistant to the new technology:

> "It was his idea [Sean McCormack] and he called me in June 2007. He was on a trip. He got the idea. He said 'I want you to launch a blog. Make it look however you want. Do whatever you want but I want a blog.' And Sean was so senior that we didn't really have to ask other people." (Interview #4, Personal communication, September 11, 2009)

The current Editor-in-Chief was also quick to recognize McCormack as a catalyst for the adoption of blogging in the Department. Before conducting fieldwork and content analysis, it was hypothesized that the new media team would

consist of social media-savvy professionals and consultants, who would be hired

by the government to manage the blog of the U.S. State Department. The

findings from the interviews with the management of *Dipnote*, however,

rejected this idea. The Editor-in-Chief of the blog, both under the Bush

administration and later under the Obama administration, had no real

experience with blogging, contrary to the professionalization trend encountered

in the literature review that suggests communication experts are hired to tailor

the communication of many areas of politics and government. The rest of the

management team had only recently been introduced to blogging. Even the

person who served as a liaison between the traditional Public Affairs press

apparatus and *Dipnote,* and other new media channels or "products" as they

referred to them, explained his own recent adoption of Web 2.0:

> "I actually came over into the new media realm
> from the Web 1.0 world, so I managed the
> Republican internal sites at the United States Corps
> before coming to the State Department about 6
> years ago. And so I sort of just moved with the
> marketplace if you will, and when blogs came along
> I became, not a blogger myself, but a frequent
> reader of blogs. I was able to bring expertise from
> the Web 1.0 world as part of the Federal
> Government regulations and what is expected of us
> as far as content-wise so I did my best to reassure
> people that we were sound as far as the message
> and meeting the regulations." (Interview #3,
> Personal communication, September 11, 2009)

At the broader macro-level analysis, the advent of electronic government had

already gone through an evolution from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0, whereby passive

output of information through websites had given way to a more interactive

platform for citizens (Tapscott et al., 2008). More recently, blogging was

relatively quickly incorporated as an essential element in the regular practice of

foreign policy communication, but the basic tension that lingers is linked to the largely unwritten rules and policies governing uses and content for the strategic management of blogs, which might have limited the type of content that the Department published. The management responsible for day-to-day operations, and most of the video content on the blog under both administrations, spoke of a distinct evolution in colleagues' aptitude with technology over time. This was a result of the incoming administration introducing more technologically savvy people. I also learned from the management that Secretary Clinton created a direct line between the Public Affairs staff and herself. The Public Affairs people were also told to keep an eye out for potential content for *Dipnote,* since two people from that office were reported to travel regularly with the Secretary.

In terms of experience with new media, most of the management transferred skills from the private sector and media world to the world of government, in order to ensure that the blog complied with technical and aesthetic standards. Some of the management were working in the private media sector at the *Discovery Channel.* After some investigation, it was peculiar to find that a number of employees at the State Department were also previously employed by Discovery Communications. Judith McHale, the Under-Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, who had only recently stepped down from her post, was also President and Chief Executive at Discovery Communications, as were a number of employees who work in the public diplomacy and public affairs in the State Department (Kamen, 2011). McHale specifically "molded Discovery into a global giant with 1.4 billion subscribers in 170 countries and 35 different languages" (Kamen, 2011, p.1). Another relevant finding in this

regard is that, in terms of new media experience, even the bloggers themselves had very little experience in online publishing prior to *Dipnote*. Aaron Snipes. For instance, a PRT member stationed in Muthanna who was one of the most frequently published bloggers on the federal blog, and who was interviewed for this project, said he never blogged before going to Iraq. The picture that emerges is that the people managing the blog were not typical foreign affairs personnel, but rather media-orientated personnel, who brought their experience and expertise from older platforms onto the new platform. No specialist or outsider expertise was sought to create content either.

5.3.2 Immediacy

Drawing again on Farrell and Webb's (2002) framework of professionalization, and considering the ways in which aspects of the blog are a new communication technique for the government, immediacy emerged as a key element of blogging. Indeed, blogging gives the government the ability to gain the attention of the public through the immediacy enabled by the publishing platform. As the technical developer of *Dipnote* explained, the objective in the long run is "maximizing [the] value chain... being able to take an existing press briefing and move it through every channel that somebody would want it on" (Interview #2, Personal communication, September 11, 2009). Given the simplicity of the technology involved in blogging, the technical roadblocks were described as minor by the management:

> "I think that the technical challenges were actually fairly minimal; we jumped through a few hoops like any new property whether it would be a private or public sector gig." (Interview #2, Personal communication, September 11, 2009)

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The newest part of this technology in terms of content is that it enabled immediate publication and updating of content, a quick transmission of the message, and offered the potential for reactivity to foreign policy events. In terms of immediacy, the data from the content analysis attempted to measure the response rate to foreign policy events on *Dipnote*. The findings suggest that the State Department used the official blog to react to mainstream news coverage of only one event, throughout the four years analysed. The Blackwater Investigation happened during the term of President Bush; no reactions to any foreign policy event were found under the Obama administration under the period of observation. On September 16, 2007, U.S. security contractor Blackwater allegedly shot and killed 14 Iraqi civilians, sparking an investigation by the FBI. The response by the State Department on *Dipnote* was published on September 26, 2007, 10 days, or in the context of digital immediacy, roughly 245 hours after the incident took place. The post was written by the Assistant Secretary of State himself, Sean McCormack, as if conducting a virtual press conference with a virtual audience composed of the media and the blogosphere. In the post, McCormack directly challenges two articles published by the *Washington Post*:

> I woke up this morning in New York to news headlines about the conduct of U.S. government security contractor Blackwater and the multiple investigations and reviews underway concerning their work in Iraq for the State Department...Buried in a long front page story is an <u>anonymous quote from a Pentagon source</u> saying, "[w]e are making the State respond, conduct an investigation and come up with recommendations." I have no idea who the person is, but they could not be more

> wrong. (*Blackwater investigation update*, Sept 16,
> 2007)

And he added in the end:

> So, don't be fooled by the headline.

In this post, McCormack defended the views of the State Department and made use of this channel to send an alternative version of the controversy being reported by the mainstream media. By contrast, a quick search in the media archives of the *New York Times* (Schmitt & Rohde, 2007) found that the results of the investigation were not positive for the State Department. According to the article, "a State Department review of its own security practices in Iraq assails the department for poor coordination, communication, oversight and accountability involving armed security companies like Blackwater USA" (p. 1). It may not be surprising that the State Department did not publish the negative result of the investigation, but it goes to show how the official blog defends the image of the government, especially in the context of war, through the blogosphere. That is not to say that the blog merely depicts a sanitized view of the war. In fact, in many posts written by Foreign Service Officers, to be analyzed in more depth in the next chapter, there was a remarkable honesty with regard to the conditions on the ground, which the government otherwise usually does not acknowledge in official communications, and which is altogether new terrain for the foreign affairs apparatus of the State Department.

Related to immediacy, another variable that emerged from the interview data was timing. A blog's viability and readership is a direct function of the frequency of output. The frequency of publication was steady over time in the sample

studied, with 3 posts a month on average under the Bush administration, increasing to 7 posts a month under Obama ($t(157)=40.4$; $p<0.01$), suggesting a more enhanced effort to engage and more output as the institution adopted blogging as its mainstream practice. The management cited the need to update the blog regularly as a challenge in the first stages of the blog:

> "We wanted to be timely, so if something big happened we wanted an inside look at that thing. But sometimes there were people who couldn't give us an inside look because it was all top secret… or they just worried that it had to go through the official channel first, so we tried to be as timely as possible, to keep up with what was going on, but that was definitely the biggest challenge." (Interview #4, Personal communication, September 11, 2009)

The nature of foreign policy communication means there is a delicate balance to be struck between content output and issue sensitivity, between transparency and secrecy. A pertinent example is the controversy that arose in the blogosphere over a video release by Al-Qaeda leader Ayman Al-Zawahiri in November 2008, in which he called then president-elect Obama a "White House negro" and insulted preceding black leaders in America's history—most notably Malcolm X—as slaves to the "white masters" (AFP, 2008). In the blogosphere debate that ensued, *Dipnote* was reproached for its lack of response to Zawahiri's tape, leading to a greater call for *Dipnote* to become active in its blogging effort. It was expected that the blogosphere would be suspicious of government blogging, but in fact it encouraged its efforts. For instance, *Mountainrunner*, an influential foreign policy blog, wrote:

> State needs to respond both to U.S. audiences (ostensibly *Dipnote*'s mission) and abroad (America.gov's mission). Seriously, even China is implementing an agile response capability. I don't

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think we'll see anything from *Dipnote* or America.gov on this. It would be great to be wrong. Prove me wrong. (Armstrong, 2008)

Another blogger from *Undiplomatic* wrote:

Think about the "Obama is a 'House Negro'" comment from Al Qaeda leader Ayman Al-Zawahiri the other day. The comment tore up the political blogosphere. Observers suggested the comment exposes a flaw in Al Qaeda strategy since the racism of the comment could hurt AQ in [the] part of the world it is counting on for growth (Sudan, Kenya, etc.) To be fair... the newest post on *Dipnote* is from Mark Lagon (one of the highest ranking people I have seen post on *Dipnote*). And he covers a very serious topic: Human Trafficking in the Middle East. But still... (McGarry, 2008)

So while being critical of *Dipnote's* lack of comment on the tape, and its general silence on key foreign policy events as they happen, the political blogosphere pushed the State Department to take more initiatives with its digital communications, even while being critical and sceptical of the blog itself as just another official source of information. I arrived at this finding through a small exercise, researching the media and blogosphere coverage of *Dipnote* at the beginning of this project. I conducted a Google search and Google Alerts were set up for any mention of '*Dipnote*' in the first few months of its operation, from when it was launched in September 2007 until January 19 2008. The results from this exercise turned out to be useful for gauging reactions to the government's initiative. I categorized the articles after the end of the time period and divided them between mainstream media articles (31 articles in total) and the blogosphere (102 blogs in total). The majority of blogs covering *Dipnote* were effectively political blogs, 5 mainstream media blogs, 5 U.S. government blogs, and 17 other types of blog. Although it is hard to make any

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definite claims about how successfully any blog is able to influence the blogosphere, *Dipnote* was able to attract attention to its site from blogs in the political blogging community. The blogosphere was overall mixed in its judgment of the State Department's blogging efforts. The majority of political blogs sampled were largely sceptical of *Dipnote* and took a negative stance, but an equal number also approved of it and welcomed the willingness of the government to interact on this platform. For example, one blogger was doubtful:

> This is what we've all been waiting for! No more media filters and distortions. Unbiased news directly from the federal government, a news source long noted for truthful, unbiased reporting. The Clinton administration and most all its predecessors vowed to end-run the media, and they finally have the new electronic media to help them to do it. (Sudbay, 2007)

In contrast, another blogger was more open about the initiative:

> It seems like *Dipnote* is actually a legitimate forum for discussion rather than just a false front. In an era where so many media outlets, organizations, and political campaigns are concerned about "inappropriate citizen content" appearing on their websites, I am finding the openness of *Dipnote* pretty refreshing. I have to say, I'm even impressed. (Teeling, 2010)

In contrast to the mixed reviews on political blogs, government blogs characterized *Dipnote* positively. This speaks for the high degree of solidarity between government blogs to promote the wider digital initiatives and their entrance into the blogosphere. Finally, the majority of MSM articles were largely neutral or positive in their characterization of *Dipnote*; a few were suspicious of *Dipnote* and the rest described the federal blog, either as a public opinion exercise or as a tool of strategic communication. In contrast, MSM blogs in the

sample largely described *Dipnote* as a negative development. Not one MSM blog entry described *Dipnote* in a positive light. Although this part would deserve a content analysis of its own and a research topic focusing on media coverage, the preliminary difference between print and blog coverage from this exercise suggests that journalists who are aware of blogging and who blog for their media organization are much more sceptical about the penetration of the government into the global conversation than their off-line counterparts. The latter are more likely to align themselves to the official representation of the State's developments. It also shows that the terrain on which the State Department was intruding by entering the blogosphere was rather welcoming.

In addition to public opinion about the war, it is important here to recall the motivation of the State Department blog: to provide an alternative framework to the mainstream news media, which was becoming increasingly critical by 2007. In the first sample, when the Bush administration was increasingly under attack over the escalation of the war, there were direct references to media coverage characterized by a defensive position towards prevailing attitudes and opinions about the failure of the war in Iraq. The goal of *Dipnote* up until 2009 was to dispel the view of American failure in Iraq:

> Public perceptions of Iraq are not wrong; they are just out of date. Media coverage of Iraq has dropped in almost perfect correlation with progress made toward peace and stability. As a result, the picture persists from pre-surge 2006 but it is not 2006 anymore. It is post-surge in Anbar Province where a significantly more secure Iraq exists rebuilding, learning, governing, producing and starting to make huge strides along the road to prosperity. (*Iraq: Perceptions out of date*, Feb 14, 2008)

The rebuttal of mainstream media encountered in the first sample was not encountered in the Obama sample, and the Assistant Secretary was more vocal in the first operation of *Dipnote* under Bush, partly because he believed in its potential as he was the one who championed the idea to the Department. The pieces he contributed show the active effort of deploying *Dipnote* as a platform to contest mainstream media coverage as well as debate about the foreign policy issues of the day. Under Obama, the spokesman did not take such an active stance with the blog, and the content did not directly address the mainstream media, which overall decreased the level of immediacy.

5.3.3 Technical interactivity

Interactivity is a fundamental factor in the success of a blog, as links are the means through which vital pathways to the virtual network of blogging are enabled (Matheson, 2005). Through blogging, the government joined a larger conversation on foreign policy; as one interviewee said: "Seeing how this is the State Department where the foreign policy gets made, we should have a voice in that" (Interview #2, Personal communication, September 11, 2009). As part of the active engagement of the team, the bloggers said they keep an ear on the conversations taking place in the blogosphere.

> "One of the things we do is we go out primarily to the ones of the major blogs on the blogroll and other major political blogs, and we go out there and we'll comment on their blogs as well as *Dipnote* bloggers […] We're actively engaged and actively watching what they're putting out as well and again that's like we're trying to build a relationship with people who are commenting on our blog, we're trying to build relationships with other bloggers just to again let them know that we're legitimate and we're and, you know a trustworthy source."

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(Interview #3, Personal communication, September 11, 2009)

It was difficult to measure this level of interaction, since a simple Google search does not generate an all-encompassing set of data. Perhaps future research can attempt to track the government's interactions in the larger virtual space of the blogosphere, possibly through a network analysis, especially in the context of digital diplomacy. The blogroll on *Dipnote* has changed much throughout the two administrations: while under Bush it included the most influential foreign policy voices in the blogosphere such as *MountainRunner* or *Foreign Policy* blog, under Obama it contained links only to official U.S. government blogs. The use of links embedded in the blog content increased significantly over time; this feature began to resemble other generic blogs in the blogosphere. While 96% of the blog posts under Bush contained no links, 94% ($X^2(11) = 100.04$; $p < .01$) of blog posts under Obama contained a link. Figure 11 shows the development of links over time. This could be explained by a higher professionalization of the blog from a technological angle.

Figure 11 - Quantity of links over time in *Dipnote* blog posts
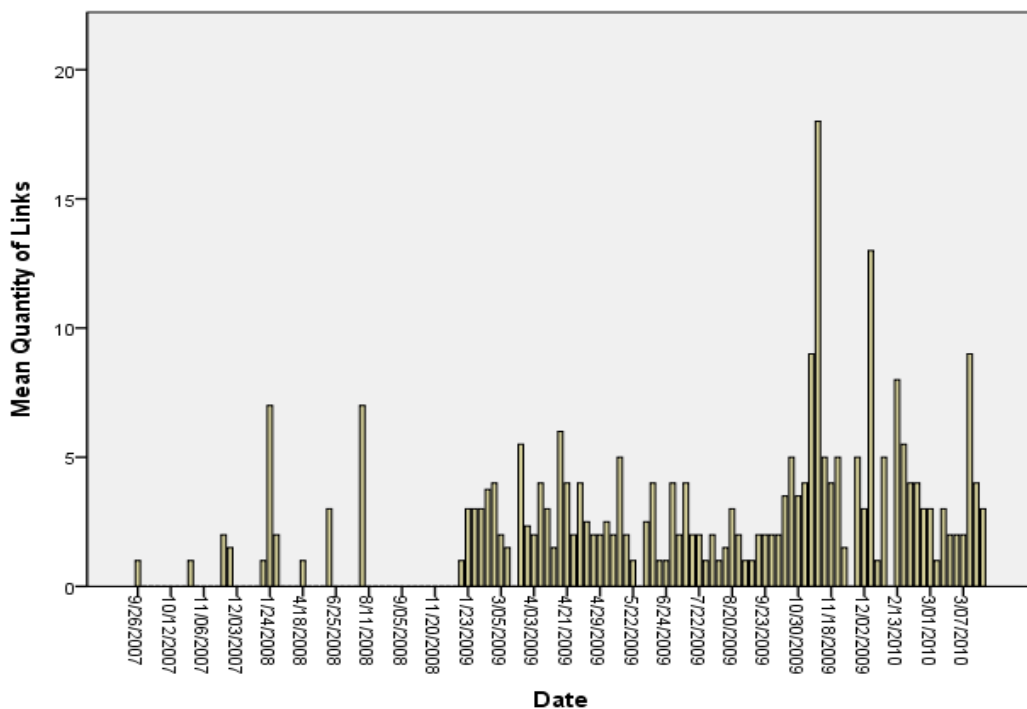
When links were embedded in the blog posts, as Table 5 shows, they were mostly linked to mainstream media sources in the Bush sample. In contrast, under Obama, the majority of links were to the State Department or other government sources. This is also indicative of the more formal and professionalized path that the blog took over the year, even though, as will be demonstrated in the following chapter, personalization still remained central to the content. What is worth noting is how much more restrained the blog's interactions became over time, as they increasingly linked solely to government in the blogosphere. Despite the technical advantages of blogging that allow for comments to engage in a conversation, more potential has to yet to be fulfilled for the government to be more credible. In order to embark successfully upon a conversation with the political blogosphere, other bloggers need to link *Dipnote* content to others, thus dispersing it to the network. "According [to] the Web 2.0 philosophy, the success of a blog derives from its external visibility in the

blogosphere, and the blogger's ability to link and engage with other bloggers interested in the same fields or topics" (Criado & Fuentes, 2007, p. 7). The higher the number of links, the deeper this interaction between a blog and the blogosphere can be. *Dipnote* produces content and successfully diffuses it. Instead of linking to other blogs, however, the official blog directs readers to other official outlets of public information.

Table 5

Type of links on Dipnote in the Bush and Obama sample

Link Types	Bush sample (N=53)	Obama sample (N=105)
Link to State Department	1.9%**	86.7%**
Link to mainstream media	49.1%**	36.5%**
Link to government blog	26.4%**	0%**
Link to a political blog	18.9%*	0%*
Link to US government	3.8%*	22.9%*
Link to NGO / IGO	0%*	3.8%*

Note: *p< .05 **p<0.01

Finally, the amount of video content is also an indicator of the extent of incorporation of the latest interactive technologies, or what Kavanaugh et al. (2007) call their "level of emerging technology use". During the entire period examined under Bush, *Dipnote* created and uploaded only two videos, compared to 158 under the Obama administration; it is important to emphasize here that while the Obama administration was already making more regular use of YouTube and video material in general, this was a novel technology at the time

of the Bush administration. The uploading of videos will thus no doubt increase over time, as the State Department further incorporates new technologies under future administrations. Other features added during the Obama administration have been links to podcasts, links to send a text to the secretary or to text a donation (for humanitarian relief), and links to a 'trip information page' where the details of the Secretary's travels are detailed, which emphasizes the earlier finding of the focus on diplomatic trips.

The results from the analysis suggest that the relationship which the government attempts to build with the public, as well as their presence in the blogosphere, is still one-way, and very much resembles the traditional approach of producing messages and providing a façade of interactivity. Perhaps this can be elucidated by an inherent tension between the blog's ideal for interactivity and the government's need for authoritative associations from the offline world onto the blogosphere. A member of the management from *Dipnote* who assisted in launching the blog criticized the increasing limits of government openness:

> "You have to be there in the new media. But we are not good at being there [...] what we're trying to do is tap into the expertise of the State Department [...] but we don't share it. We keep everything in the cubicles by ourselves [...] I think that the blog was meant to be a sharing of experiences. It seems to me that the State Department blog [is] [...] actually not as open as it should be [...]." (Interview #6, Personal communication, September 11, 2009)

One may argue that the interactive element of a blog also draws on the visual presentation of the content, and this refers back to Chadwick's (2009) notion of a "symbolic structure of power" online. In this respect, the major technical transformation of *Dipnote* took place in January 2010, in the second year of the

blog's operation under the Obama administration. When *Dipnote* first launched, the layout was white text over black background (Figure 12), giving it a rigid bureaucratic feel that attracted much criticism from the blogging community. When the Obama administration took over, the blog maintained its original layout for one year. In the second year, on the first post of 2010 on Iraq, "A year of transformation and transition" (Hill, 2010), *Dipnote* transformed and refreshed its design to fit the blogging age, with a softer and less rigid feel and look (Figure 13). Black text over white background, red titles and blue links, together represent the palette of the colours of the American flag.

Figure 12 - *Dipnote* layout under the Bush administration
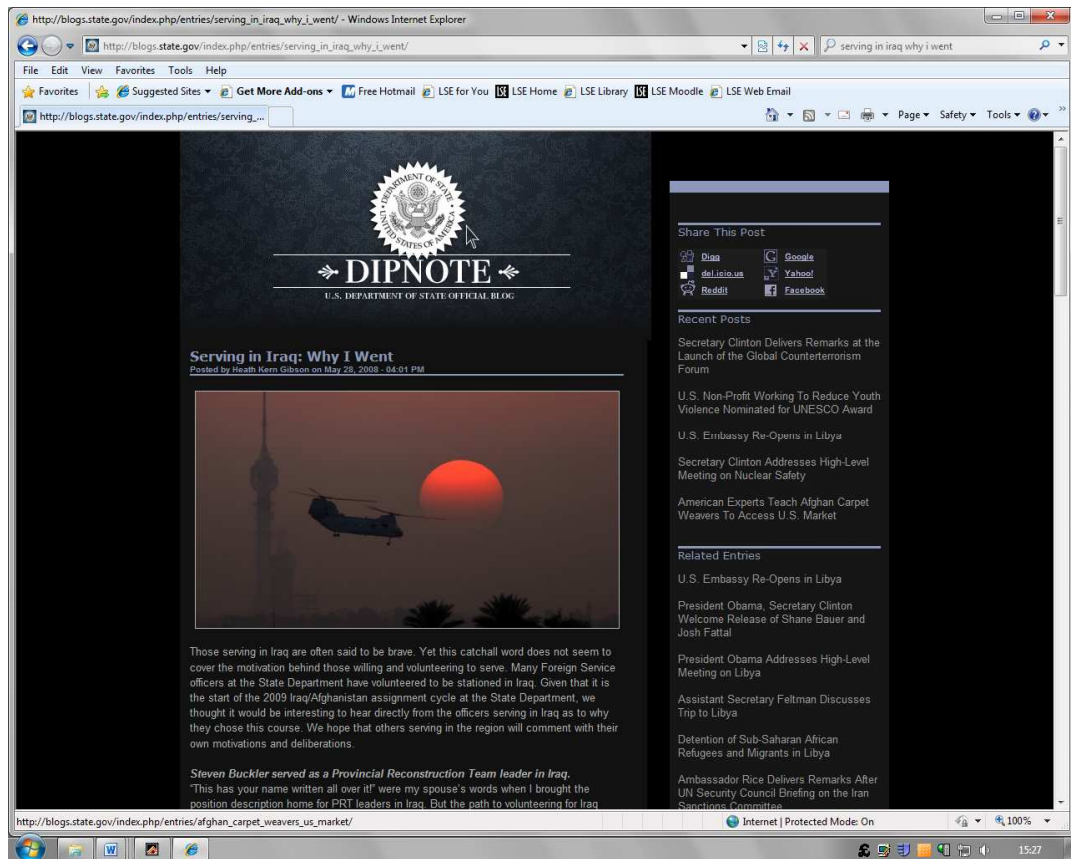
Figure 13 - *Dipnote* layout under the Obama administration

In addition to the design, easier sharing options through social media were added under each post, to enhance the spread of the content for readers. More links were added to navigate from the post to other content, such as photos, videos, archives, and so on. Finally, the updated version reorganized the content, so that upon reading one post, one is able to access other themes and regions of the world in the blog more easily. Overall, the changes over time have made *Dipnote* more user-friendly, more in tune with the blogosphere, and more visually appealing, since visuals are an important feature of any blog. They help attracts readers' attention, add aesthetic appeal, and complement the content of a blog. The factors influencing the professionalization of the content thus also include the evolution of different visual elements that help sell the product to the consumer, as political marketing would have it.

5.4   **Thematic developments**

5.4.1 **Just another mouthpiece?**

One of the most interesting questions for the advent of government blogging was the question of whether the new technology was just another channel for spreading the official message, and perhaps also, how the technology may be used to monitor the blogosphere. Some contradictions on these issues arose from the interviews, and the answer to this question is thus not clear-cut. On the one hand, one member of the management acknowledged that *Dipnote* was "basically not reinventing the wheel":

> "We were doing things the way we were doing before, just finding a new avenue to get the message out." (Interview #3, personal communication, September 11, 2009)

The State Department under the Bush administration enacted a social media

strategy that evolved and grew more refined under the Obama administration.

The government blog as such should thus not be looked at separately, but rather

as part of a loop of inter-connected channels that serve to reinforce the message

of the State Department. The description given by the Editor-in-Chief about the

social media strategy is packed with political marketing discourse, as the blog is

explained as a "product":

> "All of our products support each other and all of
> this was developed with a real strategy so …[we]
> started with RSS feeds on State.gov and video, and
> did the blog, and then Facebook and YouTube and
> Twitter…I mean it's actually got to the point where I
> feel comfortable saying that we can drive traffic to
> other properties … if somebody comes to us inside
> the Department and says …I need to get some
> publicity or that this is coming out can you help us
> with it… we can actually drive traffic to their site or
> bring recognition to their issues. And that's
> something we couldn't do two years ago."
> (Interview #1, Personal communication, September
> 11, 2009)

This brings to the surface the publicity value that blogging brings to the

government. Although a focus on political marketing discourse would perhaps

warrant a doctoral thesis of its own, it is important to consider political

marketing in the analytical context of the government blog strategy in the new

media environment and the general evolution of political communication. The

message of the blog also was systematically referred to as the "product" by the

management of *Dipnote*. In fact, each of the types of posts within the blog, such

as Q&A with an Ambassador, or an experience on the ground, is considered to

be a separate sub-product. The decision to blog was compared to setting up a

"shop" and the blog itself as a "concept to sell". The readers of the blog, mainly

the American public but also people overseas, were referred to as "viewers" and

the "viewership". In terms of the transition of the blog from one administration

to the next, the analogy to the private sector was also straightforward:

> "Every administration comes with a set of priorities and we definitely enact their priorities and priorities change, from administration to administration, it's pretty natural like a company changing leadership." (Interview #2, Personal communication, September 11, 2009)

The change in leadership was certainly reflected in the change in the types of

blog posts published, and also, in part, of the issues covered, as we will see in

the chapter on ideology. During the interviews, the management of *Dipnote*

were asked to describe the adaption to the digital era. All were enthusiastic

about the need to keep up with the changes in the media landscape, and in

general had the impression that the government is making great strides in this

domain and that it was an almost natural evolution that mirrored the private

sector's and the media's own re-adaptation in response to advances in new

media technologies:

> "We gotta stick our neck out there...The new media crowd is recognizing the government as one of the key innovators now in the social media realm and Web 2.0 ...[It is] an overall paradigm shift recognizing and into trusting the government as actually being engaging on this front ...We're all following the same trend ...as news organizations..." (Interview #3, Personal communication, September 11, 2009)

During the first months of the government entering the blogosphere, the

mainstream media was quick to be suspicious of this move, though it stopped

short of condemning the government for what it saw as direct competition.

