NICOLE MATEJIC



# SOCIAL MEDIA RULES OF ENGAGEMENT



WHY YOUR ONLINE NARRATIVE IS
THE BEST WEAPON DURING A CRISIS

WILEY

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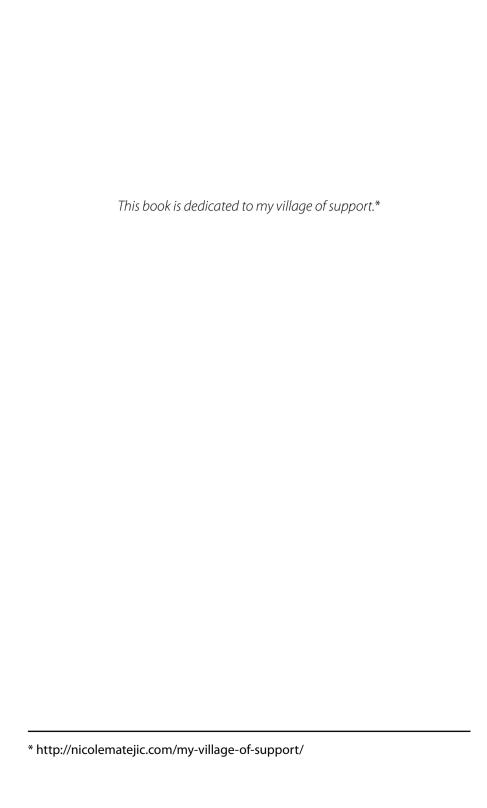
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### About the author

An online trailblazer with a mission, Nicole Matejic is an internationally recognised military information operations adviser and social media crisis communicator.

From the cyber-trenches fighting terrorism on the social media battlefield to the boardrooms of Australian government departments, Parliament House and blue-chip multinationals, Nicole is known for her proactive, innovative and no-BS approach to managing crises and complex issues.

Wearing two hats, Nicole is:

- the co-founder and CEO of global military think tank Info Ops HQ, delivering training to military forces in information operations in the social media battlespace. A regular lecturer to NATO, Nicole speaks around the world on the topics of social media jihad and social media warfare. Visit www.infoopshq.com
- also known as The #SocialFirefighter®. Nicole founded and is CEO of the Australian social media crisis communications consultancy Social Media Monster, providing specialist crisis communications services, training, strategy and preparedness simulations to the public and private sectors. Visit www.socialmediamonster.com.au

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Want to find out more about Nicole?

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UCQSLuwl3lOuHDPluavlXnFw

Visit her website: www.nicolematejic.com

### **Author note**

Before you immerse yourself in this book, you should know it's much more than just ink, paper and pixels. It's a conversation, a #CrisisComms and Info Ops #IOinAction community.

With the purchase of this book you receive access to the Social Media Rules of Engagement online resource portal 'SMROE-HQ', which will keep you updated with real-life and real-time examples of organisational crisis that relate to each chapter in my book.

You can read it the old-fashioned way, from cover to cover, or you can just dive straight into the chapters you find most relevant. Whichever way you read *Social Media Rules of Engagement*, you can choose your own learning adventure by interacting with me directly during your journey: tweet<sup>1</sup> me, leave me a comment<sup>2</sup> or join my book club on BookShout.

I look forward to talking #CrisisComms and #IOinAction with you soon! *Nicole* 

<sup>1.</sup> https://twitter.com/nicolematejic

<sup>2.</sup> https://www.facebook.com/thenicolematejic

NATO needs social media more than social media needs NATO... It is critical that you are out in front managing your message so that you do it yourself; if you don't, someone will do it for you and not always with the best intentions.

Franky Saegerman Head of NATO Social Media

### **Preface**

2008. Canberra. I was working in intelligence.

As an analyst, you have two choices:

- 1 Follow the status quo the tried and tested methodology of finding your targets.
- 2 Forge a new path.

I've never been particularly good at playing follow-the-leader. My brain just isn't wired with the collective groupthink mentality required for life in a hive, so I went off on what was considered at the time a fairly left-field tangent.

Having convinced my then boss to let me loose on the internet (read: humour me for a time), I set up a fake Facebook profile, loaded up a series of Google Alerts and the hunt was on.

