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21st Century Statecraft: Bringing Public Diplomacy into the Future (A Strategic
Public Diplomacy Plan for US Embassy Bogota)

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Abstract

Public diplomacy serves an extremely important purpose for US diplomatic missions abroad. However, they face several 21st century challenges that change so frequently, they sometimes are not utilized. The United States' relationship with Colombia has great strategic importance, and although traditional diplomatic efforts are increasingly more effective, public diplomacy strategies can always be bettered. By assessing the current public diplomatic strategy of the US toward Colombia as well as best practices from other posts, this study created a new public diplomacy strategy for Colombia. The strategy focuses on two aspects that are important to the future of public diplomacy: youth and social media. Increasing the use of social media will help increase outreach to youth. The importance of youth is often understated in public diplomacy, but creating bonds and cultural ties with younger generations helps smooth the future diplomatic relationship between nations. This is especially true of young students who show great potential to lead their countries in the future. By focusing this new strategic plan on youth exchanges and creating interest through social media and exchanges, public diplomacy goals can be easily achieved and stronger diplomatic ties can be created.

Introduction

The turn of century brought a myriad of changes to the United States of America. One year into the 21st century, the U.S.'s world shook with the impact of two planes on two towers. The housing bubble burst. The stock market plummeted and reached levels only outdone by those of the Great Depression. And the way Americans and the world communicate altered in ways whose effects will be difficult to ascertain. Communication technology, powered by the Internet, changed with the advent of social networking sites. Friendster, then MySpace, then the mighty Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Tumblr, Reddit, and many other sites allow people to connect in ways that previously only existed in the collective imagination of techies around the world. And because of these innovations, not only did American behavior change; but U.S. government policy in turn had to reshape itself to incorporate and account for new technology. When President Barack Obama appointed Hillary Rodham-Clinton as Secretary of State, she took the 21st century and all its changes and challenges to heart. Clinton's driving ideal is aptly named the "21st century statecraft agenda, which aims to harness communications technology and information networks to address the U.S.'s grand challenges on the international stage: aiding democratic movements, providing disaster relief and alleviating poverty."¹ A main focus of 21st century statecraft is communication, which the State Department can conduct most easily through its different aspects of public diplomacy.

Defining public diplomacy can be difficult because of the subjective nature of its programs. However, the Commission on Public Diplomacy "defines public diplomacy as the

¹ S. A. M. Gustin, "Digital Diplomacy," *Time* 178, no. 10 (2011).

process of 'informing, engaging and influencing foreign publics so they may, in turn, encourage their governments to support key U.S. policies.' Public diplomacy includes government-sponsored international broadcasting; cultural, educational, and informational programs, and citizen exchanges."² When considering a public diplomacy strategy, a myriad of aspects must be taken into account. First and foremost a Public Affairs Office (PAO) or Public Diplomacy Desk Officer (PD Desk Officer) must ask his- or her-self two questions: 1) Who is my audience?; and 2) What am I trying to say and achieve? After the two questions have been answered, the PAO may implement the strategy and then assess its results. However, according to Ambassador Anthony Quainton "The first step toward a more effective public diplomacy would be to ask ourselves what freedom means to the people whom we are trying to influence."³ Meaning that not only should a PAO be concerned with their audience and the message but the way that their audiences' perceptions will color the communication. Simply asking and responding to the two first questions proposed will not necessarily lead to a successful public diplomacy campaign. Communication between cultures is difficult even in the best of circumstances where language and customs are similar. But when language and the innate behavior of a culture differ slightly, communication becomes much more difficult. Devising a public diplomacy strategy that communicates across cultures requires understanding of what makes those cultures different and how those difference will change the meaning of the message.

The Cross-Cultural Communication Divide

² "US Public Diplomacy - A Theoretical Treatise," in *International Communication Association*, 3.

³ Anthony C.E. Quainton, "Refocusing America's Message," in *America's Dialogue With the World*, ed. William P. Kiehl (Washington, DC: Public Diplomacy Council, 2006).

For the U.S. Embassy in Colombia, these cross-cultural communication concepts remain important even in places like Saudi Arabia or Zimbabwe where little similarity between the cultures exists. However, difficulties in communication continue to plague any communication between the two nations. Understanding those cross-cultural differences and using them to the advantage of the embassy can greatly strengthen communications and help create greater understanding. Several different facets of Latin American culture differ from North American culture. These cultural differences make communication and cooperation difficult, but recognition of them can greatly ease relations.

First, and most crucial to any type of communication, is the concept of context. Cultures can be high context or low context. And whichever they are, defines certain aspects of what they actually say during communication.⁴ According to Edward Hall, as quoted in *Communicating Globally*, “Latin American countries tend to be ‘high-context,’ meaning that cultural messages are implicit and one needs to read between the lines when interpreting another person’s meaning.”⁵ Americans tend to be low-context, which means they say what they mean. Communicating through these two very different styles makes transferring messages quite difficult. Latin Americans will feel that Americans are rude, with their blunt language and way of engagement. While Americans will only understand the surface meaning of what the Latin American is saying.

Another difficulty that North Americans will face when communicating with Latin Americans is their high level of uncertainty avoidance. Uncertainty avoidance means that people

⁴ Edward T Hall, *Beyond Culture* (New York: Anchor Books, 1989).

⁵ Wallace V. Schmidt et al., *Communicating Globally: Intercultural Communication and International Business* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2007). 182.

with high levels of avoidance “feel uncomfortable if they are given vague or incomplete information and will most likely seek additional data from another person.”⁶ Although this may not seem a problem at first, it becomes problematic when Latin Americans start asking for more information and may not use the appropriate channels to find it. High uncertainty avoidance can sometimes create a higher incidence of misinformation when dealing with organizations such as embassies, that don’t give priority to every issue or have clear answers for every question. Because of this, Embassies must keep in mind the difference in that uncertainty comfort threshold, and devise communication plans that provide the uncertain with as much information as possible, clearing everything prior to publication in order to avoid any controversial questions.