Indeed, there was one instance when the State Department bypassed the

mainstream media by publishing directly on *Dipnote*, when Condoleezza Rice embarked on the first official visit to Libya in 50 years (September 2008). The post on "Libya's New Role in the International Community" was picked up by a number of bloggers in the blogosphere and in the mainstream media. The mainstream media expressed discontent with this move, as the government blog at first seemed to resemble a virtual form of the traditional press conference. However, when asked about how the government views the mainstream media, the management of *Dipnote* did not see them as a competitor, nor did they agree they could take away from their market share. In fact, the evidence so far, as will be shown throughout, is that the blog is not a news service, except for minor instances that do show the potential for the blog to bypass the press.

The management explained that *Dipnote* as a government blog is subject to many limitations that restrict any manipulation of public opinion, such as not being able to engage in data mining or what is commonly known as dataveillance. There was no way to verify or measure this, but the management also stressed that legislation does not allow the State Department to enable cookies on its blog. From the interviews with individual bloggers, it was further emphasized that *Dipnote* is not a coordinated, centralized effort by the State Department. In other words, the blog is crafted mainly to share the agency's activities with those who are on the ground, or to update the public on the head of the agency's diplomatic efforts and travels, but it remains independent from central communications control. This could suggest that the government today, in the age of the proliferation of communication channels, opens the control

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from within to a wider variety of actors (blogging, micro-blogging, social networks) more than before, when there was maintenance of one central online channel, the website.

Indeed, the evolution of blogs from personal web pages to a wide variety of uses across sectors and fields has turned the format into an important marketing tool for organizations; in public relations, blogs quickly rose to the fore as important tools applied by communication firms and consultants (Kent, 2008). Speaking to other interviewees suggests that blogging complements other more traditional tools used in the State Department, setting it apart as a novelty because of its ability to incorporate the otherwise excluded experiences of people within the Department, as well as open up the discussion of foreign policy to the public for the first time:

> "[*Dipnote*] is sort of an insider's look at the way government is run and what we're really doing, because I think that prior to *Dipnote* you would have press releases…very short, always worded very carefully, and then you had the things by the spokesperson, but you didn't get a lot of behind the scenes look at what really everybody was doing." (Interview #4, Personal communication, September 11, 2009)

Along with other tools such as press releases and websites still in operation as part of the routine tools used by the government, *Dipnote* 's objective is to show what happens behind the official version of events or foreign policy. The same marketing opportunity that interested the private sector thus rapidly attracted the interest and application of the government, which, as documented in the literature, has already begun to adopt a marketing logic. In terms of editorial control, the Editor-in-Chief approves all of the content it receives from the

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variety of sources within the Department and publishes it. Therefore, how much editorial independence do the bloggers actually have? A blogger explained the process by which his written entries were published:

> "At *Dipnote* I didn't do anything at all, I just email with my blog contribution. And they put it up. And I didn't notice it was up until it happened." (Interview #6, personal communication, September 11, 2009)

According to the current Editor-in-Chief, the content is not edited as with traditional content produced for official political communication by the State Department.

> "I think that people are really getting to look at not just what the top-level people are doing but what a lot of different people are doing at the State Department. It's in your own words too, because I think that most of the things that come out of the State Department are written by one senior person and then edited by the other senior person, and then edited by lawyers or whatever it is, whereas this is honest, straightforward, from the person who is writing." (Interview #4, personal communication, September 11, 2009)

The underlying claim by the management here is that the content written by FSOs is more transparent and truthful than it would be, if it had been part of the filtered official communication process of the State Department. What it does not address however is how bloggers are guided in this process compared with the Department of Defense, which is documented to alert bloggers to what type of information may or may be suitable. On the one hand, the blog is an official channel of communication, but on the other it permits the type of communication that is not communicated in official channels. This is a point I will return to in the discussion chapter.

5.5   Further things to think about

In the first breakdown of the analytical framework, this thesis sought to explore what the State Department's blog changes in communications techniques, resources, and thematic developments within the institution. It further considered the development of blogging in the context of government, as a new technical platform of foreign policy communication that allows for immediacy and interactivity. The findings show that *Dipnote* was used to boost support for the war under the Bush administration when polls reached an all-time low. It then became an official diary of the State Secretary's activities to a large extent under Obama. The results from the content analysis suggest that public relations content increased over time; the content became more official and resembled more traditional forms of communication. The kind of PR material that increased over time shadowed all other post types. The online deliberation about the row over directed assignments on the blog shows the potential for this space to become a platform of debate about internal issues. It shows the first time in which the personnel publicly expressed their views candidly on the blogging platform. As the blog evolved over time, however, there was no other such instance when employees publicly deliberated about any internal issues (or external issues for that matter). The delay or lack of response to events was significant; it is telling of both the objectives and the constraints of an official foreign policy blog, in that it is still hard to replace the controlled environment of the press conference with the vulnerabilities that a virtual environment entails. Interactivity is also only a potential and remains limited as far as the content analysis of this study shows.

There also seem to be parallel developments at work that may appear as a contradiction at first but that are happening simultaneously. This elucidates the tensions explored throughout this chapter and further in the next chapters, between transparency and secrecy, openness and control, interactivity and the safety of closed networks. First, the blog is becoming less interactive, with more traditional types of content encountered in other communication platforms, while the general look and feel of the blog is more professionalized. At the same time, the informality of the language, as will now be reviewed in the personalization chapter, helps the government enter the blogosphere scene and blend in with the rest of the blogs. It brings to light the limits of government openness. The hasty conclusion that the government blog is a publicity tool only, as will be explained in the chapter on ideology, is simplistic and not all-encompassing of the in-depth look at blog posts, where the reality of the situation is not always sanitized and the comment not always positive. The blog, then, has a more varied function for the State Department than just another channel to spread the message; these findings address the complexity of such a digital enterprise and help understand its application in its full multi-dimensionality. To delve deeper into the personalization of the narrative, the next chapter on the role of personalization will elucidate the content on *Dipnote*.

Chapter 6:   **Personalization**

6.1   **Introduction**

This chapter relates back to the sub-question introduced in the theoretical framework: *what is the nature and level of personalization on the government blog?* In the context of blogging, personalization refers to the narrative or a "writing style characterized by personalization" (Wall, 2005, p. 153); it is the style, form, and content of the State Department blog that defines personalization. Adapting Bjerling's (2011) framework, there are three dimensions of personalization that will inform the structure of this chapter and the analysis of this concept. The first section, *personification*, will explore how the State Department is embodied through personalization of the content, what actors are most prominent on the blog, and the variety of authorship of the blog posts. It is important to clarify here that humanization, by which I mean putting a human face on the bureaucratic apparatus, is in this thesis at times interchangeably used with personification. The second section, *orientation towards persona*, will analyze what personal attributes of the blogger(s) are infused within the content, including references to family and emotions. The third section, *intimization*, will describe the kind of private versus public information that the bloggers convey to readers, including references to everyday life.

Together these three dimensions will add to personalization theory in the context of foreign policy communication. In the context of the government blog, it will also contribute theoretically to legitimation strategy as understood from Chadwick's (2001) study of the White House website. Indeed, *Dipnote* was

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initially conceived as a site for alternative news to the mainstream news media. In 2007 when the blog was launched, the public was growing increasingly uneasy about the course of the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. It was the first time war had been blogged about by soldiers and citizens alike, so it was then a new digital era in which the government could be involved but was not. Government communication in general, and in this case the State Department, has been predominantly depersonalized; from press releases to press briefings, there has usually been a distance between the foreign policy that happens in distant lands *over there* and the United States *here*. In this chapter I will analyze how the government blog personalizes foreign policy communication and creates a rapprochement between the foreign policy and the American public, while the discussion chapter will discuss the link between personalization and ideology.

6.2   Personification of the State Department

Compared with formal or official foreign policy communication, stories on *Dipnote* are informal in nature and casual in language, although they obey the overarching main official messages of the State Department, primarily because it is an agency blog. A blog in its core essence is an online format that resembles a personal diary; the narrative is characterized by the use of the first person. One blogger interviewed emphasized that a blog "has to have personality" (Interview #6, personal communication, 11 September, 2009). Another explained:

> "…a blog is not like an essay. It has to be based on self-experience. You have to be someplace where something is happening…So that was my experience at *Dipnote*." (Interview #6, Personal communication, 11 September, 2009)

In-depth analysis of the sample suggests that personification on *Dipnote* is dominant under both administrations but in different ways. The results in the professionalization chapter (see Table 4) showed that the majority of post types, roughly 75% under the Bush administration, were personal accounts of the situation on the ground by Foreign Service Officers. During this period, the State Department blog put a human face on American foreign policy by focusing more on experiences of civil servants than on the official policy discourses or the activities of the Secretary of State and other elites, conventionally reported by the government to the mainstream media and the public. Under Obama, however, the online entries focused more on the activities of the Secretary of State and included less posts about personal experiences — only 50.9% ($\chi^2(1)$ = 9.42; p< .01). While the first sample embodied the State Department through a focus on personnel, the second sample embodied it through one person, the Secretary of State, which will be elaborated upon below.

The stories of personal experiences on *Dipnote* were authored by State Department officers from elites to low-level Foreign Service Officers, and the content analysis helped further categorize the authors of the blog posts over time. The results indicate that posts written by the *Dipnote* team accounted for only 20% of the content under Bush, but increased to 50% ($\chi^2(10)$ = 39.8; p< .01) under Obama. In contrast, the proportion of content written by Foreign Service Officers went from 40% of content under Bush to 25% under Obama ($\chi^2(13)$ = 27.2; p<0.01). The amount of high-level diplomats blogging also increased, which shows a better adoption of the tool at the senior level. Correlating these figures with the post types helps to make a better claim about

professionalization, as will be discussed in the discussion chapter, since various elements interlink. Overtime, the management reported a higher generation of content by people within the State Department and a greater willingness to submit material without being solicited to do so, as in the beginning. It thus became a real part of the practices of foreign policy duties.

> "I think at about a year, instead of constantly going out to ambassadors and soliciting content, selling them on the product and the concept, they started coming to us. And we basically had to sort of line them up and say alright we have two this month and this would be a good time for you to do yours...I mean [our Editor-in-Chief] actively goes out and solicits for content but there are certain offices that regularly contribute...I mean people are recognizing the good publicity value." (Interview #3, personal communication, September 11, 2009)

According to one source, it has become mandatory for ambassadors overseas to submit a blog entry, signalling a related process of professionalization in the adoption of this new media. The "publicity value" of the blog content falls in line with the political marketing aspect of government communications, discussed in the next section. One of the reasons for the evolution of the blog into a personality-based blog is the popularity of Hillary Clinton herself. Interviews with the management revealed that readership doubled with the arrival of the new Secretary. In the transition from Bush to Obama, according to the interviews, the change in leadership first and foremost made a significant impact on the visibility of the blog. As of September 2010, *Dipnote* had reached 30 million page views (Forgerson, 2010). The management further explained that Secretary Clinton's personality, and popularity in the United States, translated into a doubling of traffic to the site:

"There is a contingent: …we always had viewership that was interested in foreign policy and we always had a viewership that was interested in communications and …now we have another group that's interested in Secretary Clinton. And they're interested in following what she does…" (Interview #1, personal communication, September 11, 2009)

From an in-depth reading of the comments across the two samples, it was also noted that the positive comments in the Obama sample were largely in praise of Secretary Clinton. For instance one commenter wrote:

Ed writes:
Dear Secretary Clinton, I was and still am a supporter and admirer of you. I feel that you would have made an excellent U.S. President and I know that you will [be] outstanding as our Secretary of State.
(Posted on Sun Jan 25, 2009)

The praise garnered by Secretary Clinton on *Dipnote* was matched by no other person in the administration or the State Department. Posts were mostly less about foreign policy than about her as a person. While some feared for her safety, some accessed *Dipnote* to wish her birthday wishes. This finding suggests the way in which foreign policy is becoming personalized, whereby Secretary Clinton herself embodies and becomes the personification of American foreign policy. What really boosted *Dipnote*, according to some, was that 'Clinton understands blogs' (Ross, 2011). In comparison, no positive comments in the Bush sample were related to Secretary Rice, except a few negative comments about the administration in general. An interview with a *Dipnote* blogger further confirmed the Secretary's popularity as a driver of personalization:

"They [readers], they have a connection with her, a connection that Secretary Rice, because of her personality, because of the administration, because of the challenges of the last administration was not able to make with people… Secretary Clinton's star

> power, to increase readership and to attract readership I mean I think that really helps." (Interview #5, Personal communication, September 11, 2011)

Some scholars have previously only found evidence for presidentialization (Poguntke & Webb, 2005) of foreign policy over time and the personalization of party politics (MacAllister, 2005), but there was no study of foreign policy personalization in the way it is understood here in the digital context. When Hillary Clinton assumed office, the blog immediately made the shift from a State Department of many voices, to a State Department in which the Secretary was the key actor and explicitly mentioned in most entries. The conceptual distinction between presidentialization and personalization is worth probing here. Presidentialization usually refers to the increasing power bestowed upon a President or Prime Minister, whereas personalization refers to the style or way in which the conduct of power is associated with a person. The former refers to influence and exercise of power by the head of the party or country, while the latter refers to how this power is represented as being symbolized by the head of the party or country. It is effectively the personification or embodiment of the person into an entity.

Since the United States' foreign policy implementation of the "War on Terror" was interchangeably referred to as the Bush Doctrine, there was also an evident presidentialization of foreign policy which did not translate onto the agency's blog. On the other hand, the lack of an ideological doctrine attributable to President Obama translated in a figurative shifting of power from the President to the head of the State Department, Secretary Clinton, who was thus portrayed

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on the blog as the personalized depiction of foreign policy. Interestingly, while the interviews with the management focused on political marketing, the focus of interviews with bloggers was more on personalization and how the format of the blog encouraged this shift. The online entries on *Dipnote* thus focus on personal issues rather than on foreign policy issues and this could be because the format of the blog thereby facilitates the personalization of the content and the overall personification of the State Department.

6.3 Orientation towards persona

6.3.1 Formal vs. informal: Protocol & state visits

In the context of foreign policy, protocol is a key element in the official conduct of relations between countries. The personalized narratives on *Dipnote* attempt to bring the reader behind the scenes and informally shed light on what happens backstage ahead of formal meetings and events, which are key components of public diplomacy. Compared with the informal and casual style encouraged by the blog format, protocol as a practice is formal in essence:

> Protocol is often considered to be synonymous with formality, but for diplomacy protocol provides the commonly accepted norms of behaviour for the conduct of relations between states. As informality becomes the norm in diplomacy, so diplomatic protocol will help systematize and therefore stabilize these new forms in the communication and negotiation between states. (Goldstein, 1998, p. 1)

Bloggers travelling with the Secretary provided a narrative of their trip and the protocol preparations, but, in contrast to the definition above of offline formal protocol, the content presents the informal aspect of protocol. The reader is

invited in to see the backstage before a show, led by personal thoughts and attributes of the blogger. For example, the Chief of Protocol during a trip writes:

> We've been doing a whole lot of running and jumping throughout [the] morning... I enjoyed talking to Yitzhak [Israeli Chief of Protocol]; we had a great discussion about **what shoes are best to wear** in this hectic job. (*Ambassador Brinker's Reflections of the Middle East,* Jan 24, 2008 – emphasis added)

The futility of certain details as mentioned here about the discussion of shoes, between the two Chiefs of Protocol, could be an indication of the adaptation of foreign policy communication to the blogging logic. Such attempts to discuss details of a private nature exemplify the private-public information convergence that is often encouraged by the personal blog format. It is in those details, which are oriented towards persona, that the discursive humanization of the diplomatic process takes place. One may even go as far as to contrast the adroitness and formality of diplomatic routines with the *Dipnote* entries of the humane and unceremonious side to the diplomatic process. What the public usually sees are well rehearsed orchestrated events. That perspective is replaced on the blog by descriptions of the impromptu feel of the preparations. In another entry, the Chief of Protocol writes about the conclusion of a conference, with a level of personal detail that includes hospitality, an important element of protocol to which the American public usually has no access:

> ...We try to think about the personal comfort of our guests, offering them chocolate or coffee. At least for me, a little chocolate does wonders! *...*Aimee Violette and I ran down to the White House mess to eat very quickly after seeing President Abbas to his car. (*Behind the scenes: The day after the Annapolis conference,* 26 Nov, 2007)

The blog covered state visits and trips, with personalized reporting of protocol procedures during conferences and official state visits by the President and / or the Secretary of State. The diary-like description of the events that the United States either organized or took part in thus added another element to the humanization of the State Department, and the normalization of backstage of public diplomacy. At the time *Dipnote* was launched in September 2007, the main buzz was around the high-profile Annapolis conference, which brought together the Israeli and Palestinian leaders for negotiations under the patronage of the United States. What was noticeable in protocol-related posts was that the content omitted the foreign policy context, instead focusing on preparations and the range of emotions of the blogger. By cross-tabulating the results of posts on 'diplomatic trips' with mentions of 'policy,' 15% mentioned foreign policy while 85% did not; in the Obama sample, 24% mentioned foreign policy while 76% ($\chi^2(1)$ = 10.4; p< 0.01) did not. The data shows more inclusion of official foreign policy in the content, but the focus remains on the preparations, not the issues at stake.

6.3.2 References to emotions and family life

Emotion is an important element in the personalization of content, orienting the focus toward the persona. For instance, an officer at the Embassy in Jerusalem writes about how "excited" she was to be part of preparations for a visit from the Secretary (*Teaching my daughter to say "Madame Secretary,"* March 5, 2009). Another example of the centrality of emotions can be found in the postings made during President Bush's visit to the Middle East. The Chief of Protocol describes how the President 'felt' and whom he met through a personalized

account, that contains a tone as casual as any other personal non-official blog. In both samples under Bush and Obama, the content on *Dipnote* is filled with expressions of personal feelings, independent of the rank of the officers. There are instances of a dramatic style of narrative, such as when an officer in the region "choke[s] up" with emotion with "[the] honor of representing the United States at a local event" (*Poetry contest inspires Palestinian youths*, June 3, 2009).

In the content analysis, a measure of references to emotions garnered the following results: in the Bush sample, there is at least one mention of an emotion by the authors in 75% of the sample, while in the Obama sample, there was one mention or more in 70% ($\chi^2(10)= 19.8$; p <.05) of the sample. This is a significant but small difference, which directs us again to the genre of the blog as one that encourages personalization through expression of emotions. This could be because of the blog format, but it also raises questions about the trends in contemporary political communication where personalization is increasingly related to mediatisation and professionalization. It is difficult to draw conclusions about whether it is technology or social change that causes these changes. The interviews do not enlighten the discussion further, except to emphasize the element of each author's story in the blog posts, which indirectly relates to a personalization of the content. The content analysis and the textual analysis of the relevant posts, however, suggest that it may be the format. In other words, the technology of blogging encourages personalization of content.

In addition to emotion, references to personal family life are a major component of the personalized narrative that the bloggers add to *Dipnote*. Measuring for

references to family life in content analysis, the results suggest that the proportion is slightly higher under the Bush administration, in 38% of the sample a reference or more to family compared with 30% ($\chi^2(1) = 6.29$; p<.05) in the Obama sample. As with references to emotions, it was a significant but small difference; the slight decrease could be explained by the increase in more official content in the Obama sample, such as blog entries with speech transcripts. Some accounts also include very personal and private details of their lives, thereby "bring[ing] into the limelight the interconnectivity of public and private spheres as existing within areas in/of conflict" (Fadda-Conrey, 2010, p. 162). For example, this piece by the Director of the American Center in Jerusalem is about the Secretary's visit to Yad Vashem in Israel:

> The alarm rings at 4:55 a.m. and I get up ...My daughter, almost four, needs to be ready for her pickup to a school for severely handicapped children...The Embassy, Consulate, and State Department have been extraordinarily supportive of our situation, which makes it much easier to work the long hours of Secretary Clinton's first visit to Jerusalem. (*Yad Vashem testifies to resilience of human spirit,* March 4, 2009)

The excerpt here is one version of the blog that puts forth an image of a benevolent State Department. Putting foreign policy aside, this FSO recounts the humane treatment of her employer, indirectly humanizing the Department as a whole. Beyond personification, the key message is that the US government treats its employees and their families well, and the references to emotion and family help orient the content further towards the persona as opposed to the foreign policy.

6.4   **Intimization**

6.4.1 Private vs. public

In the context of war, public diplomacy for winning hearts and minds is as important as winning the military victory, and the narratives communicated are as important as the weapons employed on the ground. As Funcken (2009) notes, "many senior politicians have come to believe that convincing narratives are as important as effective policies" (p. 6). One way for the government to communicate directly to its citizens is through blogging, a medium that facilitates story telling. As a communication tool, *Dipnote* played a role in the overall attempt to persuade its readers, the American public, to look beyond the media's reporting of the negative evolution of the war in Iraq at the time. One blog post for instance argued that "figuring out the situation here [Iraq] is more an art than a science" (*Hidden prosperity and the banana index in Iraq*, April 8, 2008). The narratives arguably appeared more authentic, partly through intimization.

Iraq and Afghanistan were the subject of the majority of the content under Bush and Obama, as will be shown in the next chapter, and the content analysis results further show that the dominant theme in respect to these war zones has been one of reconstruction and rebuilding. The personal experiences on *Dipnote,* set in the war zones, make up what Cammaerts and Carpentier (2006) call "an alternative and highly personalized narrative of war" (p. 261). Indeed, many blog posts read like a diary, similar in structure and style to personal blogs.

In the context of news management, the press office was an important element, central to the war effort in Baghdad. On *Dipnote*, dispatches from officers in the press office recount the work they do on the ground, and personalize the content by including private or personal information. In one of the first blog posts on *Dipnote*, an officer from the press office writes about the daily routines and operations at the press offices. But the same officer also describes the unofficial activities in the press office, as well as his personal activities, which helps to humanize the war effort:

> It's getting late and it is quiet now in my office, "the Green Room." The only sounds are those of a couple of stragglers clicking away at their key boards. They're either sending emails back to Washington where it's mid afternoon (normally there's an eight hour difference) or maybe they are ordering their favorite sundries from drugstore.com or a new pair of shoes from zappos.com (mine should be in any day now)... (*Living on the banks of the Tigris*, Oct 5, 2007)

Both accounts are personalized narratives, but the inclusion of references to everyday living and language makes the blog different from a feature story to be found on an official website or other forms of official communication. The colloquialism in the content makes the writer human and enables him or her to connect to the reader first as a human, beyond the context of war. In addition to this, personalized blog posts can foster the State Department's credibility in the war effort and detract from the hard news of the war at the time, by highlighting the human effort involved in foreign assignments, which will be reviewed further in the next chapter on ideology.

The press conference in the context of foreign policy communication became institutionalized during the course of the 20th century, and has become part of everyday practice in the 21st century. The spokesman at the State Department usually gives daily briefings and hosts press conferences. Nowadays the government can communicate directly with the public through new media tools. In the case of the State Department blog, the spokesman connects with the audience as a person in the first instance and as a spokesman in the second instance. During a trip to Baghdad, McCormack began by describing the arrival of the Secretary of State and gave a brief description of the trip, which went beyond the official information; the trip is also recounted from his point of view:

> I've made the same trip many times, but it was one of the first times that I had no anxiety about the flight, far different than flying the same route just a year ago. Looking down on Baghdad, I'm struck by how normal life on the street appears from the air. (I'll let others with time on the ground describe what they see). Kids are playing soccer, people are shopping in the market, cars are gassing up, laundry flutters from clotheslines. (*Behind the scenes: Secretary Rice arrives in Baghdad,* Aug 21, 2008)

In this passage McCormack describes the apparent normality of life in Baghdad despite the context of war. It depicts imagery of life, contrasting with reports of death and violence in the mainstream media. In another instance, McCormack makes subtle challenges to the mainstream media, all the while sharing lively stories about his trips. A case in point is his trip to Libya with the Secretary, when *Dipnote* as a government blog was actively used to promote diplomatic détente between the United States and Libya, at a time when Qaddafi had just given up the use of nuclear weapons. It was a historic visit as Condoleezza Rice made the first visit by an American Secretary of State in 50 years, heralding a

"new phase" (BBC News, 2008) in relations between the US and Libya (Pleming, 2008). On *Dipnote*, McCormack recounts "Shaking Qaddafi's hand", digitally personalizing the narrative with an image of diplomatic cooperation. Historian Erik Goldstein (1998) explains the significance of handshakes as "part of diplomatic practice" (p. 49), as it can be adapted in the digital diplomatic context emitted to readers of *Dipnote*. This is public diplomacy at work on the digital stage.

After describing the tent in which the delegation was received, referring to the mood, the colours and sights, McCormack directly contests the media: "Contrary to all those news reports, Qaddafi engaged in a direct, free flowing conversation with the Secretary" (*Just in from Tripoli: Shaking Qadhafi's hand,* Sep 5, 2008). Such statements, which were mostly absent in the second sample under Obama, make the blog more like what he envisioned it to be in the mission statement - an alternative news source to the mainstream media. Interestingly, the foreign policy tides have turned against Libya following the Arab Spring, when this thesis was written.

What remains on *Dipnote* is adapted from what Fadda-Conrey (2010) calls a "living archive" of events in the Middle East, narrated by those experiencing them (her reference was to personal blogs but it also fits in the context of a government blog), that will be available for future historians to draw upon throughout the transformations of US foreign policy in the region. During the Secretary's Middle East trip under the Bush administration, McCormack was able to complement the traditional press conferences and briefings with blog

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posts telling the stories of his personal experiences by meshing private and public information.

6.4.2 Testimonies of war: official vs. unofficial discourse

In addition to mixing personal and public information, the personalized narrative often blurs the line between official and unofficial reporting. The present tense creates the immediacy of the narrative that makes the reader feel as if he or she is there. The fruit of employing this narrative is that the bureaucratic apparatus of the State Department, traditionally unreported to the public, is brought to life and thereby humanized. The language in the account of personal experiences from Iraq and Afghanistan is vivid and personal in nature, referring to everyday living situations:

> Morning started today for me like many other mornings in middle "Mesopotamia"; I rise and shine at 7 a.m., even though work in the Public Affairs Section of Embassy Baghdad doesn't officially start until 9 a.m., and in spite of living just a couple hundred yards from my office. Had yet another restless night of sleep due to the drone of helicopters flying overhead all night. (*Iraq: On the Ground*, 26 Sept, 2007, *Dipnote*)

This is the kind of information or detail that would otherwise be emitted in other official communication platforms on the State Department. By extension, the implementation of foreign affairs, traditionally reported only in the form of policies, is also humanized by involving testaments of the personnel, human interactions, and everyday life from the war zones. The narrative of war on *Dipnote* comes in the form of testimonies, which put together, over time present the reader with alternative stories that challenge other narratives in the mainstream media and in the blogosphere.