What I found was a treasure trove of information about persons of interest. Forget about digital breadcrumbs; these people were tossing whole loaves of bread behind them as they went about their daily lives. It was a photo-frenzied orgy of people, places, contact information and connections.

Social media was in its early sociological renaissance. People were so enamoured with just the thought of being part of this exciting new phenomenon that they had very few online inhibitions.

I remember this moment vividly. From an intelligence analyst's perspective, I'd hit the data jackpot! Forget about months of legwork to track down the name of a single person of interest's associate. I just had to search their Facebook friends list, cross-reference that with information from classified sources and verify my data.

In a very short time, riding on the high of some early successes, I began teaching a few others in my unit the tools of my newly forged trade. Those early successes were significant, not only because they proved that a seismic shift in open source intelligence (OSINT, or publically available information) gathering had occurred from a theoretical standpoint, but also because it worked.

We were finding persons and activities of interest that in all likelihood would have taken a fair amount of traditional tradecraft to discover. Those in the game know only too well that gathering intelligence successfully is an uneasy marriage of exceptional behind-the-scenes groundwork and covert or overt in-situ intervention. All things being equal, the groundwork sets up those conducting the intervention for success — but sometimes one side or the other (or factors outside your control) can let the team down and the whole operation is a bust.

Social media and Google Alerts irrevocably changed the game. The deck was now stacked in the house's favour—and incredibly, it was the persons of interest doing the stacking!

After a particularly timely left-field discovery on a blog from Europe, I found myself running training sessions for a range of agencies. It was the start of my enduring love affair with social media and online data within a law enforcement, and later military, information operations environment.

It wasn't until some five years later that The #SocialFirefighter® was born out of my work in a seemingly endless cycle of crisis- and issues-management roles. I often joked with my colleagues that I should have been a firefighter—because all I seemed to do was extinguish other people's media, public affairs and social media fires. As I began working more and more in the social and digital space, the moniker evolved and I decided to adopt it as a brand.

In a way, I've come full circle. From my beginnings in the media as a freelance photojournalist to digital sales and marketing — falling into surveillance work and spending nearly six years in operational law enforcement roles, rounded out with a further four years of corporate public sector adventures — I now find myself back where I started: in front of my Mac, looking for the next story, a new angle, a different approach.

What then fell under the OSINT umbrella now has its own identity—social engineering. The digital landscape has evolved beyond anything I could

have dreamed up back in 2008, and with that evolution has come a range of new risks and challenges.

One of my earliest observations in using social media as an intelligence source was the inherent trust each individual places in those with whom they network. The company you keep online literally guards your privacy. Any one of your connections could be an avenue for infiltration or exploitation.

Social media's dynamically responsive nature presents both opportunities and threats. As a tool of modern communication and marketing, it has a starring role in the way the global population consumes information. As an influence activity conduit, it is highly effective and can be strategically targeted, monetised and measured.

On the flipside, social media can be a very risky, unpredictable proposition. Run in isolation of your broader business objectives, or by staff ill-equipped to effectively communicate or manage social communities and the nuances that arise, it can be a complete disaster. Whether you are online and socially active, offline and socially silent or somewhere in between is irrelevant to the conversations and transactions occurring in the social sphere.

### Who should read this book

If you work in the private or public sector, in military strategic communications, information operations, public affairs, crisis- and issuesmanagement, or corporate affairs, this book will give you some insight into how to manage your social media presence to avoid it managing you.

My anecdotes may have a law enforcement or military flavour, but the topics explored are just as relevant to the boardroom, broader government, not-for-profits and the private sector as they are to the battlefield.

One of the most common questions I'm asked once people find out I'm a professional crisis communicator is what 'big #PRFails' have I worked on. I understand their curiosity but it's a question I can't really answer, because I'm paid to keep secrets. My clients, my past and present employers, and those who will hire me in the future trust me with their secrets.

What I can tell you is that I've worked on issues and crises you've certainly read about in the pages of newspapers here in Australia, and some of those stories were republished around the world. You've seen them on the nightly news. Some, of course, have been social media fodder.

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I am the silent voice behind the overwhelmed CEO's face. I have been a speechwriter for federal ministers. I was the fly-by-the-tweet-of-your-pants analyst trawling hashtags and social chatter to ensure you are safe and criminals are brought to justice.