Finally, the most difficult of all differences is time. Americans have a linear sense of time. This monochronicity, per Hall,⁷ makes Americans stick to timelines and deadlines. Latin Americans see time differently, or polychronically.⁸ They find flexibility as more important, they are spontaneous and schedules are guidelines rather than firm rules.⁹ When attempting to plan events or create programs, the North American will find it difficult to pin down their Latin American counterpart. Although in communication this difference in time isn’t as obvious, it is particularly challenging for North Americans working with Latin Americans. In order to avoid situations when this will crop up, embassy staff should anticipate their Latin American friends’ tardiness, and use the guidelines schedule as a way to suggest a time that’s earlier than they actually need.

⁶ Ibid., 183.

⁷ Hall, *Beyond Culture*.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Schmidt et al., *Communicating Globally: Intercultural Communication and International Business*: 182.

When these communication barriers are placed in the frame of a communication model, it becomes apparent how difficult it can truly be to successfully communicate. “Elementary communication theory lays out this model: The sender not only must use a channel accessible to the intended receiver (think media and language) but also must conform to the receiver’s frame of reference.”¹⁰ Communication from a low-context culture to a high-context culture can be more difficult than the other way around, because creating context for language involves a lot more information than simplifying a complex message. However, Americans conducting public diplomacy in Colombia must remember this high-context and use it when drafting their messages and communications (adapting to the receiver’s frame of reference is what makes the model successful). Messages should be drafted with the Colombian mindset as a guide for what will make sense and what will lack depth necessary for Colombians to understand. Through a constant vigilance of cross-cultural differences, the Embassy can greatly further its goal to foster the relationship between the two nations.

The Colombia – US Relationship

Colombia’s relationship with the U.S. has a long history. In 1903, a U.S. backed and aided coup took place in Panama, which allowed the area to declare independence from Colombia.¹¹ The Panama Canal switched from Colombian control to American control, and became the crown jewel of Teddy Roosevelt’s presidential initiatives. Because of the U.S.’s role in the Panama separation, the Colombia-U.S. relationship remained shaky for much of the 20th

¹⁰ Joe B. Johnson, "The Technology Dimension," in *America's Dialogue With the World*, ed. William P. Kiehl (Washington, DC: Public Diplomacy Council, 2006), 107.

¹¹ Noel Maurer and Carlos Yu, "What T. R. Took: The Economic Impact of the Panama Canal, 1903–1937," *The Journal of Economic History* 68, no. 03 (2008).

century. 90 years later, the Colombia-U.S. relationship has changed dramatically. Since the Andean Initiative of 1989, which established Colombia and its narcotic trade as of national interest to the U.S.,¹² the relationship altered drastically. The main U.S. objectives in Colombia have been “strengthening the state in its capacity to confront armed violence”¹³ and the illegal drug trade. The ties between the two countries are strong. The early 1990s created the opportunity for a strong intelligence alliance, with the FBI and Colombia’s anti-narcotics unit working closely to tame the warring Medellin and Cali cartels.¹⁴ After successfully taking out the leader of the Medellin cartel, Pablo Escobar, the U.S. government found more issues with Colombian policy than positive attributes. After an official’s suggestion to legalize drugs rather than combat them and thereby take advantage of the profit, and several human rights abuses,¹⁵ the U.S. began to adopt measures that would allow more U.S. oversight of funds, and would hold the Colombian government more accountable for its actions.¹⁶ After this initiative to control U.S. monies in Colombia, the relationship remained unstable. It wasn’t until the Presidencies of George W. Bush and Alvaro Uribe that the relationship began to gain traction. Previous to their elections, Plan Colombia, enacted by President Bill Clinton, greatly helped smooth the wrinkles in the relationship.¹⁷ The Plan, ostensibly authored by then President of Colombia Andres Pastrana and his administration, but actually emanating from the minds of U.S. officials (it was

¹² Cynthia J. Arnson and Arlene B. Tickner, "Colombia and the United States: Strategic Partners or Uncertain Allies?," in *Contemporary U.S.-Latin American Relations: Cooperation or Conflict in the 21st Century?*, ed. Jorge I. Domínguez and Fernández de Castro Rafael (Taylor & Francis, 2010), 167.

¹³ Ibid., 165.

¹⁴ Ibid., 167.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 168.

¹⁷ Ibid., 172.

written mostly in English not Spanish),¹⁸ would help aid the peace process by strengthening the military through training and equipment, while creating a structure for alternative development.¹⁹ The Plan was the most successful endeavor of its kind in the past three decades and it allowed for the tension between the two nations to ease. By President Uribe's election, the ties were closer than ever. And the personal friendship of Uribe and Bush made it that much easier.²⁰ The Uribe presidency saw the most progress in the War on Drugs and the War on Terrorism in Colombia since the early 90s. Operation Jaque and the bombings on the Ecuador border, all made successful due to U.S. training and intelligence, marked a turn in the war on the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the paramilitaries.²¹ The election of President Obama and President Santos altered the close relationship between the two nations however. President Obama's opinion of Uribe stopped short of friendship, and Santos was Uribe's right hand man.²² The advent of Mexico's narco-trafficking spike and the violence that accompanied it allowed Colombia a unique place as advisor, having gone through a similar crisis during the early 90s.²³ But these new found ties with Mexico were not sufficient to replace ties with the U.S. For Colombia, a relationship with the U.S. that is mutually beneficial (if not one-sided) plays a crucial role in governmental decisions. Today, Colombia's place as a strategic investment and national interest for the U.S. remain in flux. But relations are currently on a positive and constructive path that will help eliminate security threats in Colombia and ease the fears that emanate from Washington. The future of the relationship remains unsteady and rests on the

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 185.