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Personal experiences on the ground include day-to-day personal and professional activities, not directly related to combat operations or foreign policy formulation. However, in many of the accounts, there is a considerable amount of description of the security situation in the war zones. For many it was the platform through which they could express their insecurities about the challenges they faced. For instance, the Press Officer at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad recognized the danger of the assignment and his personal anxiety about the matter:

> It's no secret that the International Zone, like Iraq as a whole, is a dangerous place. The IZ, as we call it, is targeted from time to time by those who feel Americans, as well as our fellow Coalition members, do not belong here. There have been mortar and rocket attacks within the IZ that have been a little to[o] close for comfort and have left me and many others extremely concerned. (*Iraq: On the Ground*, 26 Sept, 2007)

This recognition of "those who feel Americans do not belong here" adds to the earnestness of the testimony from a government source that is expected to only express points of view concurrent with the official line. This will be re-assessed in the ideology chapter. Similar to this passage, a dominant aspect of the description of personal experiences on the ground has to do with the description of living conditions of FSOs. Beyond the physical descriptions, day-to-day activities are also reported with a story telling style that combines descriptions of elements such as the weather, landscapes and sounds.

During the Second Gulf War in Iraq, the advent of citizen bloggers such as Salam Pax, and also military bloggers, challenged the government's dominant discourse about the war (Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2006; Drezner & Farrell, 2004; Wall, 2006). To counter these alternative views of the war, the government set up the *Dipnote* blog to provide its own stories of experiences on the ground. The online testimonies draw on the pride in serving the country, and many of these pieces on Iraq and Afghanistan were expressions of the honor to serve that was weaved into the narratives. On Memorial Day, *Dipnote* posted a dispatch from Iraq that read:

> Sometimes it's so easy to become entrenched and consumed by the day-to-day meetings and receptions and memos that accompany diplomacy in a war zone. To the battle-hardened men and women of the armed forces, I'd like to pause for a moment to say, thank you. (*Memorial Day reflections from Baghdad*, May 30, 2009)

In conjunction, the family references, as well as the everyday language analyzed above, have helped to personalize the content. The most published blogger in the Bush sample, John Matel, is a case in point in the portrayal of narrative to the Iraq War that seeks to be an alternative to mainstream media. In a series of blog posts, Iraq is depicted with a personalized style that attempts to be earnest yet defensive of the war:

> Many Americans formed their impressions of Iraq based on the dicey and hard conditions on the ground in late 2006. Rethinking their opinions in light of the vastly improved situation in Iraq hurts their brains. They just want Iraq to go away…I am an intrusion into a comfortably settled belief pattern, as unwelcome as the skunk at a barbeque… Iraq will be difficult and dangerous for a long time to come…but the trends are definitely positive. Real change creeps up on little cats' feet, and we are

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> often surprised to look around and see that things are not what we thought. (*Iraq: After the dust washes off*, 9 Oct, 2008)

In some instances Matel references those against the war effort in Iraq as unwilling to accept any positive view. He tries to indirectly shift the credibility of the accounts of the war from those who get their information from reports of the mainstream media about the negative facts, to those such as Matel on *Dipnote* who are reporting directly on their personal experience first-hand. During an interview, the blogger said:

> I never expected people to pay attention to all my stories [...]. At first most people approach me sympathetically. They thank me for my service and commiserate about the hardship of my ordeal. They are a little disappointed when I explain that it was less exciting and not as bad as they have heard. And some seem almost offended when I tell them about the transformation that has taken place and the success we have achieved. They really don't want to hear about it. I don't think they believe me. (Interview #6, Personal communication, September 11, 2011)

Although Matel attracted most comments in the Bush sample, many other posts sought to redress the damaged image of Iraq reported in the media at the time, by personalizing the efforts of men and women helping in the reconstruction efforts of the country. As mentioned in the previous chapter, testimonies for volunteering were also frequently encountered. Under the Bush administration, the war was escalating and the shortage of volunteers for assignments in Iraq may explain why a number of the posts were about testimonies for serving, especially as a result of the row over directed assignments discussed in the previous chapter. Apart from Matel's popular defence of Foreign Service

Officers, other volunteering posts were more traditionally aligned with personal

sacrifice and pride in the nation:

> Serving in Iraq doesn't and should never guarantee promotion, and there are certainly valid reasons for not going [...]Of course, there's also the money - it would be disingenuous to say this wasn't a consideration...Iraq assignments are unique and therefore require Foreign Service Officers to put aside criteria we might typically use [...] I quickly learned that things like being able to interact in person with local contacts on a regular basis and having one's own bathroom - pretty much givens in any other country of assignment - were benefits of some but not all positions. (*Volunteering for Iraq,* Nov 23, 2007*)*

Another blogger wrote:

> Some will read this and dismiss us as selfish careerists. From our perspective, we are [...] two people trying to support the people who have borne the greatest burdens -- the people of Iraq, the Coalition and Iraqi troops, the PRT staffs in the field -- to help the Iraqis build the country and the future they deserve. (*My reasons for volunteering in Iraq,* Nov 28, 2007)

In some cases, however, even when the subject of the post was not directly

about volunteering, it was weaved with subtlety into the personalized narrative.

For example in one post, a press officer explains how Baghdad handles the

incoming media reports (*Iraq on the Ground*, September 27, 2007) but also

manages to include a word of support for the effort of volunteering in Iraq. The

personalized narrative of war on *Dipnote* thus includes arguments for joining

the war and working for the Department, based on the personal experiences of

those who took up these assignments. One may view these arguments as part of

a legitimation of military presence. Although there is no mention of the rationale

for the American presence in Iraq, the focus of the reconstruction excerpts refer back to serving the nation in times of war.

6.5   Conclusions

This chapter investigates the role of personalization in the content of the United States' official foreign policy blog. Overall, blogging can be studied as a new medium that is changing the style of official communication in the context of foreign policy. The combination of stories and reports creates personalized narratives that effectively "put a human face on government" (Soon Ae et al., 2010, p. 4).   In the same way the website enables the government to communicate electronically in a way it could not have before (Chadwick, 2001). The blog enables the State Department to put forth the kind of unofficial information that could not have been communicated through people inside the bureaucracy. The dominant focus of the narrative in the online entries on the Middle East on *Dipnote* is Iraq, perhaps unsurprisingly given the U.S. military involvement there. Looking at the totality of the posts on this subject, it is evident that the Department of State seeks to redress the image of a fallen Iraq as an alternative to what was reported in the media and the blogosphere at the time. The depiction of Iraq is painted from a variety of angles; from the living conditions and the economic situation, to personal experiences of State Department personnel serving there. In addition, the results suggest three discernible themes to the narratives across the samples: war, diplomacy and culture in the Middle East.

Most significantly, the personal experiences on *Dipnote* together weave narratives that humanize the institution of the State Department, because they are voices of people, not seen or heard in traditional official communication. Against this background, the main focus under the Bush administration was on personal accounts of assignments overseas, while under the Obama administration, the focus turned more to the activities of the Secretary of State, and foreign policy was personalized as Clinton was put to the forefront of the virtual stage. As the PR content increased over time, the content was nevertheless personalized, but it was less about personal experiences and stories, and more about reporting from the inside on diplomatic meetings, issues, and activities, in line with key areas of public diplomacy. There was a noticeable similarity however, in the manifestation of emotions and feelings over time, and the references to family life, which were part of the personalized narratives in both samples.

Blogging thus encouraged an informal, casual, colloquial content that is not usually emitted by the State Department. It was interesting to find that under the Bush administration, the content was more about expressing personal points of view, and contested mainstream media more directly. In summary, by giving a voice to the personal experiences in Iraq, *Dipnote* content is infused with sentiments of pride and honor for serving, indirectly helping promote recruitment efforts on a more personal level with the American public, and helping legitimize the American presence and foreign policy in the Middle East.

Chapter 7: **Ideology**

7.1 **Introduction**

Relating back to the theoretical framework, this chapter considers the following question: *How are power and ideology articulated through the content on the government blog?* In relation to ideology, this longitudinal study explores how the content is framed on the government blog, how official and non-official discourses are weaved or made absent in the content, and assesses hegemonic versus counter-hegemonic discourses that emerge. The issue is not whether or not it is another tool in the larger machinery of government communication; it is how the blog is used to portray an attractive façade of American foreign policy to the American public and to foreign audiences who access the site, within a context of dominance. The two samples under study were chosen from the Bush and Obama administrations and were compared for any changes in content based on the different foreign policy priorities of each presidency. Overall, I argue that *Dipnote* is becoming one of many powerful digital tools of public affairs and public diplomacy to exert soft power in the 21st century. As was discussed in the theoretical chapter, soft power and hegemony are inextricably linked.

The first section applies Nye's (2004) framework of soft power outlined in the theoretical framework (culture, political values, and policies) to structure the findings, while the second section focuses on the level of participation and government engagement through an analysis of the published comments on *Dipnote*. The extent to which blogging can impact on policy will also be discussed in this chapter. Although it is difficult to measure soft power in

quantitative ways, this chapter considers the interviews conducted with the management in conjunction with the results of the content analysis, complemented by a textual analysis of blog posts. The textual analysis is linked to discourse theory in the sense that it explores how the construction of the self on the blog, understood here as 'America,' is made possible in relation to the construction of the other through discourse. I will specifically consider the role of women, the construction of Iraqi and Afghani citizens, and the justification of allegiances and alliances. Finally, to evaluate the level of participation and the way the government engages with the readers, the content analysis of comments will be contextualized by a narrative analysis.

7.2 Blogging as soft power: Culture

When considering blogging as an element of government communications through the concept of hegemony and soft power, the emphasis is on how the content creates a cultural and ideological appeal to U.S. foreign policy. Enmeshed with the narrative of war on *Dipnote* are cultural issues that emerged both about the conduct of foreign policy in the Middle East and the assignments of American officers in the region. Blogging technology in particular facilitates a foreign policy communication space as a cultural communication space about foreign countries that transcends national boundaries. A number of entries on *Dipnote* were about U.S. initiatives in the Middle East as well as cultural and educational exchange programs promoted by the Secretary, which are classic public diplomacy activities. Beyond the subject of posts, which are discussed further below, the content was also about personal accounts of Foreign Service Officers, which indirectly humanized American foreign policy and thus rendered

the blog, as a whole, a source of soft power. The two sections will consider specifically the discourse about women, followed by that of the Middle East in general, which serve to legitimize American military policy.

7.2.1 The role of women

One salient theme in the sample studied is the role of women in Middle Eastern societies and the active empowerment of women in the region by American initiatives. Both Secretaries of State, Condoleezza Rice and Hillary Clinton, have placed women at the forefront of their foreign policy as part of broader changes in the United States' public diplomacy (Hughes, 2007). In the Obama sample, Secretary Clinton's Office of Global Women's Issues, Ambassador Verveer, was a frequent publisher of content. It is important to note here that the discussion of women's status is a sensitive topic in the region, and one which has generally raised keen interest from the American public and the media (Kamalipour, 1995). During *Dipnote*'s first months, a series of blog posts on Saudi Arabia, written by a female Foreign Service Officer, sought to highlight the experience of being a woman in the country, from the perspective of a woman FSO. These entries received a large number of comments and quickly became a popular subject on the blog. What is of interest here is the way the officer used *Dipnote* as a platform to express her personalized critical thinking on the role of women in Saudi society, not simply promoting a program or policy:

> Yes, I had to wear an abaya. No, I did not wear a headscarf, and not once did I get behind the wheel of a car while living in the Kingdom [...] The Saudi gentlemen I met that day were operating within their own cultural and religious context. From their point of view they were expressing respect for me by refraining from physical contact. This is

> something that I comprehend intellectually, but struggle to truly understand in my heart [...] No matter how much I intellectualize it, it is very difficult for me to accept someone's signal that they do not view me as an equal – even if that inequality is considered a sign of respect in itself [...] I'm not sure if I will ever truly come to peace with this issue. (*An American Girl in Riyadh,* Oct 12, 2007)

The passage here allows the blogger to construct her 'self' in contrast to the non-Western 'other' in Saudi Arabia, by rejecting the cultural norms symbolized by lack of physical contact. Specifically in the context of the Middle East, the identity of the American or Western society through discourse has long been constructed as the opposite of the Islamic society, where unequal relations between men and woman form its social structure. Such cultural differences are perhaps no better exemplified than through the symbol of the veil. In the passage above the "abaya" that the blogger refers to is a black robe that is worn by women public in Saudi Arabia. It is symbolic of what is non-Western and Islamic.

The experience of a woman in Saudi Arabia is a subject that was bound to interest the readership of the blog, because it is one that has long caused intrigue in the United States, where the veil is seen as a form of both oriental exoticism and oppression. By not wearing the "headscarf", the blogger on *Dipnote* symbolically resists oppression and extends her American feminism, as if reclaiming her power and at the same time being an ambassador for the American values of women's rights in a foreign land. The construction of her American self is thus made possible by standing apart from the 'other' Muslim

women, by asserting her position in relation to the imagined boundaries between them.

What is also interesting is that the critique of cultural and religious customs in Saudi Arabia is not an issue that has been officially approached publicly by any American administration, especially since Saudi Arabia is a key ally in military strategy and a source of oil in the Middle East. This contrasts starkly to the case of Afghanistan, further discussed below, and Iraq, where saving women from Taliban oppression and dictatorship respectively was one of the motives for waging war.

The author's challenge to the cultural norms of Saudi Arabia on the State Department blog opened the conversation to the American public and even among Saudi Arabians, who took to the blog to respond. While the State Department claims it intends the content to be read by an American audience, the contributions from Saudi Arabian nationals critiquing the blog post, and the responsiveness of the blogger, reveal the public diplomacy facet of *Dipnote* on the one hand, and on the other, create a potential for bridging cultural gaps between two countries. The blogger responded to one of the commenters that she was "wondering if we might gain Saudi readers", which shows at least a partial intention to spread the message to foreign audiences.

The audience from Saudi Arabia largely welcomed the piece but had reservations about the views of the West in general on their culture and customs, based on the reading of comments on this post. The portrayal of

Muslim women and their cultural differences, especially marked by the veil, was an all too familiar critique of the Middle East. The blogger's response acknowledged every single comment and emphasized when some were insulted (as with the handshake reference) that she was offering her personal experience. What is thus noteworthy, not only in the series on Saudi Arabia but also in other instances, is that the content of each post contains a personal perspective of the blogger that leaves room for editorial independence and personal expression. This expression is not counter-hegemonic but rather supports the dominance of the American view of the world by constructing the other as its opposite.

The stories on *Dipnote* promoting the empowerment of women as an underlying theme indirectly justify the grounds for the American presence. Women are constructed here as needing to be saved and freed, as if the blogger is speaking on behalf of them. In Afghanistan, for instance, a Public Affairs Counselor at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul highlights the achievements of the U.S. presence through a story on Afghan girl soccer teams:

> Six years ago there were virtually no girls in school in Afghanistan, and certainly none out building confidence on the soccer field! Today, there are about a million and a half female students, not yet even half of those who are eligible for school, but the numbers are significant and growing. (*Six Weeks in Afghanistan,* Oct 11, 2007*)*

More promotional entries of women heroes in the region are also present throughout the blog, as well as entries on U.S.-led or U.S.-sponsored organizations helping women, again focusing on Iraq and Afghanistan. In the context of foreign policy, the justification for intervention was often weaved

with the liberation of women from patriarchal oppression, as with the Taliban in Afghanistan. Under the Bush administration in 2002, the United States Afghan Women's Council (USAWC) was set up to complement the military strategy on the ground. The data in this study confirms the feminist literature findings of gender and culture as "strategic areas of operation" of public diplomacy (Vron, 2009). The subject of women's empowerment on the blog, otherwise considered a digital face of the State Department, was thus important in legitimizing the role of the United States in the region.

7.2.2 Middle Eastern Society

As explored in the previous chapter, the content on American foreign affairs incorporates more personalized narration than issue analysis. Iraq being the most frequent subject of the overall content, the over-arching message that *Dipnote* was emitting to the American public was that "there's more to the story" (Interview #5, Personal communication, 11 September, 2011). Beyond the role of women, there were efforts on the government blog to explain societies of the Middle East to the American public from the lens of those assigned overseas. This includes references to public holidays, ways of life, and other cultural and religious differences encountered by American personnel. In the following post for instance, a Press Officer explains the difference between a work week in the U.S. and in Iraq:

> Today (Thursday) is what I refer to as the American Friday. You see, the Sabbath here in Iraq and much of the Middle East is traditionally on Friday. Therefore, our weekend here in Baghdad is Friday/Saturday. (*Living on the Banks of the Tigris*, Oct 5, 2007)

Whereas John Matel was the most frequent blogger on *Dipnote* in the Bush sample, Aaron Snipes was the most frequently published blogger in the Obama sample. His posts expressed the alternative narrative of Iraq through a cultural lens, compared with the socio-economic lens of reconstruction that Matel adopted. Snipes sent dispatches to *Dipnote* from his assignment in Muthanna, the second least populated city located in Southern Iraq. The series Snipes wrote focused on a location neglected by the mainstream media, at a time when violence and attention was heavily focused on the capital, Baghdad, and the other main cities.

> Muthanna doesn't have many natural resources, and it doesn't have an abundance of water, though the Euphrates River does wind its way through our humble province. What it does have are lots of livestock. This is a province of farmers. Far away from Baghdad, the bigger questions of the Middle East don't really resonate here. While we are assisting the Iraqis here in all sectors, I suspect the greatest impact we will have in Muthanna is on its agricultural sector. (*City slicker learns to "dip" sheep in Iraq*, May 8, 2009)

In contrast to mainstream media reports of the main cities in Iraq, the government blog thus sought to shed light on an alternative rural Iraq, far removed from the bloodshed of war in other cities and the oil-rich regions in other parts of the country. The low relative importance of Muthanna to the Iraq War is not the subject of this analysis. Instead, the story telling style is encapsulates the role of personalization, discussed in the previous chapter, in the kind of ideological content produced. In a series of online entries on Muthanna, Snipes' personalized narrative of wartime in Iraq tries to create proximity between the experiences of Iraq and the reader:

> Most days, the lens through which I view Iraq is the glass of an armored vehicle traveling at high speeds [...] A local mayor invited my boss and me on a walk-about through his fair city. The sites and sounds of street life in Iraq were the sounds of any city, anywhere in the world: cars honking, motorbikes weaving through traffic, taxi drivers yelling. But it was the smells that let me know I was *really* in Iraq [...] sharwma roasting on a spit, tea boiling in a street-side cauldron, fruits and vegetables ripening in the afternoon sun. Even the smell of sewage from the drain, though unpleasant, was remotely comforting. I was *really* here...The *real* Iraq. (*Front lines to the main streets in Iraq*, May 6, 2009)

Although it attempts to portray the reality of Iraqi city life beyond the war zone, the passage is a narrative romanticized view of life in Iraq and Middle Eastern society. Besides misspelling the word 'shawarma' the blogger expresses impressions similar to that of a tourist in a foreign land. It constructs the 'other' as a mixture of fact and stereotype that can be linked to an idealized image of the Middle East, sold in the West through bestsellers and Hollywood movies. The reference to the "smell of sewage from the drain" as "comforting" conjures a construction of the other's backwardness as an idealization of the Middle East.

Dipnote blog posts about Middle Eastern society overall give readers a window into the professed 'real' Iraq from a personalized literary narrative style, which fulfils the objective of telling a different story of Iraq, but one that is constructed within the parameters of the Western identity of the American blogger(s). While recounting his experiences working with farmers, Snipes further drew on memories of his childhood. He writes:

> My visit to the veterinary research center [in Muthanna] also reminded me of one of my fondest, childhood memories. For many years as a kid, I

> attended summer camp in Pennsylvania. On a Saturday morning, many summers ago – it must have been when I was about fifteen years old – the camp director asked if I would help him fetch hay for the horses. (*Working with Iraqi farmers reminds me why I serve*, May 20, 2009)

The reference to childhood creates an intimacy between the reader and the author. The content thereby further deflects attention from foreign policy and into the human sentiments of the Foreign Service officer doing his duty. Most importantly, it likens a childhood play time to activities within a war zone. In this sense it again romanticizes the role of American intervention in the country, confined in this case to farming. It also does this by making U.S. and foreign experiences seem similar. That is, instead of construction life in the war zone as completely part of the 'other', it constructs it as having similarities with everyday American life.

In terms of thematic focus, the majority of the posts written by Snipes focused on culture. This type of content provided an opportunity to incorporate blogging as part of public diplomacy, which will also be discussed in the next chapter. In one post, for example, Aaron Snipes recounts an art exhibition he organized in Iraq:

> The fact that the United States was supporting art — its creation and exhibition — in Muthanna was a signal to the Iraqi people that the relationship between our two countries was normalizing. I was pleased to see that the artists had not shied away from portraying the difficulties facing Iraq... Negative feelings about the U.S. presence in Iraq expressed on a canvas were far more palatable to this diplomat than many of the alternatives. (*Muthanna art exhibit takes risk, earns respect*, April 28, 2009)

This passage expresses the potential for art, a cultural source of soft power, to create an authentic bridge between Iraqis and Americans in a less formal style to the readers of *Dipnote*. Perhaps more importantly, this passage speaks for the "Iraqi people" and lumps them together in one group. This constructs the image of the Iraqi citizen as willing to interact 'normally' with the United States as part of a "relationship". It negates the actual relations of hegemony on the ground, where Iraqi citizens are in reality subjected to the force of the American military presence. It is important to note that this does not suggest a conspiracy of hegemonic powers; it is more likely because the positions held by the bloggers in general are deeply entrenched in their thinking and form their view of the world. Overall this passage also presents the United States as being open to accepting critical views of its foreign policy through art, as will be reiterated in the analysis of comments below. The passage may itself derive from an ideological motivation to highlight openness, despite the secrecy that foreign policy entails.

7.3   Blogging as soft power: Political values

In his definition of soft power, Nye (2000) referred to political values, such as democracy and human rights, and whether a country adopts these values in practice in order to yield more soft power through credibility. The analysis here cannot pretend to measure whether the United States lives up to its political values, but rather, what place political values hold on the government blog.

The word frequency count in the content analysis helped understand to what extent *Dipnote* could be seen an alternative channel for official foreign policy.

The ideological premise of the "freedom agenda" under which President Bush launched the "War on Terror" was effectively a division between those who love freedom and those who do not. 9/11 was framed in essence as an attack on freedom, one of the basic values of the United States that has reverberated throughout its history. The link between terrorism and freedom thus lay at the heart of the frame of the Bush administration, and in the context of the Middle East, bringing freedom to the region was the ultimate objective. However, the term was used an average of only once per post in the whole Bush sample; most posts made no mention of, or reference to, freedom, and the maximum number of times it was used in a single post was two. In the Obama sample, there was similarly sparse use of the term, with the maximum number of mentions per post being three and the minimum one.

References to democracy and democratic values were also curiously missing from the content in both samples. Perhaps this can be explained by the fact that the intended audience of the blog is domestic. Nevertheless, one of the main tenets of the United States' post 9/11 National Security Strategy, put forth in September 2002, was the promotion and advancement of democracy and democratic values abroad. The concept of democracy is inextricably linked to that of freedom, and the military operations in the Middle East were launched to fight terror and dictatorship in order to free the land and install democracy. Yet on *Dipnote*, as with the reference to freedom, democracy was at best mentioned a maximum of twice in the Bush sample, where it was expected to be abundant, and five times in the Obama sample. What is even more surprising in this regard is that the Under-Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, who was

also the first editor of *Dipnote,* had taken an important part in shaping the communication strategy of the "War on Terror" under the Bush administration. In fact, State Department records indicate that the 'freedom agenda' was part of her emphasis in US public diplomacy (State, 2005).

There is a possibility then that the content on the blog was deliberately void of any references to the political values asserted by the administration for its objectives in the region. In this sense the absence of references to dominant discourse and values in official foreign policy could also be a strategic tactic that sets the blog content apart from the traditional communication channels in operation at the time. From a public diplomacy perspective, in view of the waves of negative public opinion that were raging at the time in response to American policy in Iraq and beyond, it could be argued that the blog was an effort to garner support for the United States, by avoiding associations that were unpopular in the region and around the world, while at the same time not refuting them and staying aligned with the message. From a domestic public affairs perspective, the finding relates to the blog as a promotional or PR device for U.S. foreign policy, targeted towards American citizens first and foremost, which does not reiterate the dominant discourse, originally targeted at an international audience. By combining both possibilities, the blog can be seen as somewhat diffusing content that can satisfy both audiences, and thereby fulfilling its function as an instrument of both public diplomacy and public affairs.

In contrast to the lack of reference to political values in foreign policy, nationalist discourse was notable. The type of public relations content explored in the professionalization chapter and the personalized narratives of war, diplomacy, and culture analyzed thus far, and in the personalization chapter that were published on *Dipnote,* were often heavily lauded with patriotic sentiment. The expression of national pride, especially during a time of war, is clearly intended to sway readers rather than inform but resists the classic 'us' versus 'them' dichotomy that was rampant in official discourse under the Bush administration. The pride also served to reinforce the effectiveness of American diplomacy and the candidness of promoting cultural cooperation between countries. An obvious example of weaved patriotism takes place in a blog post taking the reader in the backstage of protocol:

> Tonight as our distinguished guests toured the Diplomatic Reception rooms and viewed the beautiful 18th and 19th century American furniture, paintings, silver, and porcelain, it made me so proud (as always) to be an American. Struggles of our history flood my mind for a minute and filled me with hope that tomorrow would be the beginning of the end for conflict in the Middle East. I know all of us together can do it [...] (*Behind the Scenes at the Annapolis Conference,* Nov 27, 2007)

This is clearly one of the more rose-tinted aspects of the blog, taking the reader backstage to appreciate from the inside another façade of diplomacy that the public otherwise does not get access to. This particular passage frames conflict-resolution of the long-stalled Middle East crisis through emotional appeal of hope and a heavy dose of naiveté. Of course the Chief of Protocol has no input in foreign policy, but this type of content strengthens the ideological appeal of the administration since it draws on historical legacy and rallying for American

unity towards peace. This falls in line with patriotism being the source of approval for the Bush administration after the 9/11. One may posit that even though the 'War on Terror' or the Bush doctrine was not present in the content of the blog, the posts under the Bush administration drew on American nationalism to reinforce the larger ideological aims of the regime in power.

At the same time, the detachment from supporting the official discourse of the administration in power enables the blog to serve the ideological interest of the state apparatus across administrations, and derive its credibility from this consistency. In contrast to the American pride expressed by the Chief of Protocol above, which could also be seen as content that seeks to minimize dissent since it is not associated with any administration but with the country as a whole, another blog post attempted to demarcate the content from personal ideological motivations.

> I may or may not have voted for President Bush in the last election and I may or may not personally support the administration's Iraq policy, but as a career Foreign Service Officer my job is to implement the foreign policies of the United States to the best of my ability. (*Volunteering for Iraq*, November 23, 2007)

What this testimony seems to offer to the reader is a personal and genuine stance that boosts the credibility of the blogger's experience and thus of the blog as a whole. The allegiance of the blogger to the nation is defined as going beyond the administration, which creates a unifying argument for supporting American policy in Iraq. It thus reinforces the pride of serving, a salient theme throughout all the testimonials. There was an open effort on the part of the authors to take a distance from the official stance of the establishment in power.

This feature deserves to be noted: it does not refute the presence of ideology, because it reinforces loyalty to the larger hegemony of the United States instead of any particular administration.