In this book I share with you the stories (or fragments thereof) that won't get me arrested.

For case studies and current examples, visit SMROE-HQ at www.socialmediarulesofengagement.com.

### PARTI

### RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

## Social media crisis communications: a seismic shift in the risk profile

I was a child of the digital revolution. By the time I started my undergraduate degree in 1998, the bleeps and pings that were dial-up internet had already started to change the way people communicated.

Email had to be checked 'at least a few times a week'; web pages were a revelation of slow-loading information; and the move to digital photography was an incredible disruption to how we had traditionally captured moments in time.

By the time I was working as a surveillance operative just a few years later, the legal minefield of the digital revolution saw governments racing to update their legislation in an effort to keep up with digital consumerism (and hedonism) as digital devices were used for an ever wider range of legal and, of course, illicit purposes.

The other race being run in the digital revolution was the race to break news. With the print news media's first forays into online news, photojournalists became pseudo-reporters and websites became adjunct news services.

I often refer to the early noughties as a time when the global population developed their information-crack addiction. We just couldn't get enough. Technology-possessed people were like disciples waiting for the Second Coming. Our new temple was the internet and within it we were chasing the digital messiah like junkies chasing the dragon.

From the first digital testament and revelations of Alta Vista and Netscape then Yahoo, Google and Bing, to the second digital testament and revelations

### 4 Social Media Rules of Engagement

of MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, Tumblr, Instagram, LinkedIn... search and social networking have become our modern-day prophets, heralding in a seismic change in the way we communicate, connect and share.

Imagine the relative simplicity of being a crisis communicator before the early noughties, when print news ran to editorial deadlines that could span days and photographs took hours to be developed and printed. If the evening news wanted a story they had to send out a news truck with a reporter and camera crew, and getting hold of the videotape after the story had aired was another challenge entirely.

After the newspapers had run their stories of scandal they became tomorrow's fish and chip paper. Radio, feeding off the print news media, was perhaps the biggest antagonist in a crisis because of their inherently short production lead times. In making stories 'newsworthy' they directly influenced how long a crisis could be sustained, and talkback radio gave a voice to the unheard.

Can you imagine the luxury of such an uncomplicated, 9 to 5 professional life?

No blinking Blackberry or iPhone chimes to monitor. No tweets, posts or surprise YouTube embarrassments. No bloggers, citizen journalists or armchair generals to offer their opinions.

While the digital revolution changed the way we communicate, the times they keep on a-changing. The what-next mentality now feeds the consumer technology product cycle from one device to its upgrade and beyond. Can you think of a single aspect of your life that isn't touched by digital or social media in some way?

In the race for the next news fix to feed a global population of information addicts, the digital revolution has not come without its challenges for communicators

Our audiences are now hungrier for information that ever before.

They want to digest it quickly, concisely and in real time.

Their bullshit meter is well developed.

They have a voice.

They have influence.

They don't need the news media to generate news.

Crises have gone from largely contained events to broadly uncontainable disasters that might have been preventable but are now impossible to erase.

This seismic shift in the organisational risk profile didn't occur as a by-product of the digital revolution; it occurred because organisations failed to keep pace with the rate of digital consumerism. While children of the revolution were all worshipping at the temple of the internet, organisations were still conducting business like it was 1979.

As organisations waited (some are still waiting) for the social media 'fad' to pass, they failed to innovate. They resisted changes to the way they *needed* to communicate. They lost sight of the moving target that was their audience: their customers, their staff and their shareholders.

Strategic communications foresight was traded in for crisis communications hindsight; and in the rush to recover lost communications ground, they found their savvy digital competitors and adversaries had already lapped them in the race for online influence.

Cue the modern-day crisis communicator. With an iPad in one hand, a smartphone at their ear and their next tweet at the top of their mind, crisis communicators now arm themselves with the very technology, knowledge and socially savvy skills organisations are only beginning to realise *was* the future over a decade ago.

These children of the revolution are redefining the way crises are managed, wars are fought and perceptions defended. They are redefining organisational communications — one social media disaster at a time.

### Communications born again, but the fundamentals still apply

Ask any bartender: a martini is still a martini whether it's shaken or stirred. It may taste just a little different, but it's still made of the same ingredients.