²¹ Ibid., 178.

²² Ibid., 185.

²³ Ibid., 187.

issues surrounding the Free Trade Agreement and the eventual success in the war against the FARC and paramilitary groups that currently plague Colombia's national security. Mutual understand by future leaders will be the most invaluable resource for both nations to continue working together in the multitude of programs and initiatives that are of great importance to both nations.

Exchanges

The International Leadership Visitor Program (IVLP) brings over 5,000 community leaders to the U.S. to foster relationships with the potential leaders of the world. According to the IVLP website, "Since its inception in 1940, thousands of distinguished individuals have participated in the International Visitor Leadership Program, including 330 current and former Chiefs of State and Heads of Government, thousands of cabinet-level ministers, and many other distinguished leaders from the public and private sectors."²⁴ Notable alumni include President Sarkozy of France and President Felipe de Jesus Calderon Hinojosa of Mexico. Undoubtedly one of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs' most effective endeavors, the program's effectiveness doesn't translate to an expansion of the program or the creation of new ones. Exchanges remain a central, yet unappreciated and unsupported facet of public diplomacy. According to Edward Comor and Hamilton Bean, "Exchange programs, embassy open houses, Voice of America phone-in shows and similar methods have been used to promote intercultural understanding. However, since the U.S. Information Agency was disassembled during the latter years of the Clinton administration, these particular capabilities have been relatively

²⁴ Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, "International Visitor Leadership Program," US Department of State.

neglected.”²⁵ Because of that neglect, potential exchanges and connections were lost and left by the wayside. Cultural diplomacy is “the exchange of ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples to foster mutual understanding.”²⁶ Cultural diplomacy is one of the most crucial aspects of public diplomacy because it has the strongest potential for future success through bonds and understanding.

Because of the success of past international leadership programs, U.S. Embassy Bogota, and ECA, should place a greater budgetary and programming focus on cultural diplomacy. Exchanges help create the understanding that marked President Uribe’s time as leader, where the relationship with the U.S. made serious headway, fruitful and productive. President Uribe was able to successfully navigate diplomatic relations with the U.S. because of the experiences he had while participating in the IVLP program. Colombia over the years has had the most ‘illustrious alumni’ of any South American nation, so this tradition of excellence should continue throughout the 21st century. Increasing the programs that Colombian IVLPs can participate in will help expand the reach of the program and pass on knowledge. Programs focusing on the issues that most concern Colombia like narco-trafficking, military operations, and economic development, should be the main focus. However, programs that will spur entrepreneurship and innovation should be a priority as well. Programs like MITs Sloan Executive Education program, which provides certificates for those who study short courses on different topics, would greatly

²⁵ Edward Comor and Hamilton Bean, "America's 'engagement' delusion: Critiquing a public diplomacy consensus," *International Communication Gazette* 74, no. 3 (2012).

²⁶ Cynthia P. Schneider, "The Unrealized Potential of Cultural Diplomacy: "Best Practices" and What Could Be, If Only," *Journal of Arts Management, Law & Society* 39, no. 4 (2009).

benefit Colombian business men and women.²⁷ The programs are two days long, and provide the participants with expert advice on how to maximize their business and create profit thereby providing jobs and increasing revenues. Although these are part of the IVLP program already, the meetings they attend focus mainly on policy issues, and how to use policy to address problematic sectors of the visitors' home country. A shift in focus to more business oriented areas could go far in creating the ideal conditions for countries like Colombia, that suffer from human rights violations and similar problems, to be active players in the world community and to increase the quality of life for their people.

High school exchanges, a rarer form of official State Department programs, also play a critical role in strengthening ties with another nation. Currently, the most popular high school aged program is the Benjamin Franklin Summer Fellowship.²⁸ Each year, State conducts high school exchanges from a variety of countries, but of the 15 programs, Colombian youth are only eligible for one.²⁹ ECA funded exchange programs are hard to come by because of their high average cost and the general lack of funds during economic austerity. However, public-private partnerships make these exchanges possible all around the world with other embassies. In truth, the State Department focuses more and more on public-private partnerships than it has in the past because budgetary problems have been rampant in the past few years. Embassy Bogota should work with local businesses, and businesses in America who have interests in Colombia, to create exchange programs that benefit junior and senior high school aged students who show promise as future leaders or entrepreneurs. The programs should focus on volunteerism and cultural

²⁷ MIT Sloan School of Management, "MIT Sloan Executive Education," Massachusetts Technical Institute.

²⁸ Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, "Youth Programs Division," US Department of State.

²⁹ Ibid.

immersion as well as innovation, so that when those students become leaders in their community, their ideas and decisions will be shaped by their U.S. abroad experience.

The Elites

Elite audiences require a certain type of programming and conversation that is unique to their levels of power, status and education. However, much like exchanges, the types of programs that most appeal to the elites of a country, are programs that are considered less than worthy of funding.³⁰ The elite look for programming that is stimulating to their intellect and allows them to expand upon their cultural knowledge. Speaker series appeal most to them, as well as events considered high culture like art exhibits and symphonic concerts. Arts diplomacy remains neglected, much to the regret of foreign audiences that crave these types of programs. According to John Brown, “The neglect of arts diplomacy by the U.S. government reflects certain long-term traits of the American national character: it is puritanical, democratic, void of a national culture, yet it influences the world through its mass entertainment.”³¹ Art diplomacy can play a huge role in influencing the elites. The well-read and interested would like to expand their knowledge of other cultures, and arts diplomacy perfectly allows an embassy to tap into this interest.