Even when regarding the blog as part of the promotional communication machinery of the government, the posts themselves do not contain only positive views of the war in Iraq and the policies of the administrations. This works in favour of adding credibility to the blog. The apparent honesty of the posts, or the acknowledgment of some negative situations on the ground on the official blog of the State Department, was noteworthy in a number of instances, such as this one:

> Probably everything negative you may have heard about Afghanistan is true, at least in part. Most Afghans you speak with have a litany of complaints about high prices, the lack of reliable electricity, bad and sometimes corrupt officials, and concerns about security. The newspapers (which reach only a few), and the much more widely available radio and TV programs are filled with criticisms and complaints of all kinds. Yet, several surveys have shown that over 95 percent of all Afghans don't want to go back to the dark days of the Taliban and that they overwhelmingly reject the Taliban culture of violence and repression. (*Six Weeks in Afghanistan*, Oct 11, 2007)

In this excerpt, the mention of the difficult and stark realities facing the Foreign Service Officers is balanced with a reminder that this situation was still favourable compared to what Afghanistan was like under Taliban rule, meaning before American intervention. Framing the American presence as a liberator from the "Taliban culture of violence and repression" is also in tandem with the official motives for the liberation of Afghanistan. Interesting in this context,

given that the country was a hotbed for Al Qaeda, is that terrorism was not mentioned in this excerpt nor in much of the other content, as will be discussed below. The construction of the Afghani citizen as being on the same ideological line against the violent and repressive 'other' legitimizes American military strategy. I do not know from where the author of this post derived his survey results, but the most comprehensive survey from 2007, when this post was written, indicates that 42% of Afghans were optimistic about the direction in which their country was heading, compared to 24% that were pessimistic (Foundation, 2007). This shows that there was still relatively high optimism for the country's future from Afghanis, just not as high as suggested in the passage. It presents Afghanis as a part of a bloc consenting to American combat operations.

In summary, this section synthesized the political values that were present or absent in the blog. The results suggest that while freedom and democracy had a minor presence, nationalist values were heavily present in the narratives. These helped construct a strong allegiance of Foreign Service Officers to America's presence in the Middle East, and thereby justify its policies in the region. This loyalty expressed was not specific to any administration but to the larger American nation.

7.4   Blogging as soft power: Policies

For policies to wield soft power, according to Nye's (2004) framework they need to be framed with the consideration of others' interests. Being an official foreign policy blog, the content of the posts was in part overtly about defending

the American position of the war as well as the policies implemented. The ideology is very much present in that there was a higher calling to serve the United States as a symbolic entity representing the American people abroad, as was seen in the previous sections. To better understand the evolutionary dynamics of the content on the blog based on the policies of each presidency, the samples were taken from two administrations, Bush and Obama, from late 2007 to early 2010. The interviewees confirmed that the government blog was established as a communication tool and platform that is administration-neutral. A member of the management explained about the transition from Bush to Obama:

> *"Dipnote* just basically kept on rolling and we didn't have any major change in the department. We are a tool of the Department so we will put out content that is consistent with the Department's message at any given time but we, the core team, has been through different administrations and we'll likely be through future administrations [...]." (Interview #3, Personal communication, September 11, 2009)

This claim was consistent with the findings in the narrative analysis of loyalty to the nation instead of any administration. The results of the content analysis, however, tell a different story. Whereas the first administration focused on personal experiences of overseas assignments, the most significant change is that *Dipnote* under Obama more than doubled its content on diplomatic trips of the Secretary, and dropped its content on overseas assignments by more than half (as was analyzed in detail in the chapter on professionalization). The themes covered were also different, as Table 6 shows. Under Obama, the focus thus shifted to more policy communication, culture and humanitarian issues, the latter rendering its application of soft power more effective. There was also

a noticeable decrease in themes of war reconstruction, roles of FSOs serving overseas, and politics in general (Table 6).

Table 6

Comparison of issues on Dipnote under Bush and Obama

Issue Focus	Bush sample (N=53)	Obama sample (N=105)
Assignment overseas	32.1%**	14.3%**
Security	24.5%*	17.1%*
Diplomatic trip	20.8%*	44.8%*
Explanation role of officer	18.9%*	11.4%*
Reconstruction (war zones)	17%*	11.4%*

Note: *p< .05 **p<0.01

A major finding from an in-depth reading of the sample under both the Bush and Obama administrations is that the discursive frames that emerge from the sample of Middle East posts go beyond the "War on Terror" frame that resonated in U.S. foreign policy discourse after 9/11 and that was reflected in the mainstream media. The reference to the "War on Terror" as an international military campaign, framed by the Bush administration as an ideological struggle, is brief and otherwise not an important focus of the blog. In the Bush sample when the main foreign policy focus was on the "War on Terror", there was no mention of terrorism in 77% of the sample. Terrorism was not mentioned in 89% of the Obama sample (χ^2 (5) = 12.7; p < .05).

In January 2002, President Bush labelled Iraq, Iran, and North Korea as the Axis of Evil. The use of the binary discourse of good versus evil that dominated the administration's rhetoric, however, was not translated to the State Department's blog. This contradicts research that pointed to how the mainstream media echoed the administration's discourse (Ward & Cahill, 2007), a conclusion that would suggest that the administration's new media outlet would also resonate to the official doctrine of the state.

Under Bush, when there was mention of terrorism it was mostly in the context of Iraq and the Israeli-Palestinian issue. The phrase "War on Terror" was encountered in only one instance in the following passage, when a political officer recounted her experience in Afghanistan:

> They [Deputy Secretary & Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asia and staff] paid visits in early September to Afghanistan and Pakistan, key allies to the United States in the War on Terror and critical partners to improving regional stability in south Asia. (*On the Ground in Afghanistan*, Oct 22, 2007)

Upon taking over the White House, the Obama administration changed its official foreign policy discourse from "War on Terror" to "Overseas Contingency Operation". The content analysis of the Obama sample did not bring up a single use of this phrase, and the mention of terrorism was mostly counted in blog posts with official speeches by the Secretary or an official. This suggests at first glance that the official blog of the State Department was not necessarily an ideological arm of the administration as far as replication of official foreign policy rhetoric is concerned. However, assuming that the absence of the

administration's doctrine in the blog renders it an ideology-free tool seems short-sighted.

The ideological motivation for having a blog in the first place may be more calculated than it appears. The fact that the Bush administration's discourse in the "War on Terror" was multiplied across every channel, including press releases and official documents, and in the media's public spotlight, but not on its new media outlets such as the blog, pushes us to enquire if that in itself is an ideological facet. Not mentioning the ideology is in this case akin to not questioning it or putting it into doubt, and makes an implied statement that it is inherently legitimate, which indirectly maintains the hegemony. The finding that *Dipnote* does not reflect the dominant ideological discourses in both administrations, interestingly, relates to the findings of professionalization of foreign policy communication. In fact, it concurs with Holtz-Bacha's (2002) finding of "de-ideologization" as a result of the professionalization of politics. Relating back to the concept of hegemony and presenting ideology as common sense, de-ideologization is deeply ideological because it presents content as self-evident, not ideologically explicit, in a manner intended to neutralize ideological enemies and deny the very existence of hard power as well as counter-hegemonies. In the discussion chapter I want to consider how perhaps the medium of blogging itself encourages a move towards presenting ideology through more subtle content and indirect messages.

The contrast between content on the blog and content in more traditional channels is further enhanced when considering that *Dipnote* is an agency blog

and as such represents the United States government. In one sense clearly the blog aligned with the ideology of the State Department. As an interviewee reiterated, "Our message doesn't differ a whole lot from State.gov / spokesman says […]. It's sort of one point of view, with varying experiences […] it is to be expected because this is an official blog" (Interview #1, Personal communication, 11 September, 2009). Another interviewee said it was a way to "force multiply our message" (Interview #3, personal communication, 11 September, 2009). One blogger shed further light on how writing content for *Dipnote* bore a responsibility of representing the U.S. government and staying in line with the larger message. He said:

> "What my boss, Jeremy Curtain,[2] has said about the new media […] [is that] we should treat it like a giant cocktail party. He doesn't mean to make it trivial. Like if I'm in your country and I'm invited to a cocktail party, and you ask me about U.S. policy, I'll tell you my interpretation of it. It doesn't mean that it's a 100% right…it makes dialogue. It's not authoritative, but it has some authority. So I watch what I say, like I don't say 'you should get a new ruler' unless that's what the government says." (Interview #6, Personal communication, 11 September, 2009)

The metaphor of a cocktail party, where government personnel create cautious dialogue, is perhaps fitting for how the government approaches blogging about sensitive issues of foreign policy. It helps understand how the communication apparatus tackles the inherent tension between openness and secrecy, which has become more pronounced since 9/11 when the Bush administration became resistant to information sharing. In fact, the immediate response to the terror attacks was to limit the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), part of which

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[2] *Served until December 2009 as coordinator of the Bureau of International Information Programs at the State Department.*

required departments to remove "sensitive information" from their websites (Gansler & Lucyshyn, 2004). This was later revoked by President Obama (McCullagh, 2009).

The traditional tension between the Department of State and the Department of Defense in relation to information control is also important to take into account in the context of online content. The ultimate goal of the State Department was to prevent any misuse or sharing of sensitive information in cyberspace to an unintended audience, meaning an enemy. In relation to foreign policy in the State Department, the content focuses on how the United States is approaching the policies from a diplomatic angle.

Although there were fewer direct defences of American policy and presence in Iraq, policy was the subject of a higher number of posts over time, as content became more professionalized, especially in the Obama sample, where excerpts of speeches on policy formed the content of many posts (see figure 14).

Figure 14 – *Dipnote* blog posts about policy over time under the Bush and Obama administrations
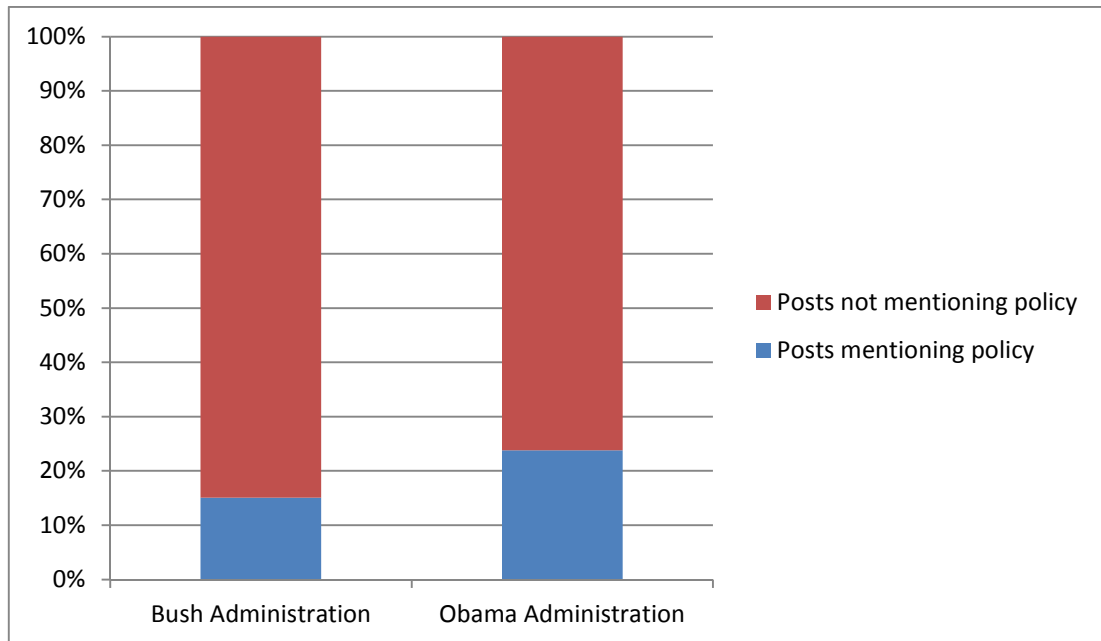
The ideological content of these official transcripts were more straightforward. The first policy-related post under Bush was on the U.S. policy towards Iran, a contentious issue at the time. The other policy posts thereafter mainly concerned Afghanistan and Iraq, as was the case in the Obama sample. The context on the ground was also important to consider, as discussed in the chapter on professionalization. For instance, the month of September 2007 was heavily focused on Libya, when the U.S. administration was attempting to renew diplomatic relations. On September 9, 2008, the same day that President Bush announced the withdrawal of 8,000 troops by February, *Dipnote* published a post on "Iraq: When the Dust Washes Off." These are two examples of how the blog was used as a complementary channel to official foreign policy (refer back to the timeline in chapter 5).

Examining the diplomatic status of Middle Eastern countries with the United States during the period of study, and the countries which *Dipnote* focused on, helped decipher to what extent the blog was aligned with the foreign policy priorities of each administration (Table 7). The increase in focus on Afghanistan and Pakistan in the Obama sample was in tandem with the new strategy applied to both countries that "acknowledge[d] that any success in Afghanistan would be undermined if violence spiralled in Pakistan and vice versa" (Ghattas, 2009, n.p.). Pakistan was also a key ally in combating terrorism in the region, and the United States increasingly relied on it militarily for bases under both administrations.

Table 7

Comparisons of country focus, based on diplomatic status, on Dipnote under Bush and Obama

Diplomatic Status	Bush sample (N=53)	Obama sample (N=105)
US military presence (troops)	28.3%**	50.5%**
US diplomatic relations	28.3%**	13.3%**
Special relationship (Israel)	0%**	7.6%**
US diplomatic negotiations (Palestine)	0%**	6.7%**
Middle East process (Israel / Palestine)	7.5%**	4.8%**
Severed diplomatic relations	18.9%**	1%**
US military involvement (covert operations)	0%**	6.7%**
Other (Middle East as a region; US focus)	5.7%**	4.8%**
US focus	0%**	3.8%**

Note: **p<.01

Surprisingly, Pakistan was not widely covered in the Bush sample even though it had joined the "War on Terror" (it was mentioned a total of 24 times – in 3 posts in total). In contrast, Iran, part of President Bush's 'Axis of Evil', was the subject of a number of posts when relations were at their most hostile, but was the subject of none under Obama, when there was a willingness to open the door for talks.

The overall results reflect the different foci of diplomacy rather than official foreign policy discourse. Moreover, countries of focus in the Obama sample directly coincide with the Secretary's travel agenda in the Middle East, yet are more subtle in terms of official policy alignment. An interviewee further explained how even though *Dipnote* continued its activities across administrations, foreign policy changes were indeed reflected on the blog:

> "Every administration comes with a set of priorities and we definitely enact their priorities and priorities change, from administration to administration, it's pretty natural like a company changing leadership." (Interview #3, Personal communication, September 11, 2009)

Another change in the administration that is reflected on *Dipnote* is the change of foreign policy approach or strategy. Indeed, a shift can be observed from 'transformational diplomacy' under Secretary Rice, which focused on mobilizing diplomats for more communities and posts around the world to reach out, to '21st Century Statecraft' under Secretary Clinton, which positioned the Internet and technology as a central factor in the practice of diplomacy. While 'transformation diplomacy' recognized the importance of technology as a catalyst for change, '21st Statecraft' came at a time when new media and communication technology was arguably a more central element in advancing the interests of the United States in an increasingly interconnected world. As an interviewee explained:

> "A big subsistent change in this administration [OBAMA] actually has been an explicit emphasis on 21st Century Statecraft and digital diplomacy, and really utilizing a lot of these new tools and incorporating them into the traditional workflow of foreign service officers in the field." (Interview #3, Personal communication, September 11, 2009)

While under the Bush administration, the blog was still not well known to many, when Secretary Clinton came to power she made a direct mention of *Dipnote* in a video on the State Department YouTube channel. She said, "Our latest signature blog *Dipnote* reflects the latest breaking news from State and behind the scenes insights from the men and women working in U.S. diplomacy and development" (Clinton, 2009). Like many in the Obama administration, Clinton's innovation adviser Alec J Ross (2011) stated, at a recent talk at the London School of Economics, that the disruptive technology of the Internet and social media has gone from having a negative to a positive connotation. He further added that the Obama administration now operates with a "1 mouth, 2 ears" policy - that is, maintaining one official message but listening in on social media in addition to traditional mainstream media. While the Obama administration is given credit for many of the advances in adopting social media because of his tech-savvy electoral campaign, the evolution of new media incorporation actually occurred gradually, as will be assessed in the following discussion chapter, which ties all of the findings together to make larger claims about the content of *Dipnote*.

In summary, the blog promotes cultural understanding while emphasizing national pride, effectively making *Dipnote* an additional source of soft power in the arsenal of public diplomacy tools in the digital era. The narratives constructed women as needing to be liberated and the Afghani citizen as needing to be saved from the Taliban's oppression. The narrative is also administration-neutral to the extent that some bloggers resist being associated with any administration. Instead, the emphasis is on the experiences of the

Foreign Service, which is there to serve and advance the interests of America and its citizens. The discursive framing of the Middle East on the government blog reveals that official discourse was not replicated in the content. Instead, the content bypasses the official frame of the "War on Terror" narratives that were communicated to the mainstream media, and offered a source of discourse that was predominantly non-official and de-ideologized on the surface. The implications of the findings for the central research question will be explored further in the discussion chapter.

7.5   Nature & level of participation and engagement

One of the key variables from the thematic analysis of interviews was the adoption of *Dipnote* as a tool for government engagement. In addition to presenting the State Department's stories as an alternative to the mainstream news media's, *Dipnote*'s second mission is to encourage debate and interaction. Table 8 summarizes the content analysis findings of comments in the Bush and Obama administrations, while figures 15, 16 and 17 show the comments per post over time. What was noticeably different was the marked decrease in negative comments in the Obama sample, perhaps as a result of the more popular Secretary of State Clinton, but also because the Obama presidency in general was less polarizing that the Bush administration in the context of the war debate. The majority of comments in both samples were of a positive nature, perhaps because government blogs would be expected to attract audiences that are more supportive of the government.

The extent of resistance to hegemony, assessed in this study through the nature of critical comments, differed in each sample. About half of the comments under the Bush administration were negative, compared with only a smaller portion of the Obama sample.

Table 8

Comparison of the quantity & nature of comments on Dipnote in the Bush and Obama administrations

Post Types	Bush sample (N= 53)	Obama sample (N= 105)
Total comments	53	105
Maximum number of comments	828	583
Minimum number of comments	1	0
Comments per post (mean)	216	25
Positive comments	357	345
Negative or critical comments	190	89
Mixed comments	31	36
Neutral or irrelevant comments	228	114
Comments requiring response	144	51
Response to comment	143	16

Although the number of posts from the Bush sample to the Obama sample doubles, the number of comments actually decreases over time. Delving deeper into the comments corpus, it was found that some posts attracted disproportionately more comments than others. The main outlier in the Bush sample was one blog post discussed in depth in the professionalization chapter

('*A Letter to My Overwrought Colleagues*'), which drew the largest number of comments (216), as it became the subject of media and blogosphere attention in the row over Foreign Service assignments. Even without this outlier, however, the Bush sample drew more comments than the Obama sample, even though it contained half the number of posts. A few posts under the Obama administration generated no comments.

Figure 15 - Quantity of comments by post over time under Bush and Obama administrations (combined)
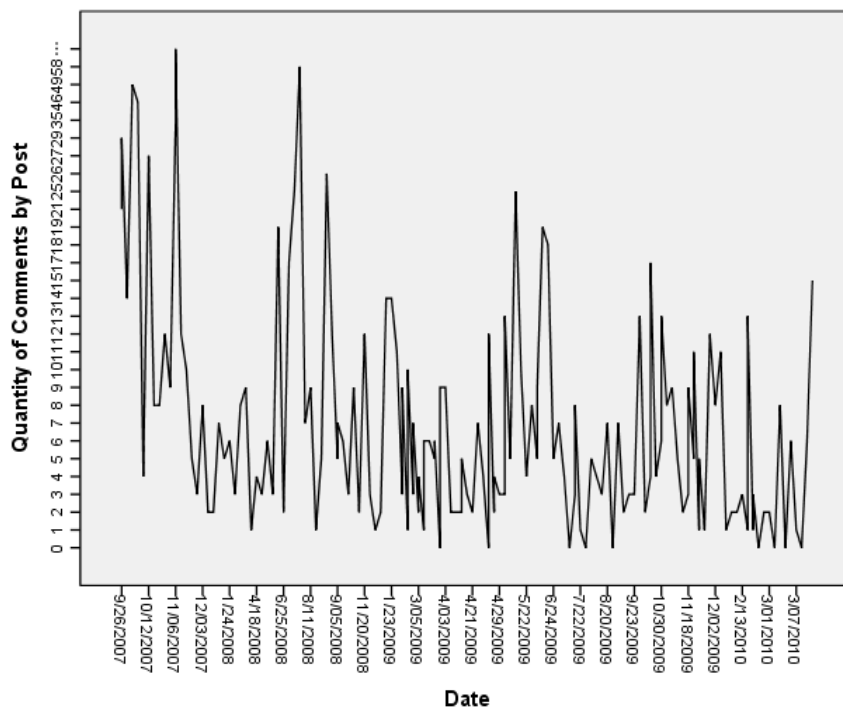
Figure 16 - Quantity of comments by post on *Dipnote* under the Bush administration
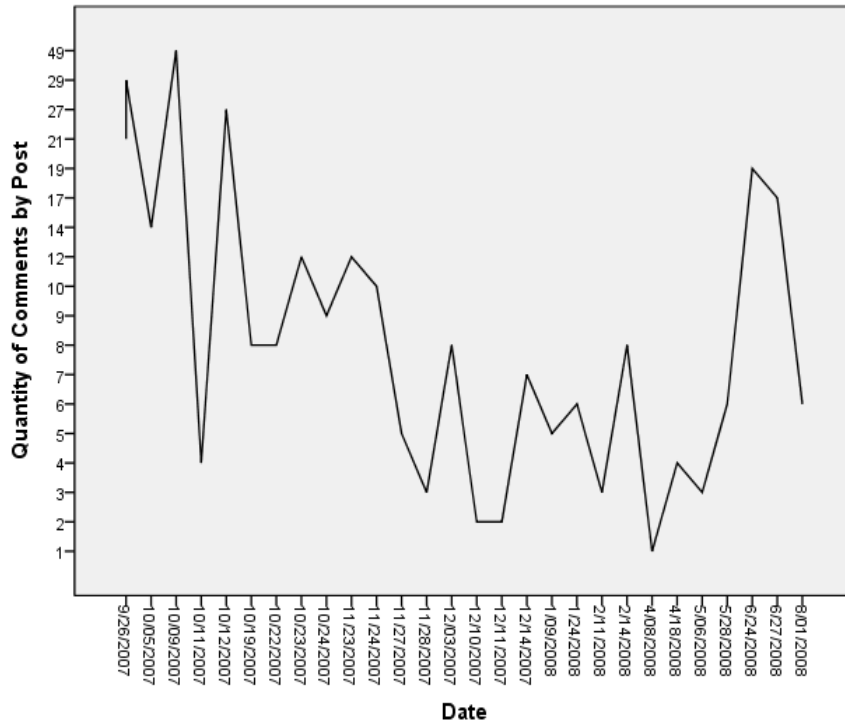
Figure 17 - Quantity of comments by post on *Dipnote* under the Obama administration
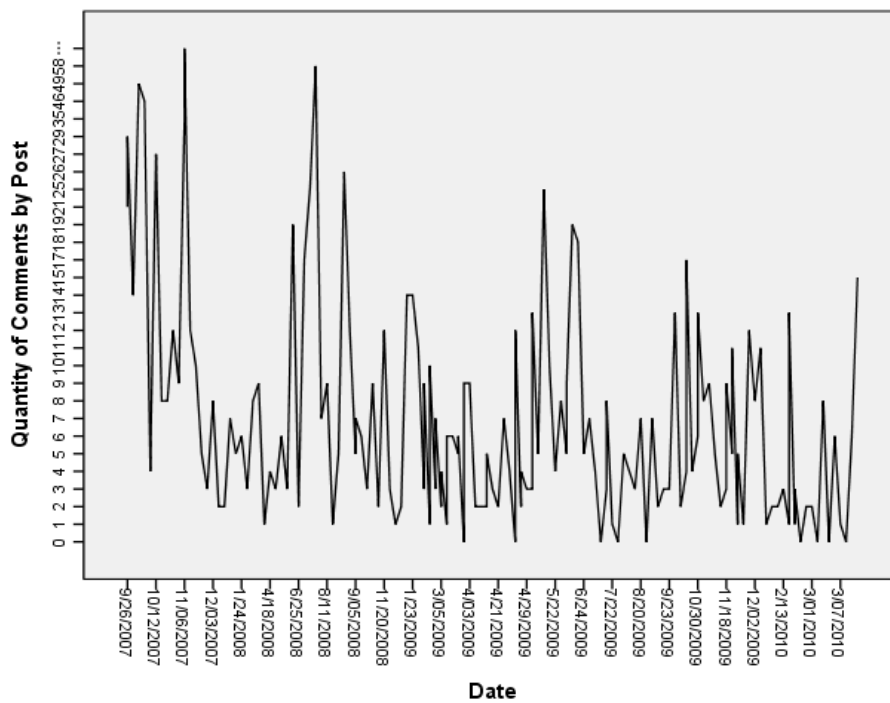
A manual count of the most frequent commenters over time in both samples further revealed that commenting was not very diversified. The most frequent commenter over time, 'Eric in New Mexico', was the same in both samples. Of the top five most frequent commenters, three were the same in both samples. This contrasted with the claim made during the interviews with the management that *Dipnote* consisted of a *"vocal and consistent level of participation"* (Interview #2, Personal communication, September 11, 2009).

The content analysis overall suggests that while the readership more than doubled over time, the participation level did not grow, but rather decreased. This is in line with Chadwick's (2009) findings of low citizen participation in online policy forums in general and also concurs with other studies of *Dipnote* (Gilpin & Palazzolo, 2008; Hamilton, 2008; Hayden, 2007). During the interviews, the management at *Dipnote* was very keen to engage with the public and explained how it was part of the larger strategy of social media adoption:

> "The State Department is constantly exploring not only different social media platforms and functions but [...] also looking at means that we can be more effective and more timely as far as getting the message out and responding to feedback from folks that are following us on these different platforms." (Interview #3, Personal communication, September 11, 2009)

The data and the results, however, indicate that this claim by the management was more an intention than reality. To measure the level of government engagement with the public, the content analysis quantified the 'comment response rate' ('comment requiring response' in Table 8). In other words, coders were asked to read the comments, note which comments requested a

response from the blogger and note the number of responses from the author of the post on *Dipnote.* Surprisingly, the level of government engagement, professed to be an important element of the blog, decreased over time, and reveals a reticence on the part of the State Department. Compared with the high response rate by the bloggers on *Dipnote* under Bush (most questions were answered - 143 responses out of 144 questions), many questions from the public remained unanswered in the Obama sample (only 16 responses were given to a total of 51 questions).

Although the number of comments requiring responses also decreased by almost half under Obama, these figures undermine the interviewees' emphasis on the government's engagement with the public. This will further help develop the discussion over what professionalization over time means for the level of government engagement. Only about 30% of the comments under Obama required a response compared with approximately 65% (χ^2 (1) = 18.5; p< .05) in the first two years of *Dipnote* under the Bush administration (dividing the number of response requests by the total number of comments in each sample). It was also relevant to find that the increase in readership, which the interviewees claimed almost doubled, was not met with more questions or participation from the public. A blog is an interactive medium, unlike a website, thereby providing opportunities for engagement; simply having a blog is not enough, and the bloggers were not consistently reactive to the audience.