Communication as a profession is no different. While the digital revolution has changed the way we consume information, during a crisis a communicator's ability to *communicate* remains critical.

Whatever type of organisation they find their desk in, crisis communicators need to recognise that in the past decade the way the population has been

primed to consume information has fundamentally changed. This makes how we communicate just as important as what we communicate during times of crisis.

### Tweet this

How we communicate is just as important as what we communicate during times of crisis #SMROE

Far from broadcasting into the depths of cyberspace hoping to make first contact, if you are communicating online, someone *is* listening. In fact, more people than you could ever imagine are tuning in to brand *you*.

Perhaps one of the biggest paradigm shifts arising from the digital revolution is that crisis communications is no longer just a war of words. The online and social media battlefield is now a whirlpool of text, urban slang, video imagery, animation, infographics, presentations and instant messaging.

Do you know your LOLs from your lulz? Your tweet from your post? Your Snapchat from your Viber?

Communicating with a clear purpose, in ways and places you will be heard, is the only way to connect with and influence an audience.

The art of listening and engagement has never been more important.

There is no hiding offline; with or without you, people are talking about your organisation online and on social media. From your customers, clients, shareholders, employees and the government, through to potential clients, competitors and prospective employees, the digital footprints you leave behind during a crisis write your corporate history.

### Tweet this

The digital footprints you leave behind during a crisis write your corporate history #SMROE

Your story, even during times of crisis, is now the organisation's most effective tool for achieving redemption for the digital sins committed against your audience.

Crisis communications provides an in-depth understanding of the social media landscape and how it influences your on- and offline reputation during organisational crises.

Crisis communicators are the technological storytellers of organisational nightmares.

### It's all about narrative

Send your Spin Doctor into retirement. There will be no spinning on the social media decks. That DJ is just playing the same of tune... inauthenticity.

The #SocialFirefighter®

Authenticity is the holy grail of social media success. Without it, you are just another organisation peddling a product or service.

Organisations that have a clear, authentic voice and an engaging narrative build stellar brands and impassioned followings. Even in times of crisis genuine communications are valued above all else.

#### Tweet this

Without authenticity in social media, you are just another organisation peddling a product or service #SMROE

At a time when authenticity is most needed, it's often organisationally abandoned in favour of sterile rhetoric heavy with buzzwords or 'keywords' that mean little to anyone.

Traditional, old-school communicators and inexperienced corporate executives still tend to see throwing company policy down the line in 140-character bursts as the preferred response. If an organisation's legal team is let loose on communications, the messages often become even more indigestible.

And the reason organisations take this approach is simple: admitting fault, that you are wrong, that you made a mistake, is still seen as corporate weakness.

This leads crisis communicators down a path where they are instructed to construct a web of words that communicates plausible deniability. Instead of proactive media liaison, or authentic online and social engagement, fluent bureaucracy attempts to influence the perception of control and organisational solidarity.

It doesn't work. It damages your brand. And, in the long run, it's more time consuming and expensive to manage.

The worst part of this equation is the massive lost opportunity to control your narrative by engaging with your organisation's audience.

In losing your narrative to glib bureaucracy, you lose control of the way your story ends. Instead of driving your story through a logical sequence of events that follow crisis through remediation to transitioning back into business as usual, your story becomes like a choose-your-own-ending adventure book. Only you've just handed over control of selecting the way this story ends to your critics, your disgruntled social media audience and the news media.

Why would you let someone else write your organisational history?

Organisations that handle crises and social media anarchy well inspire cultlike followings and volunteer brand ambassadors. *Be one of those.* You don't need to be the next #PRFail to learn from the mistakes of others.

### **₩** Tweet this

Organisations that handle crises and social media anarchy well inspire cult-like followings and volunteer brand ambassadors #SMROE

You've just been given a free kick after the final whistle has sounded. What's your next move? Are you going to spin your social media crisis sideways? Or are you going to control the narrative and choose how this adventure will end?

The lesson here is simple: even when things are going terribly wrong, the right course of action is to keep communicating and to keep it real.

## Optimus Prime: are you conditioning your audience for sales or LOLs?

Just like a Transformer, there is more to social media-based crisis communication than meets the eye. While your social stream transforms into a sea of discontent, the way you have primed your audience to engage with you *before* the crisis will play a large part in how they respond to your next move.