When considering the importance of these programs, it’s necessary to note the reason why they are not a priority, “Success of American transnational cultural trade companies in the global markets and their concentration on maximizing profits decrease the importance of developing arts diplomacy in the country, which requires a significant investment and long-term

³⁰ John Brown, "Arts Diplomacy: The Neglected Aspect of Cultural Diplomacy," in *America's Dialogue With the World*, ed. William P. Kiehl (Washington, DC: Public Diplomacy Council, 2006).

³¹ Ibid.

commitment.”³² Arts programs are incredibly expensive (probably one of the reasons that country elites enjoy them, because it marks their economic status); therefore, government entities are less likely to pay for them, especially when private sector businesses handle such events on a regular basis. This lack of interest in the arts is a very American phenomenon. The Arts Council England outspends the U.S. National Endowment for the Arts by a flabbergasting amount (47.7 times): “the NEA total budget per capita for arts programs is \$0.51; in comparison, the total budget per capita of the Arts Council England is \$24.36 (McCaughey 2005, 12). In total figures, the NEA’s total appropriation for 2003 was \$116 million, and the total budget of the Arts Council England in 2003–2004 was £496 million, which constituted around \$909 million (Grantmakers in the Arts 2005, 39).”³³ With limited resources, programming is limited, but that doesn’t mean that Embassy Bogota can’t make the most of their programming.

In the past year, Embassy Bogota has conducted a myriad of cultural events. Many of their events rely on online streaming, which is not the ideal medium for events targeted towards elites. Symphonies, operas and ballet remain a great way to reach to elites who are members of the upper class. These types of programs can be uniquely American. Bringing an opera like *Susannah* by Carlisle Floyd or George Gershwin’s *Porgy and Bess* can represent America’s artistic output while presenting American history and themes. *Susannah* presents the themes of religion in American society, and the price that sometimes must be paid for absolution.³⁴ This opera’s uniqueness stems not from its plot, but from its American origin, it takes place in

³² Natalia Grincheva, "U.S. Arts and Cultural Diplomacy: Post-Cold War Decline and the Twenty-First Century Debate," *Journal of Arts Management, Law & Society* 40, no. 3 (2010): 170.

³³ Ibid., 179.

³⁴ Andrew Stiller, "Susannah," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera* (Oxford Music Online 2012).

Appalachia, and it's entirely in English.³⁵ *Porgy and Bess* is also a uniquely American product. Writing by one of the 20th century's best jazz composers, *Porgy* presents to the audience the African American experience in three acts.³⁶ Both these operas, and their quintessential American themes and struggles can greatly convey American culture and ideas to an elite, well-educated audience in Colombia via entertainment.

The ballet, although a traditionally French dance form mastered by the Russians, has a central place in high culture in the U.S. However French or Russian it may be, it presents a unique opportunity to show how immigrant culture clearly affects the culture of the U.S. and to show off some local talent. Aaron Copeland, a prodigious American composer with a penchant for odd and intriguing sounds, has written a number of ballets and operas. *Billy the Kid* is one of his more popular works and is quintessentially American.³⁷ Few plots convey American history, attitude, and themes than a cowboy gun slinger and his misadventures.³⁸ Carlos Surinach would also be a great composer and body of work to bring to Colombia. A Spanish-American composer who learned to play piano from his mother, he embodies the American dream while mixing in the sounds of flamenco with traditional composition.³⁹ His work appeals to the Latin American sensibilities while remaining a true American product.

Finally, the symphonic orchestra is a most powerful tool for creating ties with Colombians. Attendance at the symphony remains quite popular there. Aaron Copeland composed interesting and engaging orchestral pieces that focused on American sights and

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Richard Crawford, "Porgy and Bess," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera* (Grove Music Online 2012).

³⁷ "Billy the Kid," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, ed. Michael Kennedy (Oxford Music Online 2012).

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ "Carlos Surinach," in *Encyclopaedia Britannica Academic Edition* (Encyclopaedia Britannica Online 2012).

sounds. Although bringing the New York Philharmonic or the Chicago Symphony Orchestra to Colombia is incredibly expensive, commissioning an American symphonic music festival with a local orchestra (Bogota's is spectacular) can go a long way in fostering ties. The players will see the opportunity to play in a different compositional style, and audiences will enjoy seeing players they know attempting new music. Wind bands, although less popular, are also a central part of the American symphonic music tradition. Each branch of the military has one, and they perform everywhere from the State Department to the White House. Performing the works of John Philip Sousa, the composer of most military themes used today like *Semper Fidelis* and *The Stars and Stripes Forever*, would present the incredibly powerful and emotive sound of the brass band.⁴⁰