In the context of participation, there were instances of resistance to hegemony that the textual analysis helped to explore further than the content analysis

presented earlier. From reading the negative or critical comments, it was indeed surprising to find little apparent censorship on the government blog's virtual space. In-depth reading of the comments suggests that provocative stances were published, which supports the claim of transparency advocated by the management. At the same time, it provides evidence for counter-hegemonic narratives on the government's blog, which have not been observed on any other government platform thus far. Until the blog was produced, there has so far been no official U.S. government platform for citizens to publicly be critical of American policy. For instance, the following comments read:

> *Nina in U.S.A. writes:*
> *Bloody, blind, stupid fools, no wiser than the beasts you feed upon. Diplomats? What a laugh. You are merely pawns in a game played by madmen. Man of peace or man of war – the peacock spreads his fan. Find your spines.*
> *Posted Fri Oct 12, 2007*

> *Judah writes:*
> *…Your administration is a mockery of justice and of Law. Your people are suffering and dying in other lands. You have invaded countries illegally and have murdered the innocent. You have used you armies to carry out your madness. Families in America are grieving for their young sons and daughters as are others in Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, Sudan, and other Nations that are suffering the same fate…*
> *Posted Thu Nov 22, 2007*

The public engaged in the discussion on *Dipnote* also expressed their surprise at the transparency allowed. Some even suggested that the government actually censor some comments when they considered a comment to go too far. What was also striking was the extent to which information otherwise assumed to be sensitive to the government, primarily because it puts it in a negative light, was fully published. A case in point is a series of comments about a ruling by an

Italian court in 2003 on American C.I.A. operatives who kidnapped a Muslim cleric in Milan. The commenter openly writes about the case in full detail, a small section of which I refer to here:

> *Tracy M. in California writes:*
>
> *The case was a huge symbolic victory for Italian prosecutors, who drew the first convictions involving the American practice of rendition, in which terrorism suspects are captured in one country and taken for questioning in another, often one more open to coercive interrogation techniques. Critics of the Bush administration have long hailed the case as a repudiation of the tactics it used to fight terrorism. And that Italy would actually convict intelligence agents of an allied country was seen as a bold move that could set a precedent in other cases.*
> *Posted on Wed Nov 04, 2009*

This information was obviously cleared as not harmful but publishing it does serve to show how transparent the State Department tries to appear.

Overall, the type of negative comments read on the blog space thus show evidence of resistance to hegemony, but within certain boundaries. First, these expressions of counter-hegemony appear within a space that is regulated by the government and that is approved by the editors of the blog, who take their considerations into account before publishing it. Second, a blog of this sort draws critical commentary from a part of the populace that has a certain level of understanding of foreign policy. In other words, the participants are blog-literate and well educated, and engage in an online discourse that is presumably more limited in its inflammatory content than would be if it were possible to bash the government off-line. Despite appearances of tolerance to counter-

views of official American foreign policy, these two factors together define the boundaries of resistance on a government blog,

Nevertheless, many of the comments that were provocative and critical of American foreign policy are in line with Mahler and Regan's (2009c) conclusions about agency blogs eliciting more controversy than would normally be anticipated from a government source. Although many of the contributions and feedback from the public are value-free about U.S. foreign policy or the U.S. government in general, they express an enthusiasm for voicing their points of view in the forum. Indeed, some commenters articulated thorough and rigorous brainstorming of American strategy in the Middle East that can give the government an additional source of feedback from the public.

Most comments on *Dipnote* thus expressed a point of view on Middle East issues in general. When considering the extent to which the blog is taken into consideration for foreign policy making, the content analysis was less useful. The results from the interviews, on the contrary, exposed the contradictions that emerge out of the tension between the need for governments to engage in the age of social media, and the traditionally restrained and complex process of foreign policy making. This also raises the larger question for scholars of liberal democracy, about the extent to which public opinion in general can impact on foreign policy, and whether new media makes any changes to public opinion influence on foreign policy. The results from the interviews with management suggest a general disagreement over the extent to which the comments on *Dipnote* feed back into policy making. On the one hand, an interviewee said:

> "We're a government agency that is actively engaging the public and actually responding and bringing those suggestions back to the decision-making process here in the Department." (Interview #3, Personal communication, 11 September, 2009)

On the other hand, another vaguely responded:

> "I don't want to say it had one. I'm saying it could have an effect." (Interview #4, Personal communication, 11 September, 2009)

Although the bloggers have less insight into policy making, since all they do is provide content, one blogger shed some insight on whether the blog posts themselves are read by policy makers:

> "I don't think it [blog content] contributes to the politics because first of all, the State Department is not supposed to. You know we work in the international environment…we're not supposed to be participating in the debates in Washington. And if we start doing that, we'll get in trouble, and we'll make trouble." (Interview #5, Personal communication, 11 September, 2009)

In terms of interaction, responses were usually provided to issues of minor importance, such as to clarify content on a post or to correct and acknowledge a grammatical mistake in one instance. The responses, in other words, are not about foreign policy. When a commenter asks for an answer to a foreign policy question, there is no reply; this links back to the finding of the low response rate on *Dipnote*. In the sample studied for this thesis, there was only one instance when a State Department blogger wrote a response in defense of U.S. policy. The blog post was about the clearance of landmines in Afghanistan. The commenter condemns the use of landmines and the *Dipnote* blogger responds to defend U.S. policy:

Zharkov in U.S.A. writes:

Now maybe we do not authorize the sale of mines but we can hardly say we do not "export" them if we are using them on foreign battlefields. And look how they are used - precisely where children are likely to play! Uninhabited buildings, near running water, under fruit and shade trees? The only thing left out is playgrounds and schools. Let's stop land mining entirely. We don't need to go out of our way to maim and kill children with our wars.
Posted on Thu Sep 17, 2009

Dipnote Blogger Peter Villano writes:

Actually, the United States has not exported a single anti-personnel landmine to anyone anywhere in almost 20 years. In 1992, Congress enacted a ban on exports of all U.S. anti-personnel landmines. For more facts about U.S. landmine policy, visit http://www.state.gov/t/pm/wra/index.htm.
Posted on Thu Sep 17, 2009

This type of interaction shows the real possibility of a government blog being used as a resource to inform, engage, and advance U.S. foreign policy awareness among the American public. It is active in its blogging effort rather than putting up information and passively ignoring the feedback. Unfortunately, this example is the exception rather than the rule. This brings to the fore the tension between the potential danger that the government perceives to be inherent in casual conversations with the American public that may come with liabilities, and the need to join the conversation in a sea of blogs that are already discussing U.S. foreign policy among themselves. Another point of caution for the government is that there is a risk that the mainstream media can pick up on what is publicly available on the blog and potentially re-purpose it out of context.

Dipnote has, during this period, no doubt succeeded in creating a virtual forum where citizens debated first and foremost among themselves, and provided the

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platform upon which to express their views directly (or so it appears) to the State Department. There was however, no way, either through the interviews or by any other means, to find out how many comments were removed or not published. The management may very well have selected or omitted certain comments and framed the parameters of discussion in line with what it would be willing to accept. *Dipnote* official comment policy states:

> This is a moderated blog. That means all comments will be reviewed before posting. In addition, we expect that participants will treat each other, as well as our Department and our employees, with respect. We will not post comments that contain vulgar or abusive language; personal attacks of any kind; or offensive terms that target specific ethnic or racial groups. (State, 2007)

The inclusion of critical comments bolsters credibility as the blog helps give the State Department, and thereby the U.S. government, an image of openness, setting a liberal example. This does not itself mean that it is truly open and conjures up another contradiction between openness and control. It is telling the public that it wants to hear what it has to say about the state publicly, but it essentially reserves the right to know what the public has to say before publishing it, as well as making sure that it stands up to its criteria of reviewing its content. It also claims to open up a conversation with the public. However, the flow of conversation is largely one-way, with few exceptions, and it thus resembles the monologic communication flow of traditional media.

7.6   Points to ponder over

Ideology is endemic to any discussion of the government and new media. The role of ideology in the content of *Dipnote* was overall more subtle than blatant. The discursive construction of oppressed women as well as citizens helped justify the presence of the United States in the war zones, and the bloggers asserted their identity through the contrast with the non-Western 'other'. In this chapter the findings that were analyzed through Nye's (2000) framework helped understand how the content on the blog did not necessarily reproduce the dominant policies and political values in each administration. The "War on Terror," the main ideological line of American foreign policy under the Bush presidency, is never the focus of the discussion and is mentioned only sparsely. The Obama sample did not present a salient ideology to the public either. These findings suggest that ideology is presented as common sense, not needing to be mentioned, and thus actually reinforces the role of ideology in the shaping of content.

What comes to light in the blog content is the contradiction between informing and persuading: the federal blog shows characteristics of both. The subjective angle of the personalized blog posts appears authentic while documenting the Secretary's travels is informative in nature. The claim in the mission statement that the blog serves an alternative to mainstream media places the blogging motivations as being both to inform and to persuade.

The content analysis showed that the diversity of themes was not concentrated on hard or military power, but rather focused on socio-economic and cultural

issues, featuring the roles of men and women serving for the United States and putting forth largely favourable imagery. Together, these make the blog a tool of soft power at very sensitive moments for both administrations in the Middle East. The cultural content specifically locates the blog's use within cultural diplomacy, which was particularly contradictory during a historical period when President Bush was flexing America's military might upon the world and placing strains on U.S. diplomatic relations. Indeed, "the events of 9/11 and Bush's need for a political raison d'être make hard power a welcomed fit to define Bush's presidency" (Berry, 2004, p. 1). The blog shows that there was also room, however, for weapons of soft power to attenuate the hard power employed by the Bush administration, as exemplified by *Dipnote*.

What gave the blog credibility from this analysis is that not all the entries showed the United States in a positive light. They acknowledging some negative realities on the ground, and the blog allowed resistance to hegemony through the very critical comments published on its site. This resistance, however, was expressed within controlled boundaries. Furthermore, the number of negative comments decreased over time. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the popularity of Secretary Clinton was reflected in the positive comments from the public in the Obama sample, and was a key variable in promoting *Dipnote* to the public.

A key finding of the level of participation is that there is evidence of some meaningful debate between citizens. As for the level of government engagement, there were a few instances of meaningful dialogue between

blogger and citizen, but this remains the exception more than the rule. However, the response rate decreased, and the government engagement with the public, contrary to what was claimed during the interviews, thus grew weaker over time and throughout the Obama administration.

During the interviews the respondents from the management team gave opposite views on the impact of blogging on foreign-policy making and acknowledged its limits, while the content analysis of the comment nature and quantity revealed that the impact is still only a potential one at this stage. The contradictions which the government faces in the digital era have been partly highlighted here where relevant to the findings, and the next discussion chapter will tie all of the concepts together in order to further flesh out these tensions.

Chapter 8: DISCUSSION: Linking personalization, professionalization, and ideology

8.1 Introduction

While it made sense to study aspects of personalization, professionalization, and ideology separately at the onset of this project, in order to break down the dynamics operating in this blog space, the results made clear that they are closely inter-related. The objective of this chapter, in the light of the empirical findings of the three previous chapters, is to explore the relationships that exist between professionalization, personalization, and ideology in the shaping of the content of an official foreign policy blog. It will bring together the results to provide more detailed answers to the research questions.

There were parallel forces at work that revealed continuities and discontinuities in all three concepts across the Bush and Obama administrations. In going back to the research questions, I will discuss the findings and revise them in more detail to cross-tabulate results and delve deeper into the connections that have emerged from the analysis. The first part of this chapter links the three concepts together and combines the data thus far studied separately, with a specific emphasis on the relationship between personalization and professionalization. The second part links personalization, soft power and public diplomacy (a in figure 18), and the third part links ideology to both personalization and professionalization (a and b in figure 18).

Figure 18 - The links between professionalization, personalization and ideology in the content of *Dipnote*
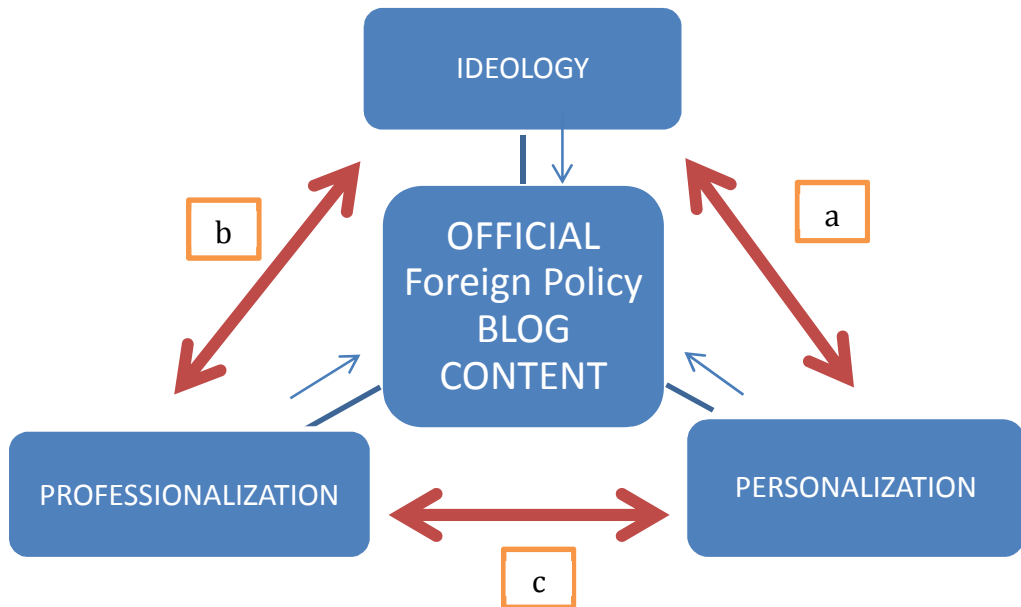
8.2 Linking professionalization and personalization

The trends of both continuities and discontinuities of professionalization gathered from the data on *Dipnote* are further elucidated through an appreciation of the dynamics of personalization. However, before exploring this, I would like to review the divergences in the results of the content analysis. On the one hand the results showed a higher PR content over time, more official content, and a more professionalized design over time. This finding confirms Chadwick's (2001) observation about the evolution of the White House website toward a "more professional approach, which ties in with broader communication strategies" (p. 454). At the same time, the absence of professionalization is manifest in the lack of involvement of professionals in the whole endeavour, and the lessening of interactivity and immediacy over time.

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In terms of personalization, the findings from the content analysis showed that, while the blog began with a larger publication of personal stories of Foreign Service Officers, these decreased markedly over time. At the same time, the consistency in the personalization of the narrative style helped personify the State Department, even in posts that were more official in content or more focused on the Secretary of State. These results take the discussion further only when understood as a part of an evolution that is multi-faceted, and when all three concepts are inter-linked as part of one new vehicle of communication.

The three dimensions of personalization, personification, orientation towards persona, and intimization, emerged jointly from the blog content, and the trend towards professionalization links with personalization through two main facets. First, studying personalization as a technique of professionalization pushes the discussion of blogging further to consider a new form of foreign policy communication practice. Second, the personalization of the content style and narrative is a means to personify or humanize the State Department and thereby the U.S. government. Relating post authors to post types helps understand how personalization and professionalization are linked. Under the Bush administration, data suggests that Foreign Service Officers wrote most of the PR or advertising content (73%), compared with only 37% (χ^2 (13) = 22.4; p< .05) of PR content being written by FSOs in the Obama sample. This shows how promotional content in posts on personal experiences on the ground is weaved in subtly. It included a type of public relations content full of positivity, promotional value and favourable imagery, which is less surprising, since this an agency blog promoting itself. There were however, some exceptions to this,

which can be seen to counter the common view of the blog as a mere promotional tool (for instance, when negative realities in Iraq were included in the narrative). The results of the interviews suggest that bloggers are not guided in the process of content creation, whilst the Department of Defense provides documentation to alert bloggers to what type of information may or may not be suitable. On the one hand, the blog is an official channel of communication, but on the other it permits a type of communication that is not present in official channels. The medium allows a form of PR that has a feel of intimacy which is not possible in official interactions between state and citizens. It also allows employees outside of the official communication apparatus to speak directly to the public.

Publication frequency increased over time (figures 19 and 20) though the variety of authors decreased. The "*Dipnote* bloggers" were increasingly publishing more content than employees in the State Department (see table 9).

Figure 19 - Publication frequency on *Dipnote* over time under the Bush administration
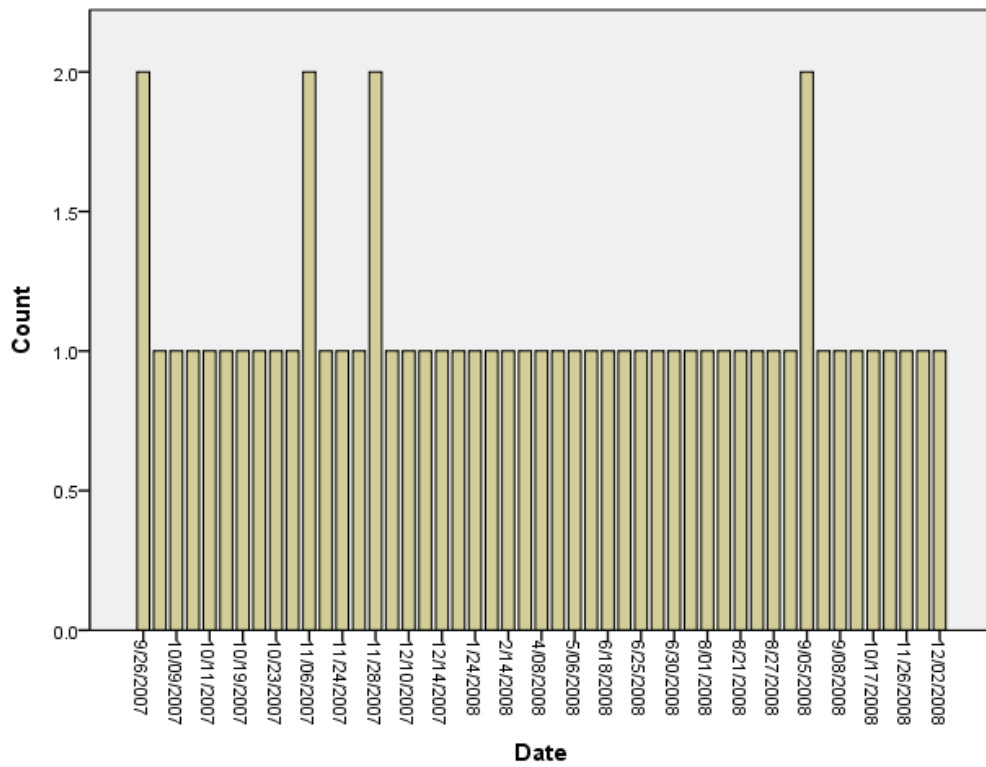
Figure 20 - Publication frequency over time under the Obama administration
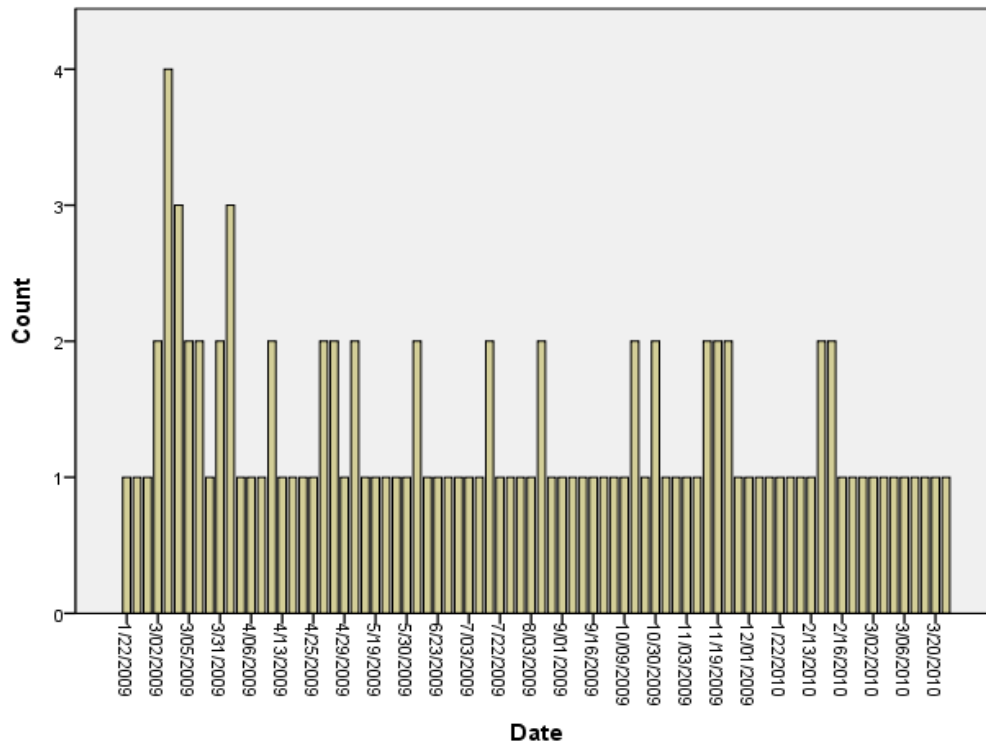
Table 9

Comparison of the variety of authors on Dipnote under Bush and Obama

Post author	Bush sample (N=53)	Obama sample (N=105)
Foreign Service Officer(s)	56.6%*	35.3%*
Dipnote blogger (s) or Editor-in-Chief	20.8%**	51.4%**

Note: *p< .05. **p<0.01

One entry was published by the then newly-appointed New Media Director under the Obama administration. The posts on testimonies about the war in both samples, otherwise coded as 'position taking content', were written by FSOs and *Dipnote* bloggers, as well as the Assistant Secretary of State. Over time, position-taking content decreased (see figure 21). It was more surprising to find an equal authorship of content (50%) with a position-taking stance between FSOs and *Dipnote* bloggers in the Bush administration (table 10). In comparison, the *Dipnote* bloggers wrote 57% of the position-taking content compared with only 29% written by FSOs (χ^2 (20) = 241.8; p < .01).

Figure 21 - Position-taking content over time under Bush and Obama administrations
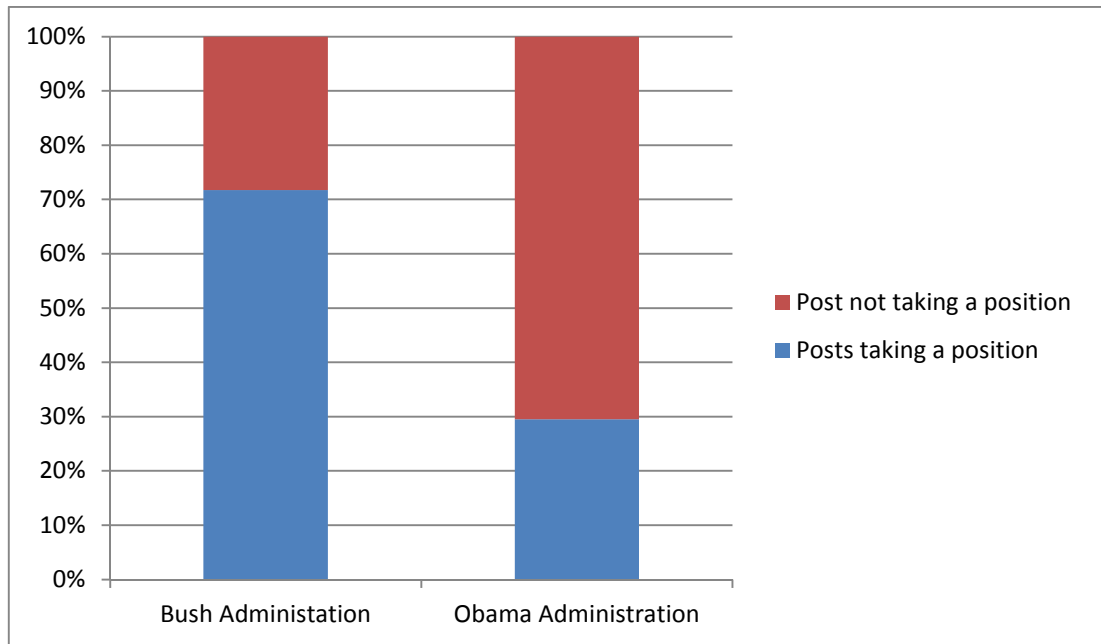
Table 10

Comparison of position-taking content by author on Dipnote under Bush and Obama

Post author	Bush sample (N=53)	Obama sample (N=105)
Foreign Service Officer(s)	50%**	29%**
Dipnote blogger (s) or Editor-in-Chief	50%**	57%**

Note: **P<0.01

Under Obama, 73% of the content on the Secretary of State was published by *Dipnote* bloggers (compared with 20% under Bush (χ^2 (13) = 88.7; p< .01), thus implying that the Obama administration produced more professionalized content.

In the Bush sample, the travels of the Secretary were published by a variety of authors, from the Assistant Secretary himself to the Foreign Service Officers. Despite the increase in publication by *Dipnote* bloggers, there was also in parallel a higher generation of content by people across the State Department instead of mainly FSOs. The management reported a general improved willingness by diplomats and employees to submit material without being solicited, as was the case during the launch of the blog.

This indicates that blogging gradually became a part of the practices of foreign policy communication, supporting a claim of professionalization. The paradox that remains is between, on the one hand, the increase in contributions by *Dipnote* bloggers, and, at the same time, a greater variety of authors contributing over time (figure 22).

Figure 22 – Average frequency of posts by category of authors over time under the Bush and Obama administrations
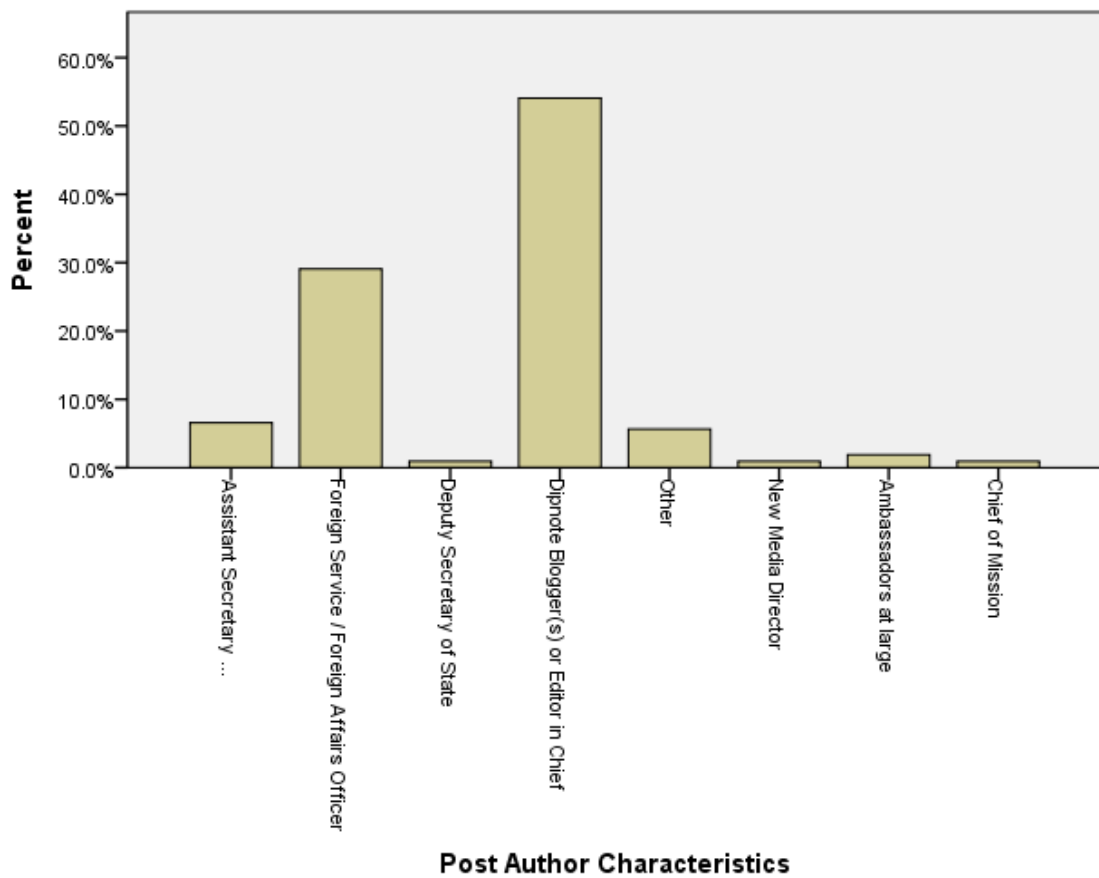
I was not able to reach the management subsequently to ask whether this was because they were not able to get content from the employees, which would contradict their claim that there was an outpouring of content across bureaux. Furthermore, the credibility of the content becomes questionable and the vagueness of the term "*Dipnote* bloggers" means that the reader does not know who exactly authors the content. While it is perhaps logical that "*Dipnote* bloggers" are synonymous with the State Department's official version, it reminds us of the contradiction between editorial independence, for which there is some evidence, and control, which increases over time despite the decision to engage the public through the medium of blogging.