Are you all about the LOLs? Hard sales and bold calls-to-action? Controversy? Deviating from your authentic voice during a crisis can be tricky. Social media audiences are fickle. If they aren't learning something, laughing at something or getting a spectacular deal on whatever it is you're selling — one click and they're gone.

Transitioning them into crisis communications is just as important as transitioning them out of it.

If you can't use your usual authentic voice — humour may be inappropriate, for example, and courting controversy is an open invitation for round two in the crisis boxing ring — here are some ways you can hit that reset button.

### **RESET REQUIRED?**

You suspect you've got a crisis brewing — some storm clouds are visible on the horizon and the forecast is for thunder, maybe a little lightning. Prepare now for what you *might* communicate in the hope you won't have to. Keep monitoring your audience sentiment and as soon as it starts to rain, issue that statement or apology.

### The soft reset

If your aim is to prevent a minor crisis from escalating any further, the cap-in-hand approach may be useful. While it's more of a 'you got me there, I should have handled that differently' style communiqué, be careful not to misjudge audience sentiment and take a casual approach to genuine outrage.

### The hard reset

Wish you could just start the day over? Get out of bed on the other side?

(continued)

### RESET REQUIRED? (cont'd)

Ask your audience for forgiveness for your faux pas and let it be. Of course, you have to actually *receive* their forgiveness for this to work. Listen, engage, engage again. Gauge your audience sentiment and use poignant pauses in your regular posting cycle to demonstrate you're not ready to move on until they are.

Forget about the reset; hit the panic button instead Trending #PRFail? Stop the merry-go-round; it's time to get off. This situation should have your *full* and undivided attention.

Forget about your online persona and just be authentic—authentically sorry. Social media outrage doesn't die down until you've demonstrated that you've heard what your audience is saying and have taken their feedback onboard organisationally. Be wary of issuing backhanded apologies or insincere statements. Mean what you say and back up your words with demonstrable action on- and offline.

### MY STORY: SAILOR CREATES A TWITTER 'SHIT-STORM' IN TWEET TO THEN AUSTRALIAN PRIME MINISTER

I happened on this story as I monitored the tweet stream while working in strategic communications for the Defence Materiel Organisation. I thought at the time how well it illustrated both the impact of social media on news making and, more specifically, the role of a carefully articulated social media policy in helping organisations to defend against employee-generated social media crisis.

In days gone by, sailors had a reputation for causing chaos in port cities around the world. In their race to shake off the cabin-fever of months at sea: bars were drunk dry, brothels were bonked out and the cells of the local police stations overflowed with those who had drank the former and missed out on the latter.

In days gone by, the nightmare of 'sailors gone wild' for the ship's public affairs officer was largely confined to the local newspaper, perhaps a lucky news camera crew.

Things have changed.

Social media has made it possible for any employee, anywhere at any time, to provide the news media with both content and story.

Such was the case when a Royal Australian Navy seaman decided to tweet then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd (see figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1: a sailor's exchange with then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd



The ever watchful media monitor the social media accounts of politicians and other notable members of the public for news, so when Kevin Rudd retweeted and then interacted with @chapsax, the resulting story was quickly published by Melbourne's *Herald Sun* newspaper, this extract of which is still online today, some three years later.

Even though the prime minister appeared to take the tweet in good humour, the media could quickly verify @chapsax's identity via his name and a correlating LinkedIn account.

Cue organisational embarrassment via vicarious liability.

Social media has given everyone a voice, and it doesn't place any caveats or disclaimers protecting organisations from becoming collateral damage to their employees' personal online antics. Being heard has never been easier, yet common sense hasn't become any more common.

We've all been slowly acclimatising to a life of consuming information in short text bursts and video snippets, but (has anyone noticed?) we're now all instinctively communicating like mimics. What we consume, we then externalise in our own interactions with the world. It's a global case study of monkey see monkey do.

So while tweeting world leaders can be considered a hobby for some, when does fun cross the line to folly? What is good humour to the mind of one person may be offensive or disrespectful to others. Where is that line between personal privacy and organisational liability on social media?

Is it invisible because a social media policy doesn't exist in your organisation?