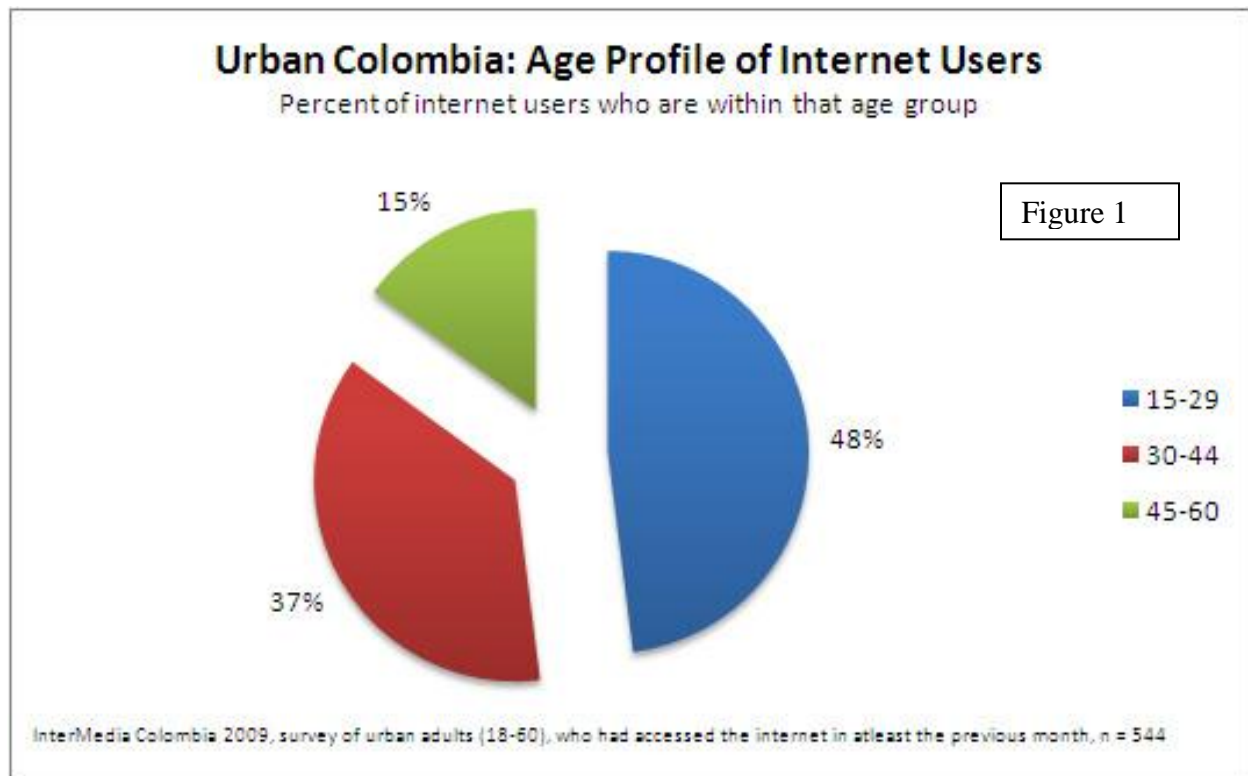
So many beautifully composed American pieces exist, each performance could be an introduction to a new program or style. Although the price for all the programs mentioned above, when coupled with exchanges, is relatively high, it's important to remember that "Arts diplomacy is a response to desires of overseas publics."⁴¹ Investing in programs that are going to appeal to the demanding public counts as a better expenditure than spending money on programs people are not interested in attending.

⁴⁰ "John Philip Sousa," in *Oxford Music Dictionary* (Oxford Music Online 2012).

⁴¹ Brown, "Arts Diplomacy: The Neglected Aspect of Cultural Diplomacy," 84.

Youth & Social Media

Outreach to youth can be tricky, because they have a specific set of needs and wants that an embassy setting cannot always accommodate for. Latin American youth seek American culture much in the way that the elites do. However, younger generations tend to focus on the internet as means for acquiring that knowledge. As seen in *Figure 1*, a majority of internet users in Colombia in 2009 were between the ages of 15-29, the youth demographic that social media should be targeting.⁴²