8.3   Linking ideology and personalization: Soft power and diplomacy

Culture emerged as an important dimension of soft power and public diplomacy on the blog. The main indicator of the humanization of the State Department was through the personalization of the narrative, as shown in the personalization chapter. The online testimonials and entries on *Dipnote* portrayed the United States government using a personalized account disconnected from combat operations. The blog thus allows for personalized communication, enabling the government to spread a message in a new style and format. During the analysis, it was hard to distinguish between the blog as a personalization tool versus a tool for ideology, because in reality, they are intertwined.

The narratives of the war, diplomacy, and culture were personalized through references in the content to everyday life, emotions, and family. In terms of culture, the empowerment of women and the representation of Middle Eastern society emerged as key themes in the blog content in both samples and thus across administrations, which parallels the way in which they are strategic themes in the conduct of public diplomacy and legitimization of military strategy. The discursive construction of the blogger's 'self' thus portrayed the 'other' as needing to be liberated, whether from inequality and lack of opportunities as in the case of women, or from oppressive rule as with the Afghani and Iraqi citizens.

In terms of cultural focus, the type of content published on *Dipnote* about the Middle East falls under the umbrella of cultural diplomacy. On a broader scale, this takes us back to the long-running public diplomacy efforts in the Middle East which Brown (2011d) calls the 'graveyard of public diplomacy':

> The Middle East has always been a problem in Western ... public diplomacy...Western powers have tended to deal with local and regional developments through the lens of their own interests at the cost of damaged relations with local actors. This is hardly surprising but it means that public diplomacy difficulties are not about PD actions, or even policy decisions but in deeper structural factors. (p. 1)

The interests referred to here are mainly geo-political interests in the region, such as oil, and these are the real backbone of American action in the Middle East. The blog then complements public diplomacy by negating the importance of these interests. It is this digital face of the State Department, far apart from the bloodshed and the politics involved in foreign policy of the region, which effectively makes *Dipnote* a viable tool for public diplomacy 2.0.

Signitzer and Coombs' (1992) conceptualization of public diplomacy was useful for the interpretation of the results in the context of public diplomacy (see figure 4 in the theoretical framework chapter). They make a distinction between "tough-minded" public diplomacy, the one emitted on mainstream media through persuasion and propaganda, and "tender-minded" public diplomacy emitted through cultural activities, the latter being more fitting for an analysis of *Dipnote*. As explicitly stated at the onset of this project, I distinguish between public affairs, public diplomacy and propaganda and focus instead on the properties of blogging as a soft power of diplomatic practice through

communication. The blog content that emphasizes personal experiences, culture, and reconstruction together portrays how the United States behaves abroad, and how it handles US foreign policy both officially and unofficially. These all amount to more soft power through the medium of blogging and at the same time help frame the conduct of diplomacy online within the context of rebuilding, instead of that of destruction, as reported in the mainstream media. Underlying this façade, this type of soft power is used to avoid the consequences of the use of hard power offline by presenting the United States' foreign affairs in general through cultural and humanitarian frames, but also by not mentioning the "War on Terror" or other official American policies and uses of hard power thereafter under Obama.

According to Signitzer and Coombs (1992) both "tough-minded" and "tender-minded" public diplomacy are used to "explain government policy", which *Dipnote* does but to a minimal extent, as was analyzed in earlier chapters when discussing the general absence of foreign policy context. They also serve to "portray the national society", which interestingly *Dipnote* does, but inversely. Instead of traditional public diplomacy portraying American values and society to foreign audiences, the content on *Dipnote* portrays Middle Eastern societies, namely Iraqi and Afghani societies, to the American public. In this way, it can be seen as a personalized informational resource about the Middle East that is an alternative to the news media or the administration's other communication strategies. As one journalist argued when *Dipnote* had just launched:

> Perhaps *Dipnote* is a welcome source for information on foreign affairs that is often so lacking in mainstream media. And, *Dipnote* could

> provide some healthy exposure to life outside the United States, the bubble of U.S. news coverage, and the rhetorically truncated world-view of the…administration's talking points. (Hayden, 2007, p. 1)

This passage has salience with ideology and the fact that content is recognized as going beyond the "administration's talking points", even though, as was argued, ideology is still an important indicator. Apart from that, the convergence between public affairs and public diplomacy is clear in the case study of *Dipnote*, and arguably part of a larger trend in foreign policy communication. Signitzer and Coombs (1992) further distinguish between "cultural communication", managed by a semi-autonomous cultural section, and "political communication", the work of embassies and foreign ministries; in this research, blogging was considered under the larger umbrella of political communication. Since there is no foreign ministry in the United States, the State Department fulfils these duties and obligations.

Finally, within cultural communications, there is "cultural diplomacy" on the one hand, referring to cultural agreements, and "cultural relations" on the other, referring to cultural cooperation. From the variety of issues encountered on the blog, *Dipnote* as an official foreign policy blog presents the public with a range of issues, the diversity of which reflects the way in which foreign policy contains "complex, politically and strategically driven topics" (Tapscott et al., 2008, p.15). According to both the content analysis and the interviews, however, there was no evidence for any content on cultural agreements or cooperation, which is an important area for public diplomacy.

Nye's (2004) framework of soft power originating from three main sources of culture, political values, and policies, enables us to discuss how all of the concepts of professionalization, personalization, and ideology can be understood as essential elements of the blog content, and also flesh out the contradictions between hard power and soft power. First, I would like to recap the way in which the blog's content amounts to soft power for American foreign policy. The culture of the Middle East, as was discussed, was a major feature of the blog that helped support American foreign policy offline, because it encourages the reader to go beyond the military situation so heavily covered by the mainstream media. The presence of cultural highlights on the blog is what creates soft power, because it helps portray the American presence and activities in the Middle East in a non-military light, even when discussing serving in war zones. From the analysis of issues on *Dipnote*, the American political values of democracy and freedom that are essential to U.S. foreign policy - and are classic soft power values - are surprisingly absent from the content, but there is an important coverage of human rights, namely the empowerment of women and local citizens. Of course there was no mention of human rights abuses by the American administration in the Middle East, which had cast a grey cloud over the reputation of the country's values. For instance, Wikileaks revealed abuses and torture by US forces in Iraq (Batty & Doward, 2010). As for policies, the blog does not itself outline the strategy of the United States in the Middle East under either administration, but over time the choice of issues of focus has become more aligned with the priorities of the administration. Posts elicited less controversy and became more similar to the issues on the agenda of the Secretary of State. This could mean that the

government blog became institutionalized over time as part of a historical development, a point to which I will return in the conclusion chapter.

The finding that *Dipnote* does not reflect the dominant ideological discourses in both administrations is connected to the findings around professionalization of foreign policy communication. In fact, it concurs with Holtz-Bacha's (2002) notion of "de-ideologization" as a result of the professionalization of politics, adapted here from the context of modern campaigning. Perhaps the medium of blogging itself encourages a move towards presenting ideology through more subtle content and indirect messages, thereby rendering it an innovative soft power tool. Whereas official discourse focused on American military strategy in the war, or hard power, the blog focused mainly on the humanized accounts of the State Department through personalized narratives of war and the activities of the Secretary of State, or soft power. It also provided an opportunity to incorporate blogging as part of public diplomacy, as noted earlier.

Deeper exploration is necessary of the difficulty of separating when hard power and soft power are at play, in order to go beyond simplistic analyzes. As Brown (2011a) asks, "Is soft power really hard power or is hard power really soft power?" (p. 1) Communication may be considered a form of artillery along with military weapons, and its power in society can lead one to argue it is a non-military form of hard power for the state. Indeed, "sophisticated nations have everything from smart bombs to smart phones to smart blogs" (Wilson III, 2008, p. 113). In this sense, public diplomacy may even be seen as a 'hard' tool that is involved in military operations.

The institutional context of the State Department blog helps to articulate the meaning of soft power. The management of the blog operates under the Public Affairs Bureau and the Obama administration's 21st Century Statecraft has boosted the role of the blog as an instrument to derive attraction from the State Department's employees through various dimensions of personalization, mainly due to the fact that the Secretary personally embraced the blog. It has also arguably become part of the permanent communication campaign of U.S. foreign policy, especially in the light of the findings from the interviews, that blogging is now part of foreign policy practice. The personalization, and thereby de-ideologization of the content, helps to legitimize the US government's actions and policies.

There is a further distinction to be made here between American national interests and national ideology in discussions of foreign policy. The State Department view of the world figures on *Dipnote*, and is geared towards advancing American national interests, but it does not overtly impose an American view of the world or national ideology, as advanced most ferociously by the Bush doctrine in the first sample of this study. In other words, the content is not moralistic. The blog, in offering a personalized account, thus allows for informing the public on the mechanisms of U.S. foreign policy, but without explicitly preaching a worldview, which it is assumed to hold regardless, through the discursive construction of the 'self' and the 'other.' By replacing the government voice with the voice of the employee speaking from his or her personal perspective, ideology is expressed in a personalized form.

There is no way of knowing if this blog was intended to build public support or not, and the focus here is not on audience reception, which would warrant a thesis of its own. What was more important in terms of the focus of this thesis was to spell out the claims made by the management, combined with the content analysis of blog posts, and trace the convergence and divergence between the results of the research and the intentions and discourses around *Dipnote,* or what *Dipnote* is supposed to do or represent and what it actually does and does not do.

In terms of the personalization of foreign policy, the sharing of personal stories on the ground personifies the State Department. The results from the content analysis showed that the focus of the post shifted from personal experiences of Foreign Service Officers on the ground to a focus on the activities of the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State in the Obama sample grew more visible and personalized foreign policy, as a result of the frequency of the posts on her, bolstered by her popularity at the time. Relating back to Bjerling's (2011) framework, there was a shift from personification to an orientation towards persona. The following passage describes Secretary Clinton as a glorified figure:

> When we receive word that the Secretary has entered the building, a hush falls over the crowd…As she comes into the room, the crowd erupts with applause, and the Secretary's face beams as she steps onto the stage. The Secretary's first words resonate over the microphone as she tells us all how delighted she is to be here. She acknowledges the daily efforts of the staff at the Consulate General and Embassy and then takes time

> to sit and chat with the children and shake the
> hands of staff eagerly lined up along the red carpet.
> I am very proud as a diplomat, an American, and a
> member of the Consulate General team. (*Teaching
> my daughter to say "Madame Secretary,"* March 5,
> 2009)

In this passage, there is a sense of spectacle or theatrical effects that make the

stage which the Secretary steps on, parallel to the digital stage on *Dipnote*.

Through the findings on personalization, one may suggest that the blog provides

a new medium for the State Department to communicate a new form but for

existing purposes, that is to adhere to the official message of the American

government. In this way, blogs enable an added-value channel to traditional

communication, by boosting legitimation through the voices within the State

Department, and through personalization of the content without having to refer

to the official doctrine of U.S. foreign policy. Relating back to the theoretical

framework, the concept of legitimation is vital: "as citizens increasingly come to

interact and participate via electronic means (alongside established physical

means), the legitimizing role of government's 'electronic face' will assume great

significance" (Chadwick 2001, p. 444). It enables the government to use this

channel in parallel to the official messages relayed to the mainstream media,

and to focus on aspects of the war or the region that are otherwise ignored and

arguably less important to communicate through other official channels. It

should be emphasized here that although the information is a soft type of

information it serves to legitimize the government because it encourages

cooperation, understanding, and human elements that are important for public

diplomacy.

Another facet of immediacy is 'semantic immediacy', introduced in the theoretical chapter. The personal experiences of FSOs in the Middle East give insight into a region usually covered by the mainstream media from the angle of war in relation to U.S. foreign policy, and in romanticized terms, similar perhaps to the popular literature of the Middle East in the United States. As introduced in the theoretical framework, a pertinent piece about personal blogs during the 2006 Israeli-Lebanese conflict lends some key insights into the "cyberblog-as-testimony" (Fadda-Conrey, 2010) which is essentially what the *Dipnote* blog posts about the war are. It creates a different experience because it is not the government who is telling the story; the public is being told first-hand. The main difference between the context of war in Lebanon and that of Iraq on *Dipnote* is that the citizen blog helped the reader experience the "trauma" of the war, while the FSOs on *Dipnote* helped the reader understand the experience of working in a war zone whilst omitting the traumatic elements. Although it is not necessarily sanitized, it presents a de-ideologized, personalized depiction of wartime. It is in this important way that the linkage between personalization and ideology makes the blog a soft instrument for public diplomacy.

In summary, what emerges from this discussion is that personalization is in fact a highly ideological facet of blogging, because the construction of the 'self' and the 'other' is linked to a worldview that is loyal to the hegemony of the United States in the Middle East. Personalization and the form it takes also depends on the ideology of the administration. The results of this study have shown that while the Bush administration focused on experiences of FSOs, the Obama administration focused on the Secretary of State.

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8.4   Linking ideology, personalization and professionalization

With regard to ideology, the doctrine of the Bush administration and the foreign policy of the Obama administration were only subtly present in the content; yet it was clear that American values and foreign policy positions were still dominant, and that the blog reaffirmed the American presence in the Middle East. The content analysis found that the official blog content resisted official discourse although it was aligned with the larger message of the State Department. A Major from the United Army relates to soldier blogs and explains the army's strategy, which largely mirrors the State Department's:

> I do not mean that soldiers simply repeat what official press releases say. If soldiers are seen as puppets, this would have a detrimental impact on their credibility. If, however, the stories soldiers tell further enlighten and personalize the information from press releases or other stories in main stream media, this could have a positive impact for the Army. (Bruhl, 2009, p. 19)

This concurs with the findings on professionalization in the sense that, despite the variation in experiences across ranks within the apparatus, the centralization of message control remained constant over time, which is to be expected given the official nature of the blog.

There is a striking - perhaps expected - similarity between the Department of Defense's own blog strategy and the State Department's public affairs strategy. They both recognize that "the media overestimates the public interest in coverage of terrorist activities and even more strikingly underestimates the public's desire for stories about the reconstruction effort" (Bruhl, 2009, p. 17).

This could also explain why the "War on Terror" was referred to only in very isolated instances.

There is a further link that emerges between the dimensions of personalization and the techniques, resources, and thematic developments of professionalization that also link with ideology. In the Iraq context, two posts, "Making the Most out the 'surge' in Iraq" and "What They Said Couldn't be Done" drew noteworthy attention for their defence of the decision to oust Saddam from power, and had the highest number of comments over the time period under observation. These posts can help understand personalization as a key component of digital storytelling that served as a legitimation device, whereby a member of the apparatus who served overseas defended U.S. strategy and foreign policy in the Middle East. One blogger, for instance, in the following excerpt defends Bush's strategy in Iraq without having to mention him or the doctrine:

> The accomplishment of the United States, Coalition Forces and Iraqis is astonishing, especially when you consider the near-death experiences of 2006. The Middle East is more secure without the murderous Saddam Hussein in power, and it is immensely better off than it would have been had we failed in 2006. I believe this will be seen by future historians as a paradigm shifting event…
> (*What they said couldn't be done,* June 30, 2008)

This was more the case under the Bush administration, although over time under the Obama administration personalization also helped the blog become an official instrument of statecraft. The increasing focus on the persona of the Secretary of State and her activities correlates with the overall increase in traditional and public relations content. The personalization of foreign policy

through the Secretary of State thus accompanied the more official professionalized trend that the blog was taking. Under Obama content about foreign policy became more aligned with official policy statements of the American government. In other words, the choice of countries of focus, such as Afghanistan, followed increased attention as part of official strategy on the ground but it did not make any direct references to what the Obama administration said about the situation.

The focus on war zones remained constant over time, as the U.S. was still entangled in Iraq and Afghanistan under both administrations. The personalization of the blog however shifted toward a focus on the Secretary, which helped the blog become more of an instrument of policy making in the region for the Secretary of State than a blog about the FSOs on the ground. The visibility of the Secretary was higher on the blog, perhaps as a way to engage with the public, since she was a proponent of technology and social media adoption. This contrasted with the actual lower government engagement and technical interactivity over time. This goes to the heart of the contradiction in the light of the more professionalized output during a more tech-savvy administration. It seems that the more the administration is learning to use social media and incorporate them over time into foreign policy practice through diplomats and embassies around the world, the more it masters its control online. The fact that no professionals took part in the blog effort of the State Department, especially in a time of war, means that the content written by FSOs is likely to be more credible than it would be if it had been part of the filtered official communication process of the State Department.

Immediacy in this project measured the reactivity of the blog to foreign affairs events, in order to measure how the blog is being used in relation to foreign policy activity, as well as its function as a news service and any relationship it forges with the mainstream news coverage. It points out the juxtaposition between what is happening in reality and what is discussed on the blog, as was seen through the historical timeline in the professionalization chapter, as well as what the aims of the mission statement are and to what extent *Dipnote* is fulfilling those aims. What was clear from the findings emerging from both content analysis and the interviews with management is that the blog is not a news service, and in many ways it has particular content that competes with the mainstream media only to the extent to which it puts forth its own version of events in the region. This confirms Woodly's (2008) finding that "blogs are an additional node in the web of mass political communication that function differently than any traditional news medium" (p. 114). By entering the blogosphere the government has shown a willingness to adapt and understand the use of social media through the level of familiarity (i.e. personalization) enabled by the genre, but it has not created online relationships with journalists and bloggers, as it would have offline. The exceptions to this were largely in the Bush sample. Close to the beginning of the blog the Assistant Secretary directly engaged with the mainstream media and the influential bloggers. *Dipnote* bloggers went on other blogs to comment on reactions about *Dipnote*, and the blog linked to MSM media articles in the posts as well as through the initially diversified blogroll. *Dipnote* then, over time, became the representation of the State Department online, a personification in essence, and an official presence in

the blogosphere that became more linked to the government's resources online. It also focused solely on the activities of the State Department, not on engaging with the larger foreign policy debates with the media, the public, and the blogosphere, as it had in the beginning**.**

Against the background of lower interactivity and immediacy on the blog, the findings also showed decreasing government engagement with comments over time. This data concurred with Chadwick's (2001) study of the White House website where "citizens are brought 'closer' to government ... but their interactions with its electronic face are very much on government's own terms" (p. 454). While the image of transparency, credibility and openness was encouraged by the publication of critical comments, as well as by the inclusion of negative realities in the war zones, the government in this case study was not actually opening up its control frontiers. Higher professionalization over time also led to lower comments on the blog, mainly through sustaining the dominance of the type of content which no longer encouraged comments.

In addition, the level of engagement with citizens online remained limited. Citizens who come to the *Dipnote* blog are invited to comment but instead talk among themselves for the most part. This links to the government's wariness to fully embrace Web 2.0 in general and supports what Chadwick (2009) describes as the "fear of closing control over the policy agenda... and opening up floodgates by raising citizens' expectations about policy influence" (p. 16). It is not clear, however, whether the citizens are reluctant to engage with the government, or the government is creating a platform that is not open enough.

The findings on *Dipnote*'s impact on policy suggest that the government is remaining closed to policy input from citizens, diverging from the claim by the management that they are open to it:

> "[We are] recognizing ...the power of commenters and actually give them a role in the community as well so that other people who are commenting or who might be new to the tool will recognize these other commenters in the community already who can help moderate the comments for the community in general." (Interview #3, Personal communication, 11 September, 2009)

There was no real evidence to back up the claim made here. Relevant to a discussion on the role of ideology is how editors scan for material suitable for the blog, a continuation of the issue of editorial control raised in the chapter on professionalization. Since *Dipnote* is the sole producer of content, it did not allow for collaboration. The only apparent collaboration is between the management and the employees of the State Department. One blogger explained how the agency approached the content of his personal blog and re-used it on *Dipnote*:

> "I started a personal blog about my experiences as a diplomat in Iraq and I sent it around to some of my former foreign service colleagues and my personal blog eventually sort of made its way to *Dipnote* folks who thought 'Oh...you're writing from a perspective that is honest but politically correct, not controversial but telling a unique story, we'd like to re-purpose some of your blogs." (Interview #5, Personal communication, 11 September, 2009)

What was most disappointing was the absence of collaboration for content generation. The management claimed that their objective through social media initiatives, including the blog, is "empowering [...] followers as well and

recognizing [...] the power of commenters and actually give them a role in the community" (Interview #3, Personal communication, 11 September, 2009). This was disproved by my data. The posts uploaded on *Dipnote* were solely written by FSOs or State Department personnel and no collaboration of content exists in the sample studied. The afore-mentioned quote suggests that the management understands the logic of social media in general, but has yet to implement it into reality given all the tensions that the government faces. Citizens online, or netizens as they are called in blog forums, have indeed become increasingly eager to join in content creation:

> Citizens, in particular young Net-savvy citizens, are keen to play [...] a larger role. The idea is not merely for governments to understand what the electorate thinks should happen; public opinion polls can do that. But what polls don't capture is the wisdom and insight that a nation can collectively offer through online brainstorming. (Tapscott et al., 2008,)

The feedback that is generated on the platform is thus important for gauging an alternative measure of public opinion, even though the management did not clarify to what extent this has been the case for the State Department. The potential of the blog is to then become what Coleman (2005) calls a "listening post of modern democracy" (p. 274).

In summary, the role of Web 2.0 technology in the context of government from a broad perspective has brought challenges and opportunities which are articulated in a number of tensions and contradictions between the offline realities and the online platform. When the evolution between websites and blogging is compared, the shift is significant, especially when considering whether the State Department allows comments of a critical nature to be on

public display. Looking closer provides insights into the limitations of such an exposure in really making Web 2.0 any different from Web 1.0 for government agencies. In terms of content, Web 1.0 means that the organization provides information to the reader, while in Web 2.0 terms, ideally at least, information is the result of collaboration between producers and consumers. In the case of the State Department's government blog, the content is under the direct control of the editors of the blog, and submissions are not open to anyone outside of the State Department or the United States government.

Relating back to the research questions on editorial control, it seems the institutional context has emerged as important, but only as a contextual variable. The management is mainly making use of the blog using a business model approach, in which the product is made for the viewers, but has not yet fulfilled its potential to become a real two-way communication model. Quite the opposite: the pattern deciphered from this study suggests a tendency back towards one way communication, supported by an increase in professionalization and personalization. This finding supports Gumbrecht's (2004) assertion that personal blogs are in essence a "protected space". In other words, a blog enables its owner to define the terms of debate. This makes the blog an ideal medium through which the government can maintain strategic control of the message, interactions, and content, and helps explain why the state would choose to blog in the first place. What these findings also suggest is that as the content became more professionalized and focused on the persona of the Secretary of State, and less about personal experiences on the ground, it drew less discussion over time.

8.5 Summative reflections

The main challenge for this project was building a theoretical framework that would enable the conceptualization of public diplomacy in the digital era through the case study of the State Department blog. My analysis of Greater Middle East blog posts created between 2007 and 2010 revealed both continuities and discontinuities in content between the Bush and Obama administrations. In this chapter, my examination of Middle East posts uploaded on the State Department blog, combined with interviews with the management, revealed patterns that shed light on the extent to which professionalization, personalization, and ideology come together to play a role in determining content. It further suggested ways in which a federal agency blog is effectively one of many public faces of American foreign affairs. The strength of this thesis overall lies in the combination of these concepts with the theories of hegemony and soft power in the way that was performed in this project, and that deepens our understanding of the government blog both at the organizational level and at the level of content. In summary, as a tool of public diplomacy in the digital era, the *Dipnote* content over time is professionalized in a personalized and de-ideologized form.

Chapter 9:   **CONCLUSIONS**

9.1   **Contribution of empirical findings to theory**

This study contributes theoretically to our understanding of government blogging in the context of foreign policy communication through an operationalized understanding of professionalization, personalization and ideology. By adapting Farrell and Webb's (2002) professionalization framework, Bjerling's (2011) dimensions of personalization, and Nye's (2000) concept of soft power to the context of government blogging, the analysis enriches the way in which we think about political communication by expanding its scope from the often studied context of election campaigns onto public diplomacy.

Furthermore, the case of the government blog adds to our understanding of hegemony theory in the digital era, primarily through the framing of personal and professional narratives as a means to sustain dominant discourse. Hegemony is thus understood as part of a dynamic discursive process. The construction of the self on the blog was formed through a contrast with the construction of the 'other', in particular the Afghani and Iraqi citizen, as needing to be liberated in order to justify American power. The issue of women's empowerment was also important in legitimizing the role of the United States in the region. Within this ideological context, there was real yet limited room for resistance, dissent, or critique either by bloggers who post content or commenters.

In the context of war, the majority of posts on *Dipnote* focusing on Iraq and Afghanistan was pertinent in this study, and enabled an examination of the relationship between professionalization, personalization, and ideology at a time when the administration was losing the support of the American public for the war. The blog can hence be seen as an ideological device used to present personalised accounts in a professional way; on the surface it appears in form like any personal blog, but in doing so it conceals the real consequences of hard power by presenting one particular (official) view of reality rather than another. The publication of critical comments on *Dipnote* is in itself ideological, as it presents a model of liberal democracy to the outside world that is open to critique, but within certain boundaries. These boundaries are defined by the editorial control of the management of the blog, as well as by the readers who express their views, however inflammatory, in a controlled environment.

While existing theory served as a framework for the interpretation of the results in some instances, the blog's utilization as a cultural space is a new aspect for foreign policy communication, which has not been considered in previous studies of government blogging in political communication or international relations. The particularities of the genre enable a new form of official yet casual communication which can serve to legitimize American activities and presence in the Middle East, through a process of personalization and de-ideologization of content that makes the blog a soft power resource. The importance of story-telling emerged as a key variable in these findings; for the government to achieve authenticity and legitimacy online, personalization enables it to tell its story through its employees and accept critical feedback while appearing more

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credible and transparent. The blog can thus be conceived as a protected space where the government maintains editorial control, with low levels of technical interactivity and low government engagement with the public.

Personalization has been linked to professionalization and mediatisation in studies of political communication in the context of electoral campaigns or media coverage of politics, but this study has brought them together in the context of foreign policy communication. The style of personalization has previously been studied in depth in relation to personal blogs, and as a phenomenon in the domestic political process, but it has not been examined in the context of foreign policy or public diplomacy. Personalization as a concept was useful in exploring how the blog might put a human face on the State Department through personification, orientation towards persona and intimization of foreign policy.

The role of personality emerged as a key indicator in foreign policy communication through blogging. While the personality of the President has often been the subject of international relations studies, especially in the light of factors that impact on decision-making in foreign policy, the Secretary of State has seldom been the subject of scholarship. This thesis thus fills this gap in the study of foreign policy and political communication. Regarding the concept of personalization in particular, future studies of other kinds of PD 2.0 outlets should take into consideration the role of the key public representative of the platform under study. This is important, because as was seen in this particular historical period through Secretary Clinton, the personality can be central to the

way the foreign policy is communicated, and it shows how the orientation towards a person in foreign policy in the digital landscape can take shape. In my research, the theoretical implications of personalization further revolve around our understanding of how a style of communication, as traditionally understood in domestic political communication, can also be important in the context of foreign policy communication.

Overall, these findings point to the classic contradictions that the government faces in the digital era, both offline and online, between control and openness, and between secrecy and transparency, especially in the foreign policy context. The analysis in this study further suggests that blogging is part of an evolution and does not amount to a revolution in political communication and public diplomacy. This is an important argument of my thesis that I will discuss in detail. In the last section below, I also offer a new way of explaining the changes brought about through the blog and our understanding of professionalization in the context of the internet.