A robust social media policy is an organisation's first line of defence against employee-generated social media crises. We'll look at some of the organisations doing this well in the chapters that follow. Your second line of defence is a well-executed training and awareness program.

How are your organisational social media defences looking?

## Ready, aim ... misfire: why you must be social media data savvy

What's your social media data story? Do you know?

Are your posts being read on mobile devices from the battlefields of Syria to the desktops of the urban jungle of New York? Does your audience demographic hit your target market with military precision, or are you selling surfboards to Eskimos? When is your peak posting time? When single twenty-somethings are riding the subway on their way home from work or during beer o'clock on a Friday afternoon?

If you're thinking that all has a lot more to do with social media marketing than it does crisis communications, think again.

Crisis communicators need to be able to read and drive social media data and analytics like a sales junkie on a commission high. In fact, they need to be able to read that data better than a marketer to spot discontent before it turns to outrage, and to know when to hit play, stop and pause on the crisis communications messaging jukebox.

### **▼** Tweet this

Crisis communicators need to be able to read and drive social media data and analytics like a sales junkie on a commission high #SMROE

If you're not reading social media data and looking at social media analytics as part of your overall crisis communications strategy, you are missing out on the information that will make or break your crisis remediation strategy.

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You might be ready and have a good aim — but when you fire, will you hit your target audience?

### The social media iceberg

Social media and icebergs are more alike than you might think: what you can see above the water—your public social media channels—is but a small portion of the iceberg entire. Underwater, where the bulk of the berg floats, is where the real social media magic takes place (see figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1: the social media iceberg



Source: Background image: © deedl/Shutterstock.com; Blue bird talking image: © Qiun/Shutterstock.com.

Much like those onboard the *Titanic* that fateful night in 1912, crisis communicators looking at the social media landscape without the information that lies beneath the surface of all social networks—their data—are steaming toward disaster.

The ability to read the social media data play is an essential tool in the crisis communicator's toolbox. This skill ensures not only that you are prepared for

crisis and your strategy is correctly directed, but that when crisis occurs you aren't misfiring because of data blindness.



The ability to read the social media data play is an essential tool in the crisis communicator's toolbox #SMROE

With data one of the biggest drivers of social media success, it should be of no surprise that when crisis occurs, this information becomes one of the most important resources for a crisis communicator.

By 'social media success' I'm not talking about the size of the social entourage you've amassed (or bought). I'm talking about the behind-the-scenes information that your social interactions and audience profiles generate.

For social media crisis communicators, numbers are relative. A large audience, for example, may not adequately represent your target market, and even if they do, they are useful only if they are engaging organically with your organisation.

A smaller audience may actually have a greater organic reach, because the levels of engagement can be higher with more precise targeting of your communications.

Regardless of its size, the rubbernecking and social on-boarding that occurs during a crisis can significantly change the composition of your audience. This makes knowing what your audience's data set looked like before a crisis an essential part of knowing where to focus your communications effort.

### Tweet this

Below the waterline, where your larger audience has been all along, is where you should target your messaging #SMROE

To continue the iceberg analogy, you don't want to be concentrating all your crisis remediation efforts at the top, where all the sticky-beakers have come for a gander; below the waterline, where your larger audience has been all along, is where you should target your messaging.

### WHAT LIES BENEATH THE SURFACE OF THE SOCIAL MEDIA ICEBERG?

For crisis communicators who have yet to dive into the depths of social media data, let's take a brief journey into Facebook insights and Twitter analytics (as examples). Some of the most basic kinds of data gathered by being online are:

- the geographical locations of your audience
- peak post-engagement times
- · age and gender aggregated data
- externally referring sites (such as your blog or website)
- how many clicks per URL in a post (further broken down into geographical regions)
- your audience's aggregated interests (both professional and personal)
- which type of post they are more likely to interact with (picture, video, text and so on).

You can see that a lot of valuable information lies under the waterline of the social media iceberg; and it's this data that will be of inordinate assistance to you while planning for, and during, a crisis.

Taking it a step further looking briefly at other social media networks, such as YouTube, LinkedIn, SlideShare, Swarm, Instagram . . . the list goes on, you can establish a clearly defined profile of your social media audience, and where you are being heard.