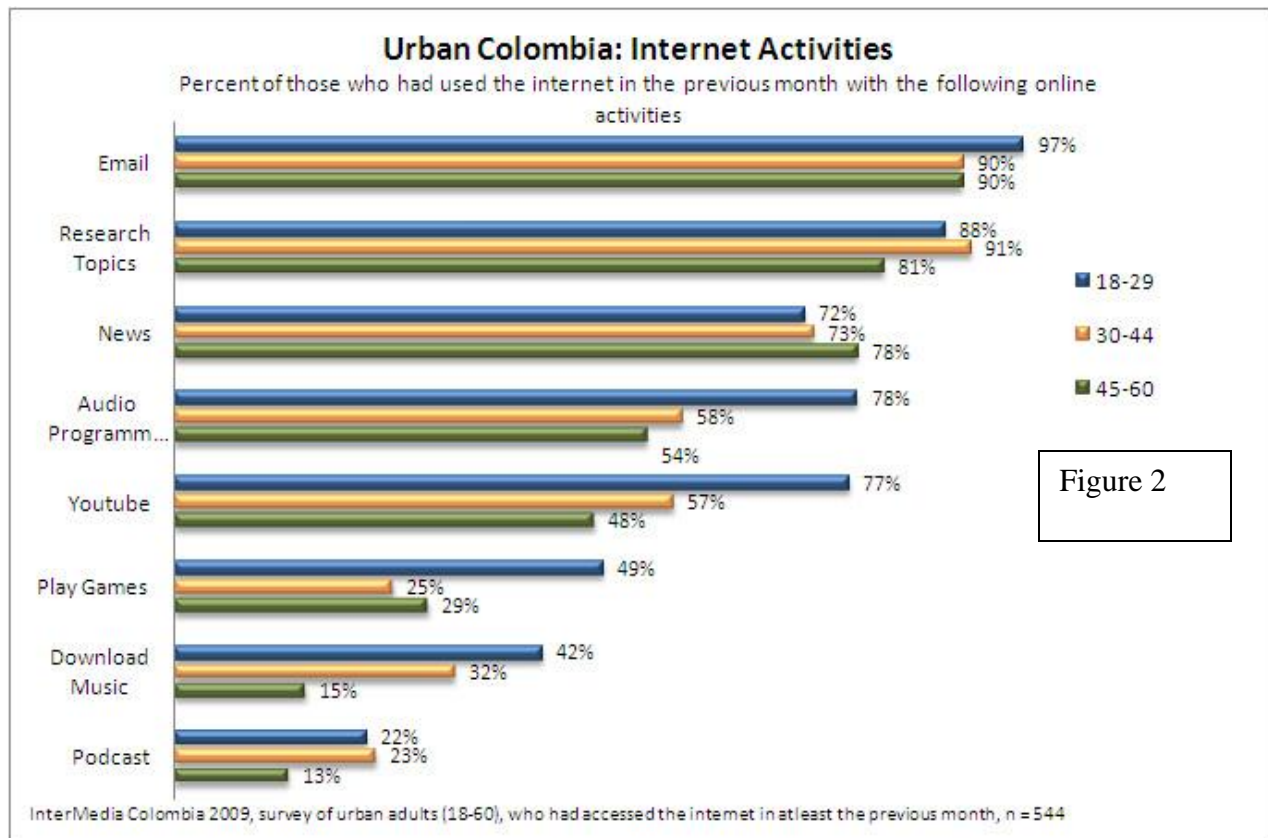


According to the InterMedia that demographic of 15-29 focus on culture specific activities when using the internet, per *Figure 2*.⁴³ They focus on email, audio programming, research topics, and

⁴² InterMedia, "Urban Colombia: Age Profile of Internet Users," (AudienceScapes.com, 2010).

⁴³ InterMedia, "Urban Colombia: Internet Activites," (AudienceScapes.org, 2010).

YouTube.



Finally, and most importantly, young Colombians utilize their mobile phones to view other media more than any other demographic. Creating mobile friendly webpages and social media appropriate campaigns should be a priority for all engagement staff in the Colombian embassy (see *Figure 3*).⁴⁴

⁴⁴ InterMedia, "Urban Colombia: Mobile Phone use to Access other Mediums," (AudienceScapes.org, 2009).

Urban Colombia: Mobile Phone use to Access other Mediums

Percent of mobile users who have conducted that activity in the past month

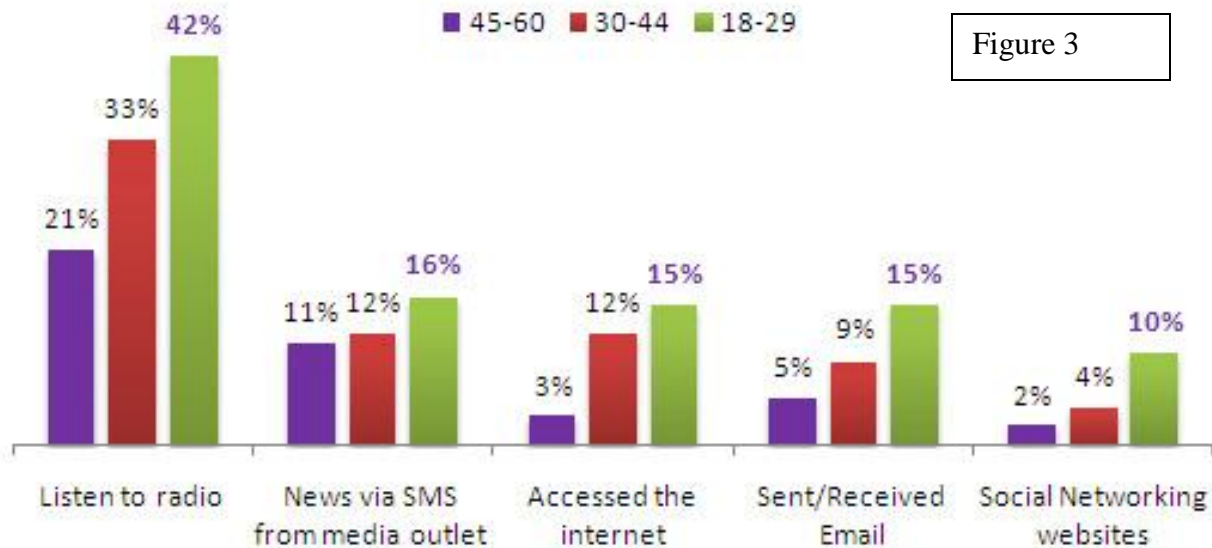
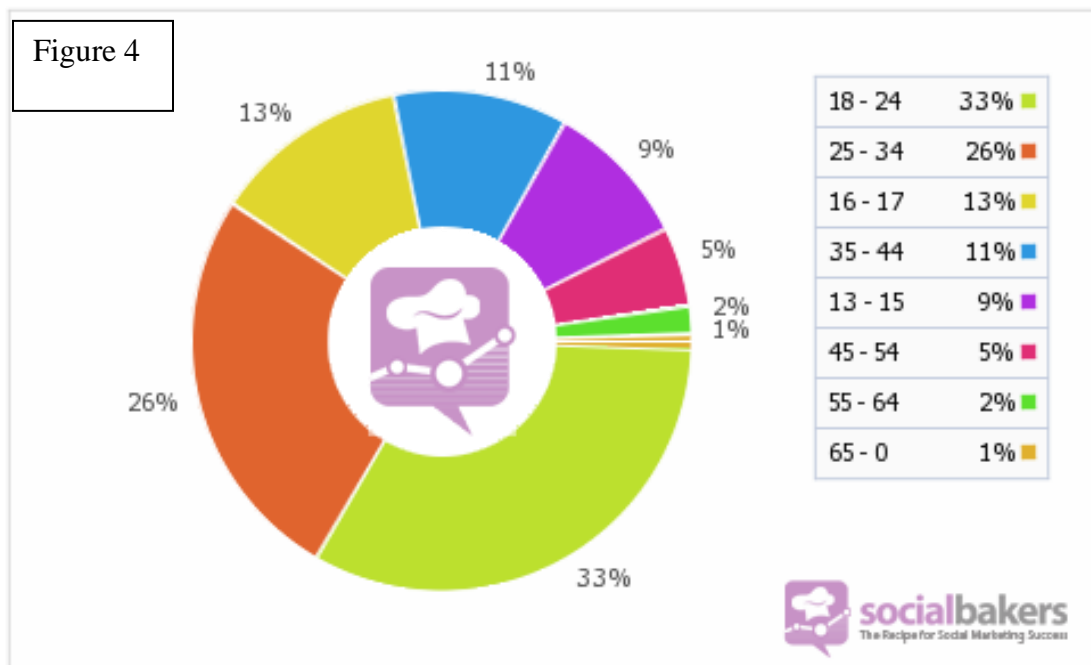