9.2   Dimensions of government blogging: Key empirical findings

9.2.1   Revisiting Professionalization of foreign policy communication

Professionalization, in the field of political communication, has been mostly linked to the rise of consultants. In light of the results of this study, what I mean by professionalization in the *Dipnote* blog is two-fold. First, it is a technological medium where more and more of the blog content is geared towards advertising and PR and less about personal experiences or engaging meaningful

discussion as it showed instances of doing in the beginning. Second, it is about how the blog encourages the development of a new method or new skills that amount to the evolution of the way foreign affairs is communicated in the era of social media. These two points may seem self-evident but the following discussion will enlighten how they help change our insight of what professionalization means for foreign policy communication in the digital era.

The first point changes the way professionalization is traditionally understood as just an injection of expertise into a communication campaign. While political communication through the blog is not regulated by external experts, over time it evolved into a political marketing tool of the State Department. In this sense it is not so much that it is more comparable to a propaganda tool but that there is a noticeable finding of evolution from a more amateurish and unprofessional blog in the beginning to a more professional and crucially more regulated blog over time.

The second facet of how I see the professionalization process in the age of new media such as the blog, given the findings set forth here, is more related to the social process by which any occupation gains ground through established codes of conduct. In other words, it is in reference to the continuous process of adaptation to new techniques and skills over time. In the case of the blog, it is in learning to make the blog a more professional outlet for the State Department, in incorporating new features, in attracting more contributions from civil servants and career diplomats. When blogging was introduced in the State Department, it was very much an experimental action fuelled by the burst of

social media after the 2003 War in Iraq, especially blogs. Its development was ad hoc, there were challenges of resistance and fear towards the new medium in the organization, but over time it became more professionalized in the sense of acceptance as a qualified channel of communication with its own set of routines and practices different from the website, the media coverage, or other social media platforms like Twitter or Facebook. Perhaps this can be linked to the rise in codes and regulations surrounding social media across all levels of government. At a broader level, new jobs mentioned earlier in the thesis such as "White House Internet and e-communications director" are also signifiers of a professionalization trend in communication management. This is a process of change, adaptation, evolution.

Professionalization as a phenomenon in the development of political communication, given its limitations, is best understood through a combined discussion of personalization and ideology in the context of a government blog. As Ward and Cahill (2007) point out, "media tools once commandeered by professionals are falling into public hands" (p. 5). What this research found was that while the technology of blogging was adopted by the government, professionals did not steer the official blog, nor were they responsible for the increase in PR content on *Dipnote* over time. These findings do not conform to the trend towards professionalization, which suggests that consultants are playing an increasingly important role in government communications. In fact, what this study suggests is that the role of professionals is less central than would otherwise be expected. This is not to say that professionals in government communication are obsolete, but that the role of external actors is

limited. In other words, departments can learn from the practices of others, for example from reading blogs, as the management of *Dipnote* has done.

An interesting parallel can be drawn in the similarity of the type of content that professionals have used in the past and how the blog is used today in a professionalized way but without resorting to professionals. A paper by Fasce (2007) usefully traces political PR in the U.S. since 1939, showing that communication professionals over time helped build the image of the American way of life during the war. In particular, "the availability of communication professionals to take charge of the promotional apparatus…give *public* appeals to patriotic sacrifice a strong private and familial component" (Fasce, 2007, p. 5). In a similar way, the findings of personalization in the content on *Dipnote* included patriotic sentiment, expression of emotions, reference to family and the recounting of everyday experiences and colloquial language. By extension, this also suggests that the medium of blogging facilitates professionalization with the advent of new media. The ease of publication, the format, and a simple understanding of blogging logic builds upon the existing online architecture of the government.

The improved design, look and feel of the blog was reflected in the change of administration a year into the Obama presidency, and the blogging approach became, overall, more professionalized over time. The same considerations of design and aesthetics go into making a blog as into making a website, but the type of space created has arguably more flexibility to generate less official

content, and fewer constraints in terms of information output, since it is more of a cultural and experiential platform than any other medium.

Technological changes have certainly brought changes in foreign policy communication, and the question is whether the medium of blogging has brought changes to the practice itself. Alec J Ross, Secretary Clinton's senior innovation advisor, said that 21st Century Statecraft is not about technology but rather about foreign policy and that "it is about leveraging technology for foreign policy" (Ross, 2011). This links back to the concept of hegemony, by recognizing that technological innovation on the periphery of foreign policy through blogging is consistent with the established core values of the American government. At first glance *Dipnote* appeared to resemble traditionally produced official communication products, such as press releases and State Department briefings, especially because the results of the content analysis show an increase in PR content. The obvious conclusion would over-simplify the case that blogging just provides another tool for the promotional machine of the United States government. Since blogging has already begun to be used as a PR tool by many organizations in the private sector, it perhaps encourages a similar application in the context of the public sector. While communication is vital for building and maintaining the image of government, the advent of blogging and social media in general have challenged how government communications traditionally perform their PR activities, as will be reviewed in the findings of ideology below.

The interviews showed that the adoption rate in the Department increased over time, as the staff grew more at ease and open to blogging; and the main finding for this is in the increasing involvement of senior-level employees in creating content for the blog. At the same, the institutionalized '*Dipnote* bloggers' published more content on the site, replacing the dominant role of FSOs under the Bush administration. The government's culture has in general been documented as conservative in nature and the lag on *Dipnote* reflects how the government is relatively slow to adapt to new technology in general, and cautious about losing control of the message. The same fear of new media exists in the Army.

Overall my study suggests is that professionalization as a concept for understanding foreign policy communication in the age of new media has proven to be limited. Re-adapting Farrell & Webb's framework was useful for handling the data and an important interpretive framework when combined with personalization and ideology but its use was more problematic outside the context of domestic political communication for which it was designed.

In a nutshell it means that the blog has become more professional in its output and design, but beyond that it is the underlying processes of change and evolution that are relevant for modern foreign policy communication. I suggest from my study that these are perhaps better encapsulated or explained by two phases relevant to blogging and arguably also to other new media in general, which future research can shed light on. There is an initial *new technology experimental phase* where the government experiments in a more open manner

in effort to modernize, followed by and culminating into a *new technology consolidation phase* when the government re-adapts to old routines of precaution in the face of classical tensions between secrecy and transparency (see Table 11). These phases in the evolution of technology adoption fall in line with Silverstone et al.'s (1992) domestication approach which was originally conceived in the context of the household but which has become relevant for organizations. The process in the acquisition of technologies thus involves "placing them, using them properly, [and] fitting them with other technologies and other people" (Lehtonen, 2003, 282). In the first phase of the government blog in this study, the professionalization comes in the form of diversity of post types with an emphasis on the personal experiences of civil servants and elites on the ground in the war zones, including content that is more alternative to the mainstream media, more interactive and rather informal. There is thus in this phase a window of openness to the public through the adoption of the new medium. In the second phase, the blog has become consolidated within the Department and in direct line with the Secretary of State's activities. The professionalization is manifested in more official content, more emphasis on the persona of the Secretary, and less engagement with the responses to the public. At the same time, the consolidation phases translates into a design format that fits more within the larger image of the American government; the patriotic colors of the flag as the unifying theme in the Obama administration is a case in point. This relates to professionalization by explaining how the technology over time became normalized within the apparatus, and that in doing so became less innovative in its content due to the decreased variety of people involved in writing for the blog and featured on the blog.

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Table 11

Professionalization phases on the official foreign policy blog

New Technology Experimentation Phase	New Technology Consolidation Phase
"Visionary" users* - Willingness to experiment with a variety of post types - Open to taking risks / challenge MSM - Engagement with the public - Oriented to personal experiences of civil servants - Basic design / presentation *In the interviews, Spokesman Sean McCormack was described as "visionary" for launching the blog when many in the Department were fearful of blogging. He also authored a few key posts.	- Wide-range users (more content from across the Department) - Focused on the Secretary VS personal experiences - Not technically focused - Risk aversion → more controlled content - Little or no engagement with the public - More sophisticated design / presentation

The professionalization of the technological medium of the blog thus translates a personification of the Department and less geared towards engaging with the people through the comment function that the technology enables. This is an evolution towards remaining minimally active with the technology while fitting it into its official apparatus. Without being able to maintain full control over the

Internet, the government thus recedes back into the established structures of information control that are prevalent across the government offline. The blog as a "protected space", advancing Gumbrecht's (2004) concept, becomes a safe tool for foreign policy communication. In light of the above, the theoretical framework is amended in Figure 23 to visually reflect my contribution:

Figure 23 – My contribution to the conceptualization of professionalization
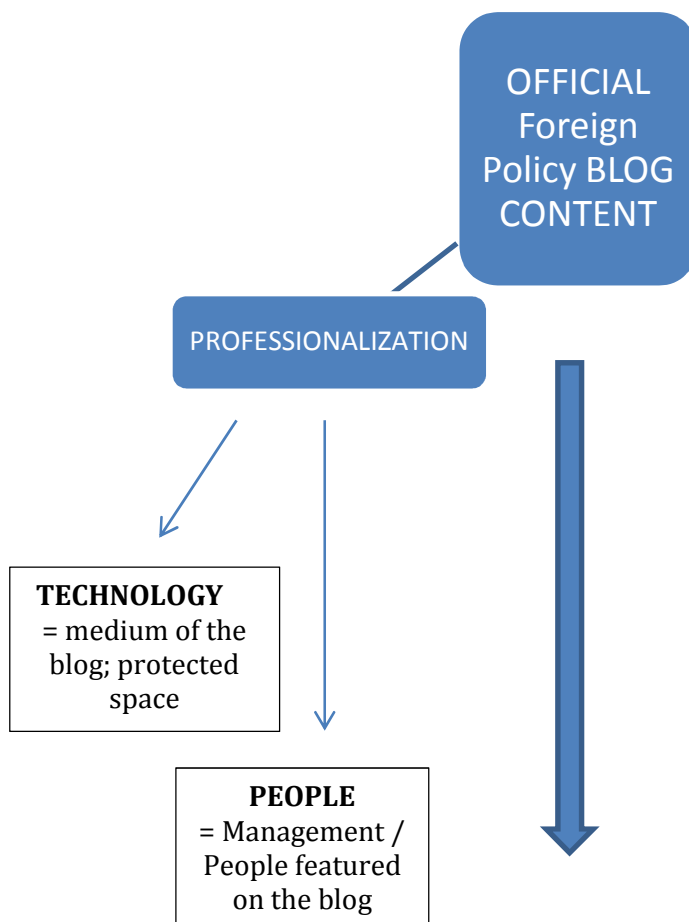
PUBLIC DIPLOMACY 2.0

Farrell & Webb's framework was useful in liking the changes within these phases to technical, resources, and thematic developments. As will be discussed

in the next section, the findings on professionalization discussed here define the underlying process of personalization in foreign policy blogging.

9.2.2 The nature and level of personalization

The particularities of the genre with regard to personalization actually helped to shape the content, and the shape which personalization took depended on the administration in power. First, personalization as a technique of professionalization shows continuity between the Bush and Obama administrations and suggests an evolution, rather than a revolution, of foreign policy communication in its adoption of blogging. The combination of content analysis and interviews helped shed light on how *Dipnote* personifies the traditionally closed and bureaucratic apparatus of the State Department. The sharing of stories as an overall theme in the content of the blog translates not only to the sharing of the experiences of Foreign Service Officers, but also to delivering information to citizens in a personalized fashion, in contrast to official traditional communication. The government blog is thus an essential tool for the construction of a personalized war narrative that provides an alternative portrayal of American involvement in the Middle East, most importantly in Iraq and Afghanistan, where the United States has troops on the ground.

Second, the personality factor that emerged from the findings on the focus on Secretary Clinton, a popular figure in the United States, over time allows us to go beyond a techno-deterministic understanding of the transformation of foreign policy communication in the digital age, specifically through the medium of blogging. In this sense, the personalization of foreign policy has come to be

associated with the personality appeal of the Secretary of State. Perhaps the blog has become more focused on the Secretary because it has become institutionalized over time. In other words, maybe the personal characteristics became important as part of a historical development, in tandem with a professionalization trend. Future research can hopefully continue to study the trends of online activity by the government, not only in the domestic context but in the context of public diplomacy, and study what future administrations bring to the blog's personalization. At a broader level, perhaps scholars need to take personalization into account when studying official communication on any new media platform, and consider the role of the most important public representative of that particular area of official communication. For example, a study on the Department of Defense would consider the Secretary of Defense and so on.

If we view personalization as a technique of professionalization, as I propose in this thesis, the government is able to emit the type of content that a government may not communicate on any other medium, and which serves to mimic personal blogs in an effort to draw support from the public. Blog content is simultaneously official and casual, unlike the formal constraints of a website. Personalization, through testimonies of personal experiences of FSOs, is able to eradicate traditionally bureaucratic and physical barriers, and also create a cultural narrative. Drawing parallels with personal blogs during wartime, Fadda-Conrey's (2010) analysis of testimony is an important one:

> …online testimonials as alternative war narratives possess the potential for connecting the writer and reader across international borders, thus promising

> a significant transformation of the fabric of cultural
> spaces by breaking through what is (mis)conceived
> as clearly defined national and cultural parameters.
> (p. 162)

Considering this point in the light of the government context, blogging technology can transform the foreign policy communication space into a cultural communication space about foreign countries that goes beyond national boundaries. The paradox that emerges here is between foreign policy as a defender of *national* interests and the blog as a communication space that is *transnational*, which serves to open up barriers to the Middle East and create a rapprochement between the American public and the American presence abroad.

9.2.3 The role of ideology

The power of storytelling emerged as a key finding that made the blog into a tool of soft power. Instead of telling the story of Iraq or Afghanistan in traditional terms, however, the reader is invited to read from FSOs who would otherwise never be heard from, as well as *Dipnote* bloggers sharing their visions, feelings, and aspirations for the Middle East. This difference is reminiscent of the United States' Information Agency's "motto shift from…'telling America's story to the world' to 'sharing values, hopes, dreams, and common respect' with the world" (Snow, 2003, p. 10). In addition to their immediate objective of portraying an alternative story of the Middle East, together these testimonials eventually become part of the historical memory of the American government that will outlast administrations.

As Brown (2011c) explains, "In practice public diplomacy seeks to bridge the gap between national priorities and foreign publics" (p. 1). This is what *Dipnote* is doing at a secondary level. *Dipnote* is a fusion of public affairs and public diplomacy, and the cultural space it enables for the State Department and the larger U.S. government helps give an image of openness by showing it explaining its activities and motives in the Middle East to the American people. In the light of the empirical findings and the discussion, one way in which the blog can be seen as a new media practice of public diplomacy is that it is a novel tool for the dissemination of American nationalist values through a new medium that enables personalization and de-ideologization. Allowing de-ideologization of the content and resistance to hegemony through the comments, as discussed below, are ideological processes at work. De-ideologization is in essence stating a reality that is considered to be common sense, going beyond ideology.

The rise of blogs as alternative news sources in the aftermath of the 2003 war in Iraq has spurred the American government to make an entrance into the blogosphere, partly in response to the propagation of military blogs that threatened to undermine US hegemony. It was also a challenging time for the United States in the media at home and abroad, when the war was escalating in Iraq under the Bush administration. The study here suggests that a government blog can be a way to communicate but it nevertheless remains an arm of information control. In other words, it is a means for the government to be a part of the blogosphere, without compromising any sensitive information that would contradict the official message as a whole. What blogging did was

transform a large, hierarchical and bureaucratic apparatus such as the State Department into small, unranked, and personified apparatus, where the personalized narrative replaced traditional bureaucratic-speak.

Throughout President Obama's term in office, Secretary Clinton travelled around the world promoting Internet Freedom (Clinton, 2010) as part of the larger umbrella of '21st Century Statecraft.' Part of American public diplomacy was voicing the rights of dissident bloggers from government repression around the world. While the United States is preaching Internet freedom to the world, this study of *Dipnote* has teased out the basic tensions between providing information and censorship, as the United States itself is recognizing the potential value but also danger of blogging. Indeed, there were many contradictions in this project that may not be altogether surprising, but these contradictions and tensions raise our awareness of the different dynamics at play offline that affect online official communication. These account for the social shaping of *Dipnote* and include the balance of power between transparency and secrecy, the tension between the military apparatus and the State Department, especially in a time of war, and between the State Department's controlled messages and the free-flowing marketplace of ideas in the blogosphere.

Popular culture, an important part of soft power as understood by Nye and others, is absent from the blog content, which instead focuses on cultural issues in the Middle East, from reconstruction in war zones to ways of life in the region as seen in the eyes of FSOs. The construction of the 'self' and the 'other' is an

important legitimation of ideology, because even without direct reference to dogma, the story told from the point of view of the State Department is designed to compete in the marketplace of ideas about U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. Indeed, "politics in an information age is not only about whose military wins but whose story wins" (Nye, 2011a). Seeing Public Affairs' main role as a propagator of the line of the State Department in the first place raises the argument over whether this is propaganda, which is not central to this particular study, as was mentioned at the beginning. What is more pertinent is how a new medium of blogging enables the publication of new forms of content and thereby the production of soft power in the digital era. In summary, the utility of the concept of soft power has helped include blogging communication in a discussion of public diplomacy, but as Brown (2011b) suggests, in the light of looking ahead to future research, "[r]ather than maintaining the separation between them [hard power and soft power] we would be better off merging the two to take account of the overlap between them" (p. 1). This thesis has thus also made an effort to be aware of, and acknowledge the limitations of, this concept.

The famous American naval geo-strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan once said something that could elucidate the case of hard power and soft power at play on a blog: "Force is never more operative than when it is known to exist but is not brandished" (Mahan, 1912), or to paraphrase Nieburg (1962), the threat of violence is more powerful than violence itself. The military presence and the state of war in the Middle East already underlines a strong use of hard power that is absent from the blog, but one that the reader is assumed to be aware of.

This suggests that the very fact that it is not put to the forefront of the blog is an effective strategy of legitimation of the American government on this platform.

In the context of public diplomacy, the blog becomes an official tool of soft power among other communication channels because it helps to overcome physical and cultural barriers inherent in foreign policy, as well as connect the public and private realms of diplomacy. Most of all, the personal testimonies of FSOs invited public sympathy for the war, a valuable resource for the government. The following definition of "testimony" opens up this discussion to the interpretation of a larger meaning:

> Testimony challenges the boundaries between intimacy and publicity, secrecy and disclosure, but as a performative utterance it depends ultimately on an audience, an audience positioned at various historical and psychological removes of estrangement, resistance, identification, or receptivity to the events being recounted – as well as to their particular mode of transmission (Brodzki, 2001, n.p.)

The target audience of *Dipnote* is the American public, who were far removed from the real events on the ground. At the same time, the international audience to which public diplomacy is most strategically bound also receives *Dipnote* messages. As was seen in the empirical chapters, the audience, both domestic and foreign, challenges these messages and questions the credibility of the United States government outright.

Credibility, which was discussed earlier in the light of allowing critical comments to give an image of openness, is a key component of soft power that is increasingly important for the face of government online. As Nye (2002)

notes, "Governments compete for credibility not only with other governments but with a broad range of alternatives including news media, corporations, NGOs, intergovernmental organizations, and networks of scientific communities" (p 69). The findings of this research project suggest that foreign policy as such is largely absent from the content, but that the personalization of the narratives helps the United States to appear in a more human, but also more modest light. During the Bush administration, when the Bush doctrine on the Middle East was part of the traditional communication apparatus, the blog thus counter-balanced the image of the government with a more attractive representation of the State Department and foreign policy mechanisms. This also contrasted with another blogging initiative of the Department of Defense called the Bloggers' Roundtable, where invited bloggers and online journalists engaged in conference calls with Pentagon officials about current issues. The difference between the two initiatives is that *Dipnote* was not fully aligned with the administration's discourse, contrasting with the Bloggers' Roundtable, which was aimed at getting bloggers to repeat the Bush administration's discourse in order to bypass the mainstream media (Matheson, 2008).

One of the particularities of the genre, the capacity for participation through comments, constituted a major challenge for the U.S. Government. It permits the freedom to criticize the content of the blog, and thereby express resistance to hegemony, which can possibly spread it across the web. *Dipnote* was able to encourage dialogue and generate feedback on its forum, which, from a government public relations perspective, was a success. However, the level of public engagement on *Dipnote* was low in both samples, and this study shows

that there was actually less engagement with the American public over time, leading us to explore further the gap between the ideals of the blogosphere and realities of government blogging. What the findings suggest is that the State Department really considers blogging as an end, instead of a means to engage with the American public. Evidence of one-way communication was strong and confirmed earlier empirical research on other government agencies' entry into the blogosphere.

Low participation and engagement also contradicts the ideals of participatory democracy. Indeed, the Internet's Web 2.0 Philosophy (Chadwick & Howard, 2008; Sustein, 2007) rests upon relinquishing control of information and sharing information, which has brought to the fore many tensions in the context of government 2.0.

Dipnote under the Bush administration was able to tap much more into the American spirit of the Foreign Service Officers, and resisted the official aura that focusing on the Secretary of State created under the Obama administration. Opening up sensitive topics, such as the veil in Saudi Arabia or the controversy over directed assignments, attracted commenters to the site and allowed the bloggers to engage fully with their audience. Of course, whether this is desirable or not depends completely on what the government in place actually wanted from the blog. From the interviews with the management, the blog sought to engage the public and provide an alternative story to the mainstream news media, but perhaps it deliberately moved away from controversial positions. The vulnerability that the government faces in cyberspace, however, can also be

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balanced by new ways to spread the message while socially interacting with the public.

> What really matters...for American diplomacy (and every other democratic foreign policy agency) is how it relates to the new information context. Yes, the Internet brings Uncertainty. But it also offers extraordinary opportunities to disseminate messages, to energise political activism and to listen to what people are saying directly unmediated by their governments or mainstream media. (Beckett, 2011, n.p.)

Unfortunately, there is no evidence that comments are taken into consideration by policy makers, or that the bloggers are listening to what people are saying online. This offers an assessment of government blogging that does not live up to its full potential, despite the real and present threats that the new environment brings to the control of the message.

9.3 Limitations

New media presents scholars across disciplines with new possibilities of studying politics, yet also many new methodological challenges. As in any thesis, the design and scope of this project imposed limits on the findings. The focus is on the State Department blog, because the main research focus was on foreign policy communication. However, this represents only part of the broader government blogosphere. It would have been interesting to study the blog of the Department of Defense, and the White House blog which was published when Obama came to power, in order to evaluate the three concepts across the foreign policy apparatus. The methodology could also have been refined further by including a broader analysis of political blogs as well as mainstream media

blogs, in order to study dynamics from a network analysis perspective. After all, the power of a blog rests upon its ability to be part of networks and it would be valuable to know which networks include *Dipnote* alongside other government blogs and across other agencies. Such a study would focus not only on foreign policy, but would increase its scope to any federal body with a blog.

At a methodological level, this study can inform future research on blogs in general. The combination of content analysis and interviews, complemented by a narrative analysis, worked well to contextualize the findings and to probe deeper into the underlying dynamics of both the blog posts and comments, and the organizational level of the management of a government blog. A part of my content analysis was, in hindsight, less useful than expected, as generating word counts in and of themselves did not always say anything meaningful about the blog itself.

The aesthetics of the blog are also an important dimension, and the images on *Dipnote* which accompany each blog post could themselves be the subject of a multi-modal analysis of the online messaging by the government. Although there were some instances when I included an analysis of discourse encountered, perhaps this study could have also focused solely on a critical discourse analysis of the blog posts, in order to construct how American presence in the foreign policy in the Middle East is communicated online on a government blog. Another limitation of this study that limits the scope of the conclusions is the timescale of the project. The time period enabled a comparison of the trends and patterns over time between the Bush

administration and the Obama administration, including the total number of posts, but the study only lasted two years. Thus there may not have been enough coverage of the Obama administration to draw conclusions about the full extent of blog content.

It is important, in the light of the findings of this study that is limited in scope, not to overstate the importance of the official blog. Part of a social media environment, the blog is a tool used alongside other tools. A future study should thus try to reconcile how the study of blogs can take place in conjunction with other platform messages such as Twitter and Facebook over a period of time, in order to compare the similarities and differences in the strategy, framed around theory.

9.4   **Contributions & Suggestions for future research**

This study contributes an understanding of government blogging in the context of foreign policy through the case study of *Dipnote,* the State Department blog. Since blogging is now one of the political communication tools of governing, the study attempted to present a critical reflection on the medium of blogging itself. Overall, what the findings ultimately reject is the cyber-optimistic view that new media are transforming political communication. Adding to hegemony theory and the related theory of soft power, this research has shown that by concealing the consequences of hard power, the blog is an ideological tool for the sustenance of dominant policies enacted by the administration offline. The contribution to political communication theory through deepening of the context of professionalization and personalization outside of the electoral or

domestic context still leaves room for the exploration of audience reception in future studies.

After considering the results of this study, it is now possible to push ahead with more possibilities for why this blog is functioning the way it is and in what others ways we can explain official foreign policy blogging. When I first approached the blog, my main interest was with ideology, how it was expressed on the blog and what implications this had for foreign policy communication in the 21st Century. The literature later led me to concepts of cultural hegemony and soft power as ways of understanding how power can be exercised without coercion. While hegemony theory alone could not solve the riddle of why the United States would invite others to express critical stances publicly but not out rightly spinning its policies with promotional material, it did provide a framework for beginning to think about it when this project was in the initial phases. Hegemony explains how ideology is presented as common sense but in retrospect does not push far enough into reconciling the contradictions inherent to government blogging presented throughout. In international relations, it can essentially be distilled to domination, as well as moral and intellectual leadership by a sovereign state (Clark, 2011). In this sense, these old elements of hegemony can be reconciled with the contribution of my study that focuses on liberation of women and process of 'othering' on the blog's Middle East content. The use of force in American foreign policy in the Middle East, namely the Iraq War, is suppressed from the blog perhaps as a way to regain a Gramscian type of soft power which has been lost throughout the War on Terror by overwhelmingly resorting to hard power. In many ways the government was

able to enter the digital stage by reconciling the transparency requirements and call for engagement but at the same time maintaining the control. It can enlighten the interpretation of the blog as an *instrument* but cannot explain the *process* at play without also putting it together with professionalization and personalization as I do below.

In order to understand the constantly changing and evolving ideological messages and strategic communication, the notion of strategy has to be incorporated into the theoretical framework with particular focus on what informs the strategy. In other words, how the blog adds value to the government within the larger social media landscape or media system. A systematic analysis of how different channels operate simultaneously can be mapped out in the future, perhaps focusing on one crisis or key foreign policy event.

Professionalization, as I suggested earlier, needs to be developed further in order to be more precise about what it refers to especially in light of this strategic element of blogging and communication. Its centrality in this study was another useful starting point for explaining changes in blog content and management but it was limited in capturing the actual processes at play. Two phases in government blogging adoption from my study can be re-adapted to other new media and those are: *new technology experimentation phase*, followed by a *new technology consolidation phase* discussed earlier. The old elements of professionalization focus on experts, specialized knowledge, interactivity, and decentralization. In this project professionalization was understood as both a

technological and as a social process. As a social process, professionalization was manifested through the personification of the State Department; the content was personified through Foreign Service Officers serving their country and over time evolved into the embodiment of the State Department through the Secretary of State (a in Figure 24). This allows us to consider personalization in political communication as not only candidate-centred electoral campaigning but in digital foreign policy communication as a technique of professionalization. The technological or technical aspect of professionalization is also manifested in the more professional look and feel of the blog over time, but also in the blog genre that permits the dissemination of ideological messages with an orientation towards persona, through references to emotions, family life, and personal attributes of the bloggers (b in Figure 24) The other technical aspect of professionalization is the adoption of the technology of the blog by the State Department; the blog can be interpreted as an ideological tool of soft power that presents alternative accounts of the war zones in Middle East through intimization of content (c in Figure 24). By linking together these separate but simultaneous processes of professionalization and personalization, my study has thus studied foreign policy communication in a more holistic way than previously done.