Expand the social media data equation yet again with API<sup>1</sup> and you have a whole new information set at your disposal, one that is driven by their

<sup>1.</sup> API: 'Application Programming Interface: a set of functions and procedures that allow the creation of applications which access the features or data of an operating system, application, or other service.' [Source: Google]

web browsing history and their ecommerce interactions. This information can be exceedingly useful for targeting your outbound messaging during a crisis.

And for the grand finale, on top of your social and API data, customer loyalty schemes offer another layer of personal data.

### From marketeers to info ops: this will blow your pixels off

Are you ready to follow me into the data-driven future?

The data sets I've been talking about are predominately geared for marketeers. Crisis communicators and military information operations specialists can leverage the same data sets by reverse engineering them for their own purposes. Table 2.1 outlines three examples.

Table 2.1: reverse engineering data sets

Data set	Marketeers	Crisis communicators	Info ops
Geographical location	Drive sales based on location to stores.	Target audience segments for reputation remediation.	Target individuals or groups of interest to counter self-radicalisation messaging.
Peak posting times	Post strong calls to action such as sales, VIP offers and other incentives to drive and convert sales through ecommerce portals.	Using a political party as an example, if I wanted to announce a popular policy I'd post it during the peak posting times of day.  Conversely, if I wanted to sneak an unpopular policy under the radar, I'd post it at the times when audience engagement is at its lowest.	As an open source intelligence tool, you can track an audience segment's online activities by watching their engagement levels at different times of the day and of the week. You can then use this to target audiences precisely for the purposes of influence or intervention.
Age and gender	Target audience sectors such as tweens, teens or young adults for specific product marketing.	Target specific audience sectors to influence positive product (or identity) trust, credibility and opinion.	Influence audience segments to build organisational trust and awareness during times of humanitarian relief.

Mind blown? It's not every day you discover that the sum of your existence can be quantified by your online engagements and transactions.

The reality is that while much was made of Edward Snowden spilling the NSA's secrets to the world, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Google and every other social network has been quietly harvesting, mining and storing your personal data since their launches.

It's not governments that hold the key to data mega-cities; it's social networks. And for the most part, people give away their data freely without thought to the digital footprints they leave behind — because they don't see the trail they're leaving.

Much has been written about online reputation management and the risks associated with social media profiles, particularly for military personnel, but the privacy debate that rages at the consumer level is obsolete.

People who have no end of concern about the way governments obtain, store and use data will happily sign up for a consumer loyalty card or log into apps like TripAdvisor and Expedia using their Facebook or Twitter credentials, often with only the 'promise' of reward at some time in the future.

Much like politicians' pre-election promises, loyalty schemes are built to collect data for marketing purposes, not to reward their members. You are being conditioned to develop purchasing habits through which your own data is used to market products or services directly back at you.

And I really do mean *at* you. From aggressive email marketing campaigns to social media advertisements, online behavioural advertising drives all the marketing you see online.

Start thinking about what information and social data could mean to your strategy — in the boardroom or on the battlefield.

Start thinking about having or regaining the tactical information advantage. Start thinking beyond this month, this year, this decade.

### Tweet this

Start thinking about what information and social data could mean to your strategy — in the boardroom or on the battlefield #SMROE

If you are not driving your strategy toward tactical advantage now, you are allowing your competitors and adversaries to fly right past you like Marty McFly on a hoverboard.

The *Back to the Future* reference here is deliberate. Whether you are looking at corporate entities like Kodak or military actions like the war in Iraq, organisations that fail to see the value in social media data will be sending themselves 'back to the future' when the strategies and tactics of their competitors or adversaries overtake them, irrevocably redefining the boardroom or battlefield environment in the process.

So whether you are planning for organisational crisis communications or military influence, understanding the big data game plan of social media is essential.

It's no longer enough to monitor your social media networks for retweets, comments and likes. This strategy barely scratches the surface of risk mitigation or online operational acuity. At best, it will give you a skewed view of the data; at worst, it will misinform your strategy and planning cycle, leading to opportunistic misfires.

### Tweet this

Understanding the big data game plan of social media is essential #SMROF

You may have noticed that I've mentioned planning cycles a few times already in this book. You'll hear me reinforce this endlessly. Social media in the online battlespace—whether in the public or the private sector—is cyclical in nature, and your planning needs to reflect the environment in which you work.