Figure 3

InterMedia Colombia 2009: survey of adults (18-60) who have used a mobile phone in the past month n=823

Taking all of the usage habits of young adults in Colombia, a clear strategy emerges. Although they do not frequent social media on their phones, young Colombians are very active on Facebook. First and foremost, they listen to the radio on their phones, which means Voice of America should be available through that technology. Although it would probably not be the first thing they choose to listen to, if VOA programming geared toward youth streams through the internet, the youth are more likely to tune in. The programming should center on American youth culture. What do American youth like to listen to, watch, read, share, and how are they doing that? Colombian youth's obsession with American youth can be used to the advantage of public diplomacy officers.

Second, their social media should focus on Facebook, while maintaining a Twitter presence. Facebook users in Colombia number around 16,302,140, making it the 14th most represented country on Facebook.⁴⁵ In contrast, Colombia ranks as the 15th country with the most Twitter users.⁴⁶ Although the difference isn't astronomical, it must be taken into account. The age distribution of Facebook is also important to note. According to *Figure 4*, Facebook users are mainly between the ages of 18-34.⁴⁷



Facebook content should focus on multimedia. Pictures, video and similar content generally garner the most likes and positive comments on Facebook pages because they are eye-catching and entertaining. Trivia tends to be the second most popular content, with fun facts about the relationship between the two countries, people who were born or died on that particular day of

⁴⁵ SocialBakers, "Colombia Facebook Statistics."

⁴⁶ Colombia Reports, "Colombians are world's 15th-top Twitter users."

⁴⁷ SocialBakers, "User age distribution on Facebook in Colombia," (2012).

posting, or contest asking users to guess the name of the person or the place pictured. Although these may not seem like ideal public diplomacy opportunities, they serve several important purposes: 1) They make interaction and conversation with users easy; 2) The posts help educate users about American history, geography, and culture while not overwhelming the user; 3) Users are more likely to return to the page when content is interactive because they want to know more. In order to achieve this interaction, the Questions feature on Facebook pages can become the Facebook manager's best friend. It makes asking a question easy to quantify, and it also allows you to structure the answer as opposed to the user answering the Comment box.

Currently, the manager of Embassy Bogota's page maintains the page up to date. Posts occur daily, with several posts a day of varying content. The use of multimedia is excellent, with multiple videos appearing a week and photos constantly being incorporated. They use the page to update their followers on events. The page has 14,990 followers, a relatively high number for an Embassy in a country that size.⁴⁸ Users also engage a lot with the Embassy page, with a majority of recent posts garnering more than 20 likes (something unheard of on the majority of Embassy sites).⁴⁹ Overall their page is engaging and interesting and helps stir conversation between users and managers. However, knowing that Colombian youth spend more time on Facebook than Twitter, the Embassy should focus its strategy to attract more likes on the Facebook page, because the Twitter page (soon to be discussed) is already lively and well followed. The new ad feature that Facebook will roll out this summer will help create more buzz about the Embassy and hopefully turn that into more followers.

⁴⁸ US Embassy in Bogota Colombia, "Embajada de los Estados Unidos Colombia," US Department of State.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Timeline, the newest feature of Facebook, is also something that Embassy Bogota should take advantage of. Because of its linear features and focus on time (hence the name), Timeline is best used to create a narrative. The best way to utilize this new feature is to create a story, beginning with the founding of the embassy or the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two nations. From that point, one can create vignettes for important events and interesting occurrences in the history of the post. This should include old pictures or documents to make the vignettes more engaging. Good examples are correspondence between ambassadors or pictures of what the embassy looked like in a certain year. Other good media to include would be important events in the history of the diplomatic relationship. Once the narrative is established, it can be used as an interactive tool with the page's audience. Scavenger hunts through the Timeline are a great way to get the audience involved in the backstory content and to create a conversation. They can discuss what they found interesting from the past, and how it affects the relationship of the nations in the present.

Twitter users tend to place greater interest on policy than social and cultural issues. Twitter should be the main outlet, not the only however, for disseminating information about policy and bilateral issues. The Embassy's twitter, @USEmbassyBogota, is very active.⁵⁰ Surprisingly, their Twitter page has more followers than their Facebook page has likes, with 27,453 followers.⁵¹ They tweet several times daily about a myriad of issues and events. A lot of their tweets mirror their Facebook posts, a common tactic for Embassies because of limited time. It's easier to draft one plan than two. However, they make an effort to post from Twitter, rather

⁵⁰ US Embassy in Bogota Colombia, "@USEmbassyBogota," US Department of State.

⁵¹ Ibid.

than connecting their Twitter to Facebook and only posting on one. Their Twitter manager also makes a concerted and well placed effort to interact with their followers. For each day of tweets the managers will retweet and reply to tweets from the page's followers. The page does a fantastic job of using the immediacy of Twitter to respond to the concerns and questions and comments of those who directly relate to the Embassy. Overall, the Twitter feed goes above and beyond what most embassies are doing. However, the manager tends to overuse hashtags. Normally this would not be extremely problematic, except it makes the tweets hard to read and over categorizes them. The screenshot of their Twitter page below shows exactly the mix of content that dominates the page.⁵²



⁵² Ibid.