Figure 24 – Revisiting the conceptual framework
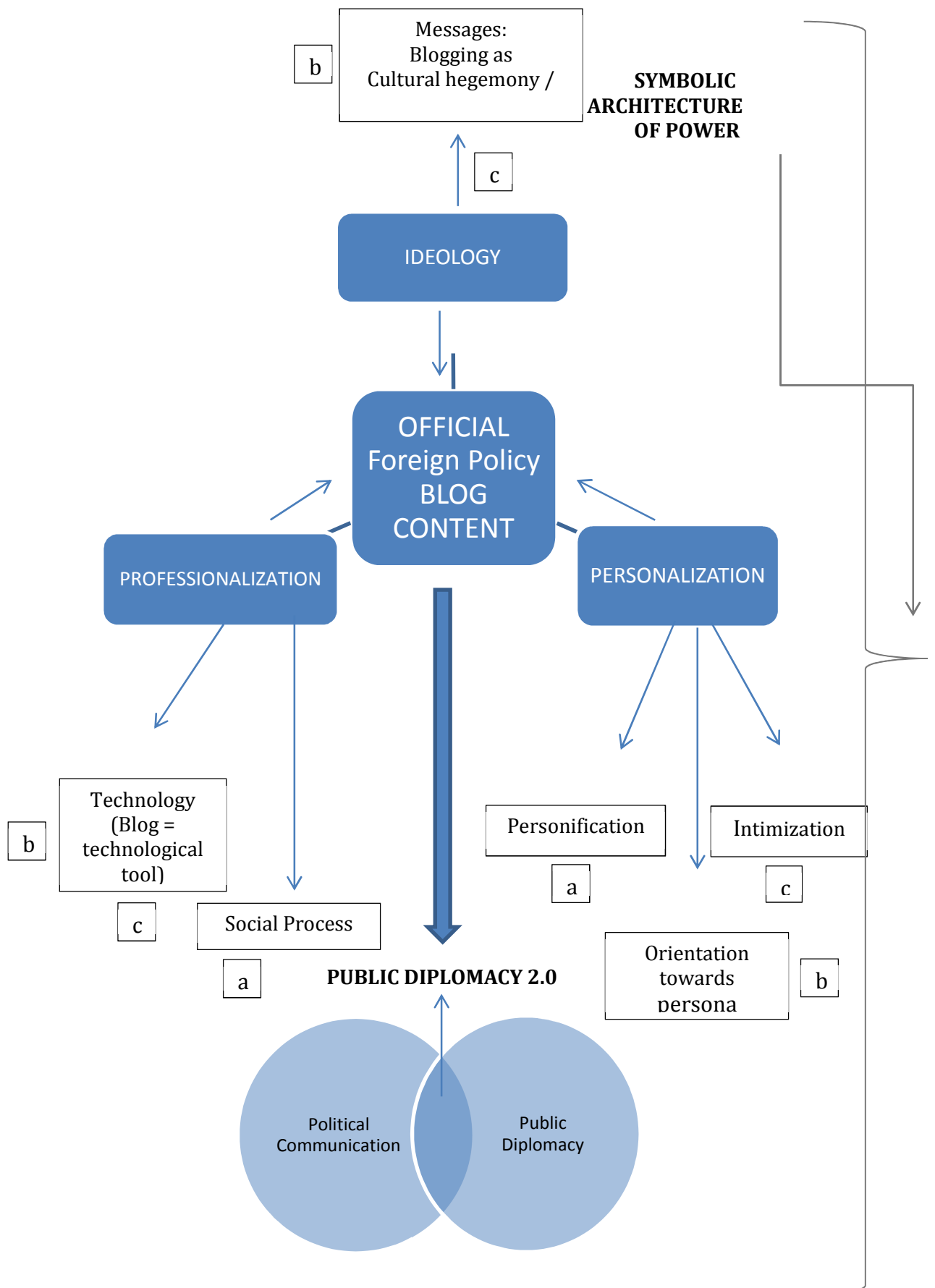
In the digital era, my study suggests that the analysis of foreign policy communication needs to look at the simultaneous developments in the technology and the content, but also in the people within the organization that adopt these tools. Ideological messages in the age of the Internet then become a function not only of the medium through which they are disseminated but also of the negotiations about the level of control and openness that the official apparatus can allow itself to embrace. Soft power is then understood as emanating not only from the political values, policies and culture of a country as Nye broke it down, which are all reflected in the content, but also from the way in which, in international relations, an online platform essentially becomes a *symbolic architecture of power* in foreign policy. In this case the blog personalizes the output to create attraction but also proximity between the public at home and the foreign policy abroad. This is not a techno-deterministic argument but instead a closer look at how the genre enables new forms of power visibility and thus is essentially an argument about hegemony. The possibilities of participation, if only in appearance, that the blog permits further adds a new credibility to the legitimacy of the foreign policy on the ground. By simply being present, without necessarily engaging actively with the public, the State Department invites participation, which it controls the boundaries of and which allows it to be part of the digital landscape. This finding thus theoretically necessitates a combination of conceptualizations of professionalization, personalization and hegemonic practices.

This study adds a new level of understanding of online soft power where the United States foreign policy mediated through blogging is personalized to create

attraction and give a human face to the State Department. The proximity enabled by the personalisation as well as the cultural space in the content of blog also changes our conception of internet-driven professionalization by making us more aware of how it goes beyond consultants or just modernization through time. The knowledge that the civil servants gain over time with these new media becomes more specialized but the professionalization also takes into account the role of personality as a signifier of digital foreign policy communication. Indeed, personalization of the content is then understood a genre of professionalization. Thus far it has been mostly studied in political communication as a candidate-centred shift in politics but this study has advanced the concept to include it as catalyst for professionalization. In light of the above, the theoretical framework was amended in Figure 24 above to visually reflect my contribution, which adds a more holistic view of digital foreign policy communication content and the larger fields of political communication and public diplomacy.

In the age of new media we can no longer study foreign policy communication separately from domestic political communication in the way it has been segregated in the literature. I would thus further argue that these separate fields are inherently intertwined as domestic and foreign audiences are becoming consumers of the same messages in the new communication environment. The salience of common themes, tools, organizational dynamics, and ideological messages make a strong case for re-invigorating the study of digital public diplomacy with concepts from political communication. This study was a starting point in this direction by re-adapting the concepts of

professionalization, personalization, and framing to the study of foreign policy communication traditionally understood in terms of soft power and cultural hegemony

Future research could follow up on the continuities and discontinuities of the blog by monitoring the development not only of *Dipnote*, but also of other government blogs. The literature on government blogging is still immature and would benefit from a broader scope, including government blogs from other countries. To date, the main focus has been on the United States and the Western world. This is no longer fitting in a world where countries in Asia for instance, such as South Korea, have far surpassed many governments in the West in their use of electronic platforms. Future studies of the government's entrance to social media would also be further advanced by assessing how the media reports on and makes use of *Dipnote* content, which is an important indicator of how the state and the press interact in a digital age, in the context of foreign policy.

The study of public diplomacy has been recognizing the increased impact of new media and communications, but it has still not systematically incorporated an analysis of online messages and spaces that exist in parallel to offline messages. This study has contributed to the study of online public diplomatic activities that work alongside offline foreign policy realities. There are many other ways to study a government blog and this study offers a starting point in its attempt to frame the discussion of foreign policy official blogging within the theoretical fields of political communication and public diplomacy. It is rather surprising

how little political science studies address the challenges and opportunities that blogs represent to the democratic process outside of the domestic election campaign context. A country's democratic health also has implications in the foreign policy context, in which blogs are arguably making headway. Indeed, the impact of new media and communications on international relations opens a discussion on the wider implication for e-democracy. Chadwick (2003) has paved the way for the convergence of e-government and e-democracy but more theoretically-informed empirical work is yet to be conducted. Another potential theoretical framework that could advance the understanding of the government's presence online is representation theory.

Since this project focuses on the case study of the State Department blog, future studies could compare *Dipnote* with other blogs in order to determine whether a new genre has really emerged. Government blogging deserves to be studied because, as Herring et al. (2005) argue, "the purposes to which weblog software will be put and the conventions that will arise around them will become so diverse in the future that it will be no longer meaningful to speak of weblogs as a single genre" (p. 25). Another dimension to be explored in the context of security online and the government's challenges is cyber warfare. This includes blogging operations set up by the military as part of psychological operations and covert propaganda tactics.

The framework of public opinion and deliberation models could well be a fitting starting point to consider blogging as a new tool of opinion management. In this context, the study of the government's online initiatives would benefit from

audience reception research, since public opinion is an important consideration in foreign policy. Finally, closely related to public diplomacy is the rising concept of nation-branding, of which government blogs could be considered to be a tool.

Finally, the digital landscape today offers exciting opportunities for research in the multi-disciplinary field of media and communications. In the 21st century, every organization has to keep up with the arsenal of new media and communication technology in order to effectively spread its message. Governments are no exception and there is much evidence from this study and others that they are increasingly adapting to the electronic age. There are many challenges that the government has to overcome in the domain of social media and the lessons of blogging are part of the larger implications of government 2.0.

What this study of government blogging has highlighted, from a wider perspective, is that blogs are not inherently liberating or democratizing, and that in particular, the relationship between blogging and foreign policy is filled with many contradictions and tensions.

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Appendix A
US Department of State Organization Chart

United States
Department of State

Secretary of State
(S)

United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Administrator

United States Permanent Representative to the United Nations (USUN)

Counselor and Chief of Staff (S/COS)

Deputy Secretary of State D(L)

Deputy Secretary of State D(S)

Executive Secretariat (S/ES) Executive Secretary

Under Secretary for Political Affairs (P)
- African Affairs (AF) Assistant Secretary
- South and Central Asian Affairs (SCA) Assistant Secretary
- European and Eurasian Affairs (EUR) Assistant Secretary
- Western Hemisphere Affairs (WHA) Assistant Secretary
- East Asian and Pacific Affairs (EAP) Assistant Secretary
- International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) Assistant Secretary
- Near Eastern Affairs (NEA) Assistant Secretary
- International Organizations (IO) Assistant Secretary

Under Secretary for Economic, Energy and Agricultural Affairs (E)
- Economic, Energy & Business Affairs (EEB) Assistant Secretary

Under Secretary for Arms Control and International Security Affairs (T)
- International Security and Nonproliferation (ISN) Assistant Secretary
- Political-Military Affairs (PM) Assistant Secretary
- Verification, Compliance and Implementation (VCI) Assistant Secretary

Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs (R)
- Education and Cultural Affairs (ECA) Assistant Secretary
- International Information Programs (IIP) Coordinator
- Public Affairs (PA) Assistant Secretary

Under Secretary for Management (M)
- Administration (A) Assistant Secretary
- Consular Affairs (CA) Assistant Secretary
- Diplomatic Security and Foreign Missions (DS) Assistant Secretary
- Foreign Service Institute (FSI) Director
- Human Resources (HR) Director General of the Foreign Service and Director of Human Resources
- Information Resource Management (IRM) Chief Information Officer
- Medical Services (M/MED) Director
- Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO) Director
- Resource Management (RM) Chief Financial Officer

Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs (G)
- Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL) Assistant Secretary
- Oceans and Int'l Environmental and Scientific Affairs (OES) Assistant Secretary
- Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) Assistant Secretary
- Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (G/TIP) Ambassador at Large

- Intelligence and Research (INR) Assistant Secretary
- Legislative Affairs (H) Assistant Secretary
- Office of the Chief of Protocol (S/CPR) Ambassador
- Office of Civil Rights (S/OCR) Director
- Office for Counterterrorism (S/CT) Coordinator and Ambassador at Large
- Office of U.S. Foreign Assistance (F) Director
- Office of Global AIDS Coordinator (S/GAC) Ambassador at Large
- Office of Global Womens Issues (S/GWI) Ambassador at Large
- Office of Inspector General (OIG) Inspector General
- Office of International Energy Coordinator (S/IEC) Coordinator
- Office of Legal Adviser (L) Legal Adviser
- Office of Policy Planning (S/P) Director
- Office of Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS) Coordinator
- Office of War Crimes Issues (S/WCI) Ambassador at Large

Approved by S/ES May 2009

Source: State Department http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/rls/dos/99494.ht

Appendix B

Content analysis coding schedule
DIPNOTE

ARTICLE I.D. ___

Sample:

- Middle East Posts
  1) Bush administration – September 2007 ~ January 19, 2009
  2) Obama administration – January 20, 2009 ~ March 22, 2010

1) **TIME –** Insert time in day-month-year (in numbers)

2) **TITLE –** Type in the Title of the article

3) **AUTHOR**

1 = Chief of Staff / Executive Secretary
2 = Deputy Secretary of State
3 = Under-Secretary
4 = Assistant Secretary
5 = Chief of Mission [appointed by the President, with the advice and
    consent of the Senate] [includes Deputy Spokeswoman at the United States
    Mission to the United Nations in New York?]
6 = Ambassadors at large [appointed by the President, with the advice and consent of
    the Senate]
7 = Senior Foreign Service (SFS) [senior leaders and experts for the management of
    the Foreign Service and the performance of its functions. They are appointed by
    the President, with the advice and consent of the Senate. SFS may come from the
    FSO or Specialist ranks and are the equivalent to flag or general officers in
    the
    military. (includes Ambassador, deputy chief of mission, head of section in a
    large
    embassy, or as consul general in a large consulate general)
8= Mid-level Foreign Service Officer [i.e Director of Regional Media Hub]
9= Foreign Service / Foreign Affairs Officer [generalists have general responsibility
    for carrying out the functions of the Foreign Service]
10= Foreign Service Specialists [provide special skills and services e.g. Embassy of
    Baghdad observer for Iraq election] [Appointed by the Secretary of State]
11= New Media Director
12= *Dipnote* Blogger(s) or Editor-in-Chief

13 = Other [Media Lab; program manager; officer in the Department not overseas]

4) **PERSONALPAGE –** Is there a link on the page to a personal page? 1= Yes 2 = No

5) **SNIPES –** Is the author Aaron Snipes? 1 = Yes 2= No

6) **MATEL –** Is the author John Matel? 1 = Yes 2= No

7) **POSTTYPE –** What kind of post is this?

   a. PR / Advertising content - State Department embassy event or initiative or
      conference or program? YES / NO

   b. Traditional reporting content (speech / post in response to media coverage / US Foreign Policy statement / transcript of press conference) YES / NO

   c. Position taking content (Diary report / testimony)? YES / NO

   d. Content on the Secretary of State or President's travel activities? YES / NO

   e. Information content (Issue-based investigation)? YES / NO

   f. Management (including policy about management)? YES / NO

   g. Personal experience of the situation on the ground? YES / NO

   h. Other? Insert _____

8) **EVENTRELATED [skip]**

9) **IMMEDIACY [skip]**

10) **ISSUE**

   a. Internal Issue = issue for the employees or about internal affairs inside the State Department?
   b. External Issue = issue about the Middle East / issues outside of the State Department?

   1   EXTERNAL ISSUE TYPE [Hard to soft] – Answer yes or no

   i. Military?
   ii. Security?
   iii. Political issues?
   iv. Economy?
   v. Reconstruction?
   vi. Humanitarian?
   vii. Culture?
   viii. Press / media?

11) INTERNAL OR NONISSUE – Yes or No

    a. Diplomatic trip?
    b. Overseas assignment?
    c. Explanation of role of an officer or Program?
    d. Policy?
    e. Support for Policy?
    f. Conference proceedings?
    g. Commemoration / Remembrance?
    h. Other _____

12) MAINCOUNTRYFOCUS

1= US diplomatic relations

- Saudi Arabia
- Lebanon
- Israel (special relationship)
- Lybia
- Morocco
- Egypt
- Kuwait
- Jordan

2= Special relationship = Israel

3= US diplomatic negotiations / aid

- Palestine

4= US military presence (troops)

- Iraq
- Afghanistan
- Syria (2008)

5= US military involvement (missiles, bombing, covert operations)

- Pakistan
- Yemen

6 = Severed US diplomatic relations (no embassy)

- Iran

7= Middle East Peace Process (Both Israel and Palestine)

8 = Other; Middle East discussed as a region

9= No country; US focus

15 – 49: Count number of words in each post [word count excludes paragraph at the beginning about the author in italics]

13) SAUDIARABIA [includes KSA, Saudi]

14)LEBANON [includes Lebanese]
15)LYBIA
16)MOROCCO
17)EGYPT
18)KUWAIT
19)BAHRAIN
20)JORDAN
21)ISRAEL
22)PALESTINE
23)IRAQ
24)AFGHANISTAN
25)SYRIA
26)PAKISTAN
27)YEMEN
28)IRAN

29)WAR
30)WARCONTEXT – In which context was the word 'war' used?

1= War activity/ violence in Iraq
2= War activity/ violence in Afghanistan
3= Blackwater firefight
4= Military operations not related to war (Ex: ISAF contingents)
5= Israeli-Palestinian issue
6= Other attacks or defences related with terrorist groups (Al-Qaida, Taliban, etc.)
7= Others
0= Not applicable

31)WARCONTEXT2- if the term was used in more than one context:

1= War activity/ violence in Iraq
2= War activity/ violence in Afghanistan
3= Blackwater firefight
4= Military operations not related to war (Ex: ISAF contingents)
5= Israeli-Palestinian issue
6= Other attacks or defences related with terrorist groups (Al-Qaida, Taliban, etc.)
7= Others
0= Not applicable

32)RECONSTRUCTION / REBUILDING

33)RECTXNCONTEXT – in which context is the term used?

1= Provincial Reconstruction Team
2= Rebuilding Iraq

34)ECONOMY / MONEY / PRICES
35)FREEDOM / FREE / LIBERTY

36)TERRORISM / TERROR / TERRORISTS
37)TERRORISMCONTEXT – in what context is the term used?

1= Al Qaeda
2= Iraq
3= Israeli-Palestinian issue

38)DEMOCRACY / DEMOCRATIC / GOVERNANCE

39)SECURITY
40)SECCONTEXT – in what context is the term used?

1= Personnel security
2= Title of a book
3= Blackwater
4= Security in Afghanistan
5= Security officials

41)SAFETY / PEACE
42)SAFETY/ PEACE CONTEXT

43)DANGER / DANGEROUS
44)WOMEN
45)INSURGENTS / INSURGENCY
46)HUMANITARIAN
47)CHRISTIANITY
48)ISLAM / MUSLIM / ISLAMIC – includes terms such as Koran, Iftaar, prayer beads, mosques
49)JUDAISM / JEWISH – includes such terms as synagogue

LINKS [exclude links to other *Dipnote* posts]

50)LINKS# - number of links
51)LINKSTATE – Links to State Department
52)LINKMEDIA – Links to media source
53)LINKGOVBLOG – Link to a government blog
54)LINKPOLBLOG – Link to a political blog
55)LINKUSGOVT – Link to a US government website (NOT State Department; OTHER department)
56)LINKNGO – Link to NGO website
57)LINKVIDEO – Link to a video

COMMENTS

58)COMMENT# - total number of comments
59)NEGATIVE – number of negative comments
60)POSITIVE – number of negative comments
61)MIXED – number of comments that contain both positive and negative viewpoints
62)NEUTRAL – number or neutral or IRRELEVANT comments
63)RESPONSE REQUESTS – any questions in the comments that request response from the blogger? [exclude irrelevant articles]
64)COMMENT RESPONSE – responses by the blogger to the comment(s)

65) **PERSONALIZATION – Count number of I, ME, MYSELF**

66) **EMOTION – 'feel' 'feeling' 'happy' 'sad' 'proud'**

67) **FAMILY –** mention of 'family' 'son' 'daughter' 'husband' etc.

68) **EVERYDAYLIFE –** mention of everyday actions 'I woke up' etc.

Additional clarifications (post pilot)

- Word count excludes paragraph at beginning that introduce the author of a post
- Negative comments include critical comments
- Exclude links to other posts on *Dipnote*
- Personalization: if 'I' or 'my' is in a quote and NOT attributed to author of the blog post, then not included; ex: the man said: 'I am not familiar with American culture!' – 'I' here is not personalization
- RESPONSE REQUEST is a SEPARATE variable from POSITIVE / NEGATIVE / MIXED / NEUTRAL

CONSENT FORM

London School of Economics and Political Science

Department of Media and Communications

Government Blogging: An Investigation of Dipnote

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I am a student at the London School of Economics, and I am conducting
interviews for my PhD Project. My doctoral research investigates the recent
entry of the government in the blogosphere through an examination of the State
Department blog site, *Dipnote*, and the way in which the media and the political
blogosphere have interacted with the blog.

During this study, you will be asked to answer some questions as to your
experience in the management of *Dipnote.* This interview was designed to be
approximately an hour in length. However, please feel free to expand on the
topic or talk about related ideas. Also, if there are any questions you would
rather not answer or that you do not feel comfortable answering, please say so
and we will stop the interview or move on to the next question, whichever you
prefer.

All the information will be kept confidential. I will keep the data in a secure
place. Only myself and the faculty supervisor mentioned above will have access
to this information. Upon completion of this project, all data will be destroyed or
stored in a secure location.

Participant's Agreement:

I am aware that my participation in this interview is voluntary. I understand the
intent and purpose of this research. If, for any reason, at any time, I wish to stop
the interview, I may do so without having to give an explanation.

The researcher has reviewed the individual and social benefits and risks of this
project with me *[LSE Research Ethic Committee Checklist].* I am aware the data
will be used in a PhD Project that will be publicly available at the LSE Library I

have the right to review, comment on, and/or withdraw information prior to the PhD Project's submission. The data gathered in this study are confidential with respect to my personal identity unless I specify otherwise. I understand if I say anything that I believe may incriminate myself, the interviewer will immediately rewind the tape and record over the potentially incriminating information. The interviewer will then ask me if I would like to continue the interview.

If I have any questions about this study, I am free to contact the student researcher or the faculty supervisors (contact information given above).

I have been offered a copy of this consent form that I may keep for my own reference.

I have read the above form and, with the understanding that I can withdraw at any time and for whatever reason, I consent to participate in today's interview.

_____   _____
Participant's signature   Date

_____
Interviewer's signature

Appendix D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire below will be used as a guide to interviewing all the participants. However, it is anticipated that for each interviewee, some questions will be more applicable or less relevant than others. For this reason, given the different positions each interviewee occupies in the Department of State, the questionnaire will be tweaked for each interview so as to tailor to each interviewee.

1. **What does your work as a [INSERT POSITION] in *Dipnote* involve?**

    ▪ [If not a blogger] Do you blog on *Dipnote*? How often?

2. **What is does your daily media diet consist of?**

3. **How were you introduced to the world of blogs and blogging?**

4. The **political blog** first made its presence after the Iraq War in 2003…Yet it was until 2007 that *Dipnote* was launched to mark the entry of the State Department in the blogosphere.

    ▪ **When was the *idea* of an official blog first considered by the State Department?**
    ▪ **What are the factors that determined the State Department's *decision* to blog?**
    ▪ **What were different people thinking *at that time* about the potential of government blogging? Was everyone in agreement?**

5. **What do you think differentiates *Dipnote* from other foreign policy blogs?**

    ▪ Are you aware of other government blogs / other departments?

6. **What contributions did you and do you see *Dipnote* making to the political blogosphere?**

7. **Can you describe what factor(s) helped to make *Dipnote* a success?**

8. **What challenges have you faced a year after the blog site was launched?**

9. **Has the mainstream media been responsive to *Dipnote*'s activities? In what way(s)?**

    ▪ "Today's Top Issues": On what criteria are news story links chosen? i.e. the sources chosen for the posts relating to a current foreign policy event
    ▪ Who decides what goes on the Home page of the blog?

10. **Do you track the media coverage of *Dipnote*? If so, how? Do you meet to regularly discuss the media's responses at the national and domestic level?**

11. **What kind of dialogue do you hope to achieve with the media through** *Dipnote*?

12. **Has the blogosphere been responsive to** *Dipnote*'s **activities? In what** **way(s)?**

   - Are you able to keep up with the fast-paced environment on the web? I.e. updating the blog as important foreign policy events occur.

13. **What has changed since the new administration is in power and what is** **the future of** *Dipnote* **under President Obama?**

14. **Are there any questions you thought I should have asked but didn't?**

ONLY to *Dipnote* Bloggers

   - **Are you developing the same sort of content as when you first** **started blogging on** *Dipnote*?
   - **If there was a change in content on** *Dipnote* **overtime, what was the** **progression of change, and what were the reasons for the** **progression?**

Possible Question on "Comments" posted:

   - **Can you please describe the content that generates the most** **comments and traffic on your blog? Why do you think these posts** **were so successful in generating such audience interest?**
   - **On what criteria are comments permitted to be posted on** *Dipnote*?

SAMPLE *DIPNOTE* BLOG POST

A Letter From Iraq to My Overwrought Colleagues
Posted by John Matel on Nov 06, 2007 - 06:59 PM

In his first posting, John writes an open letter to his Foreign Service Officer colleagues about the controversial issue of directed assignments in Iraq. The issue raises an interesting question, "Should diplomats and other non-military personnel be forced to work in an active war zone"?

John Matel is a career Foreign Service Officer (FSO) who is currently serving as the team leader of the Provincial Reconstruction Team embedded in Al Asad, Al Anbar Province.

I just finished reading a news article discussing some of my FSO colleagues' vehement and emotional response to the idea that a few of us might have directed assignments in Iraq . To my vexed and overwrought colleagues, I say take a deep breath and calm down. I have been here for a while now, and you may have been misinformed about life at a PRT.

I personally dislike the whole idea of forced assignments, but we do have to do our jobs. We signed up to be worldwide available. All of us volunteered for this kind of work and we have enjoyed a pretty sweet lifestyle most of our careers.

I will not repeat what the Marines say when I bring up this subject. I tell them that most FSOs are not wimps and weenies. I will not share this article with them and I hope they do not see it. How could I explain this wailing and gnashing of teeth? I just tried to explain it to one of my PRT members, a reserve LtCol called up to serve in Iraq . She asked me if all FSOs would get the R&R, extra pay etc. and if it was our job to do things like this. When I answered in the affirmative, she just rolled her eyes.

Calling Iraq a death sentence is just way over the top. I volunteered to come here aware of the risks but confident that I will come safely home, as do the vast majority of soldiers and Marines, who have a lot riskier jobs than we FSOs do.

I wrote a post a couple days ago where I said that perhaps everyone's talents are not best employed in Iraq . That is still true. But I find the sentiments expressed by some at the town hall meeting deeply offensive. What are they implying about me and my choice? And what do they say to our colleagues in the military, who left friends and family to come here and do their jobs? As diplomats, part of our work is to foster peace and understanding. We cannot always be assured that we will serve only in places where peace and understanding are already safely established.

If these guys at the town hall meeting do not want to come to Iraq , that is okay with. I would not want that sort out here with me anyway. We have enough trouble w/o having to baby sit. BUT they are not worldwide available and they might consider the type of job that does not require worldwide availability.

We all know that few FSOs will REALLY be forced to come to Iraq anyway. Our system really does not work like that. This sound and fury at Foggy Bottom truly signifies nothing. Get over it! I do not think many Americans feel sorry for us and it is embarrassing for people with our privileges to paint ourselves as victims.

Appendix F

INTER-CODER RELIABILITY

Inter-coder reliability by variable (results of the pilot)

Variable	ICR
Post Type	.828
Issue of focus	.899
Links	.962
Personalization	.976
Emotion	.812
Family	.824
Everyday life	.871