If that is in consumer-based marketing, you need to follow and roll with your data during each campaign. If you're in personal brand management, you need to know the when, how and why of your audience engagement during events, junkets, media interactions and business as usual. If you're in the military you need to be able to assess the data for OSINT, including threats, opportunities, audience sentiment and offline influence in the physical area of operation (AO).

## The narrative in your numbers: what story is your social data telling you?

I recognised the inherent story that lies within social media data early on when I was trawling through Facebook looking for criminals and their associates in the late noughties. And while my social spying days may be behind me, I still see the opportunities such broadscale data presents for a range of organisations and individuals.

For example, take your organisational Facebook page's insight tab for a spin and think about the story your data is telling you—in real, human terms like this:

'My name is Nicole, and I'm a 35 year old female who likes your page. I live in Melbourne, Australia. I click on your posts the most when they contain videos or when you promote posts so they come up in my timeline more regularly. Sometimes I click on calls to action that send me to your website. I don't like it when you post stupid LOLcat pictures. I'm online mostly during the morning and evening commutes. I engage most with your Facebook posts from my iPhone.'

### Let's take that a step further with API:

I use Expedia to research my overseas business trips and holidays. I also write reviews on TripAdvisor. After visiting these two sites, and logging in with my Facebook credentials, I tend to see A LOT more ads for travel-related products on my sidebar and in my news feed. It really annoys me and I don't click on them at all.'

I'm sure you're beginning to see not only the stories that are within your social media data but also the inherent value to you as a crisis communicator. Aggregated data tells a very distinct story about your audience segments.

Imagine how incredibly hard it would be in today's uber-connected and socially savvy world to communicate effectively, and with influence, without knowing anything about your audience. In a crisis, without knowing where to aim your social messaging, how can you be sure of hitting your target?

The key to unlocking organisational data, whether from social media, records management or the history files, is to humanise it. What's the story? Where are the personal touchpoints you and others like you can relate to?

#### Tweet this

The key to unlocking org data, whether from social media, records management or the history files, is to humanise it #SMROE

# Why social numbers don't always add up to Klout, influence, votes, dollars, sales and raving fans

Many people assume that those with a large social entourage (big social numbers) are at the pinnacle of social success. They command influence by simple virtue of winning the numbers game. Like a lot of things about social media, perceptions like this are often the result of a well-constructed façade: a big fancy shop window — but no customers in the store; a restaurant on one of the busiest, most fashionable strips — but no one's eating inside; a flashy car, a handbag dog, a celebrity lifestyle — all paid for on credit.

On social media, you can see accounts like this everywhere:

- plenty of fans, but no engagement
- tweeps galore, but no one is listing them
- LinkedIn connections up to the gazoo but really, how many of them do they actually know or will they convert to business leads?

Which makes a *quality* audience far more valuable than a bought or constructed audience. Sure, famous people and notable members of the public can amass militias of raving fans, but their popularity (or infamy) is a currency that trades on their reputation. When their life is all Disney and G-rated, everything is swell. As soon as they shake that G-rated tag, the paparazzi stalks them like they're on a human safari. Today's celebrity can quite easily become tomorrow's PR disaster.

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If you had sponsorship agreements with the likes of Lance Armstrong, Justin Bieber or Miley Cyrus before their respective falls from grace you were laughing all the way to the bank. But the moment their image became embroiled with drugs and scandal, by association they might as well have taken a wrecking ball to your brand at the same time their own was drained of social credibility.

Yes, they have numbers, but now people are more interested in watching the soap opera crisis than they are in them as performers or brand ambassadors.

So, whether the numbers are big or small, don't make assumptions. Until proven otherwise, assume everything is based on engagement rates. And then apply a commonsense filter.

Where are the better numbers in this equation?

Content and reputation have more value and meaning on social media than numbers ever will. This is reflected by people with impassioned followings or, as @PatFlynn likes to call them, 'Raving Fans'—people like:

- @PatFlynn
- @Brian Solis
- @QueenRania
- @MichioKaku
- @HillaryClinton
- @RichardBranson.

So if you've amassed a social entourage of raving fans, converting them to votes, likes, sales and Klout should be easy, right?



#### Tweet this

Content and reputation have more value and meaning on social media than numbers ever will #SMROE