YouTube is the most untapped resource for embassies. Videos that are engaging and interactive connect with viewers more than a picture or a post on Facebook or Tweet. YouTube gives embassies the possibility to go viral. It also serves as a great tool for simple news dissemination. The Embassy Bogota page already utilizes that role, with news videos talking about how to apply for visas, and how the visa expiration period has been extended.⁵³ The channel also played a great part during the Summit of the Americas as a source for speeches and news of the events at the Summit. The most interesting YouTube programs are those that are full of imagery and have an engaging message. Campaigns, such as ‘Colombia is Pasión,’ capture audiences emotionally as well as intellectually. Video series can also garner more audience attention. Something that Embassy Bogota would benefit from doing would be to highlight the similarities between the U.S. and Colombian cultures through video. Interviewing young adults in both nations and comparing the results to see how they differ or concur. Each video could focus on a topic like music, movies, foreign policy, and highlight the most interesting similarities and differences. The series could be monthly, so as to not place a great editing and creating burden on the social media staff. The series would not only be interesting but it would also be an incredible way to bridge understanding gaps. By highlighting ideas, likes, and dislikes that are similar across the two cultures, ties between the two nations will then become stronger.

Part of Secretary Clinton’s 21st century statecraft focuses on the successful use of social media and social networking technologies.⁵⁴ In order to help accomplish this goal, the Secretary appointed Alec Ross, innovator and entrepreneur, to lead the Department of State into the future.

⁵³ US Embassy in Bogota Colombia, "USEmbassyBogota," US Department of State.

⁵⁴ Gustin, "Digital Diplomacy."

Her decision to include Ross in her team exemplifies State's commitment to new media and the potential that it provides for information dissemination. Nonetheless, the importance of social media remains nebulous. Its rapidly morphing qualities, though generally a positive, make assessment of success a sometimes insurmountable task. However, the ease of using and the immediacy cannot be underestimated. Communication technology is crucial to all government agencies and many of their mandates, whether it be using that technology to communicate or monitoring that technology for unusual activity. But it's the greatest asset to public diplomacy, because it's about communication all day, every day and provides PAOs with a tool to connect with every individual they wish to target.

Conclusions and Rationale

Public diplomacy challenges even the most creative minds to find innovative, engaging, and cheap ways to connect with an audience. Adding to those constraints are the sometimes insurmountable barriers that culture creates. The most successful public diplomacy programs are the ones that take those barriers into account. However, the biggest difficulty is the lack of assessment tools. According to Johnson, "Without a coherent government-wide program or standards for success, additional efforts will lead nowhere."⁵⁵ Creating a government-wide assessment tool and standards by which to measure success, is almost impossible. But once this agency-wide tool is in place, best practices can truly be devised and implemented. What is presented in this paper comprises suggestions garnered from studying and assessing the Facebook, Twitter and YouTube activities of embassies in the European Bureau. All of their sites were explored weekly to understand the relationship between content and audience

⁵⁵ Johnson, "The Technology Dimension," 109.

response. From those observations, general guidelines were defined in order to create a cohesive plan that optimizes the utilities of each platform.

A focus on arts programs comes mainly from the school of thought that believes that “Arts diplomacy provides a context for American culture” and that they appeal mostly to elites rather than the everyday man.⁵⁶ These programs are the most appreciated abroad because they are the most memorable.⁵⁷ The importance of exchanges cannot be overstated. A myriad of studies exists discussing why ECA should consider them more important and continue to fund them and make them a priority.^{58,59,60,61}

Colombia’s importance to American interests remains high. It serves as market for goods and services that are always in demand. And decreasing drug trafficking continues to set much of the agenda between the two nations. Entering the 21st century means focusing more on appealing to the Colombian public, which lost respect for the U.S. during the Bush presidency. Dialogue, through a variety of mediums, will be the most important resource for public diplomacy efforts in that country. Forging public-private partnerships to help increase budgets for expensive programs can greatly further the embassy’s ability to create that dialogue. Focusing on entrepreneurship and increasing economic opportunities in Colombia, without providing direct aid, should remain a high priority. Creating a stronger state not only involves increasing the skills and infrastructure of the military but also enforcing economic stability by encouraging

⁵⁶ Brown, "Arts Diplomacy: The Neglected Aspect of Cultural Diplomacy," 84.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 85.

⁵⁸ Grincheva, "U.S. Arts and Cultural Diplomacy: Post-Cold War Decline and the Twenty-First Century Debate."

⁵⁹ Brown, "Arts Diplomacy: The Neglected Aspect of Cultural Diplomacy."

⁶⁰ Kenton W. Keith, "The Crisis in U.S. Cultural Representation Abroad or Where's My Cultural Attaché?!", *Journal of Arts Management, Law & Society* 39, no. 4 (2009).

⁶¹ Schneider, "The Unrealized Potential of Cultural Diplomacy: “Best Practices” and What Could Be, If Only."

(through exchanges) entrepreneurship and fair wages. The next century may bring prosperity and peace to Colombia, but without a strong U.S. effort to appeal to the masses, this hypothetical wealth may not serve to bolster U.S. interests in the region. Strong public diplomacy that focuses on several different strategies will be the best tool for the U.S. embassy to continue creating a positive, strong, and welcoming image for the U.S. to Colombians who may not already view it in a favorable way. Utilizing public diplomacy to better public attitudes will create a great opportunity for the U.S. in Colombia and in the world at large.

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