COURSE CONCEPT

Digital Communications in Civilian Crisis Management

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1. INTRODUCTION

Successful strategic communication[1] benefits every entity that exercises it – government, international organizations, private companies, or peace operations and missions. The goal of strategic communication is to establish a trustworthy relationship with the audiences (target groups) by engaging with them in a timely, transparent and open manner. In the case of the peace operation missions, information technologies could be better utilized for strategic communication to increase support of the domestic and foreign public and increase its legitimacy. Improved communication would increase the effectiveness of the strategic communication and would not only help missions achieve greater public support and trust, but significantly contribute to achieving their mandate.

To effectively communicate in strategic manner, solely acquiring technological hardware and software is not enough. Missions need to recalibrate their communication efforts and address the question of "why to communicate" in greater detail, develop communication strategy based on the answers and make necessary organizational shifts. They need to take into account that, due to the rapid development of digital technologies, environment in which they operate has significantly changed. Increase of information warfare, and constantly changing digital landscape demand an organizational shift, where strategic communication should be set among the core mission activities.

Faced with many (communication) challenges, missions need to address the most pressing ones such as institutional organization that is not in favour of embracing strategic communication, lack of personnel, skills, trainings, and no policy, guidelines, monitoring and evaluation of communication activities. Their mandates, compositions and institutional cultures are also factors to be considered.

To address these challenges, improve missions' communication efforts and speed up the process of organizational shift towards effective strategic communication, the Centre for European Perspective (CEP) developed the course[2] that focuses on strategic communication and usage of digital tools in more efficient way. The course will bring together missions' communication experts and other relevant stakeholders and provide them the latest and most relevant theoretical and practical knowledge on how to effectively use information technology to enhance missions' communication performance.

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[1] Strategic communication is defined by Oxford Bibliographies as "The purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfil its mission." https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756841/obo-9780199756841-0007.xml (5. 11. 2021).

[2] The course is based on the ENTRi's (Europe's New Training Initiative for Civilian Crisis Management project) "New Media – Tools and Techniques in Civilian Crisis Management".

2. TARGET GROUP

The target group of the training are communication experts and other relevant stakeholders that are a part of communication activities, working in peace operations and missions (EU, UN, OSCE, AU). While age is not relevant for this course, it is desirable for experts to have knowledge and experiences in the field of communication.

3. OVERALL OBJECTIVES & GENERAL BACKGROUND

The overall objective of the course is to update and enhance participants' knowledge in the field of strategic communication, with an aim of strengthening the overall performance of missions' communication efforts. The outcome of the course would be seen in enhanced trust and improved relations with local and foreign public as well as legitimacy of the mission within local communities.

In pursuing the goal, the participants will receive contemporary, up-to-date communication knowledge provided by leading experts and practitioners in the field. The course will have a strong practical component as participants will be given time to put the knowledge into practice through a simulation at the end of the course as well as through workshops during the course.

The specific learning objectives are as follows:
- create a digital campaign strategy and identify its development phases;
- distinguish between traditional and digital tools, and identify differences and pros and cons of both;
- use the most common social media analytic tools and to recognize the importance of social media analysis for effective online communication;
- identify main principles of rhetoric and to improve the ability to convey information and convince and motivate others;
- explain how to use free/open source software and identify the main principles of visual and infographic creation;
- use main concepts for high-quality photography with a smartphone;
- use main concepts for a high-quality video with a smartphone and use software for editing videos;
- use tools, frameworks, and examples to enhance storytelling and message development, to create quality stories and messages, and to acknowledge the importance of storytelling and its impact on the effectiveness of message delivery;
- understand how to avoid hate speech and flagging and to adapt communication style according to written and "unwritten" rules in the online space;
- apply best practices in crisis communications planning and to use techniques to control the narrative in times of crisis;
- use the most popular open-source tools to search for anomalies and to verify information;
- identify main cyber-threats and improve personal cyber hygiene online.

General Background

In the current digital environment effective, up-to-date, and engaging communication is a must for all international actors as well as peace operation missions, which need to have a favourable public opinion to effectively achieve their goals. Even though the communication tools we have at our disposal are not new anymore, we still need to learn, develop and adapt to the constantly changing digital environment. Times of underestimation of strategic communication are gone. Actors need to be relevant by keeping in mind that what happens in virtual spaces may transcend into reality, and vice versa. The digital environment is fast-changing, unpredictable, and intertwined with reality. Therefore, communicators have to be now more skilled than ever to maintain a high level of public trust by engagement with local and foreign audiences.

The course will provide up-to-date communication knowledge for peace operation missions' communication experts with the aim of enhancing their strategic communication skills with a special focus on digital communication and establishment of a stronger presence of the mission in the digital space.

4. MODULES AND SUBJECT AREAS

The course is split in two modules that can be considered as two stand-alone trainings. The first module of the training is going to offer basic theoretical knowledge and can be held online, while the second module is hands-on oriented and needs to take place in person. The precondition for attending the hands-on module of the training is successfully accomplished first module of the training. During the first module of the training, theoretical components will be covered, which leaves more time for participants to put the knowledge into practice in the second, in-person module of the training. After successful completion of each of the modules, participants will receive a certificate.

MODULE 1: Fundamentals of Digital Communications

Subject 1: The Importance of Digital Communications in Civilian Crisis Management
- Reasons to communicate digitally. (essential)
- Responsibilities of communicators. (essential)

Subject 2: Traditional Media Tools vs. Digital Media Tools
- Distinguishing between traditional and digital Media tools. (essential)
- Identifying differences and pros&cons of both media tools. (essential)

Subject 3: Digital Campaign Development
- Identifying main phases of digital campaign development. (essential)
- Developing digital campaign. (essential)

Subject 4: How are we performing? Social Media Analytics
- Using the most common social media analytics tools. (essential)
- Recognizing the importance of social media analysis for effective online communication (essential)

Subject 5: Digital Rhetoric
- How to apply rhetorical principles to digital media. (essential)
- Ways of informing, persuading, and inspiring action in an audience through digital media. (desirable)

Subject 6: The Importance of Visuals in Digital Communications
- Reasons why to use visuals in digital communications. (essential)
- Types of Visuals. (essential)

Subject 7: Crisis Communication
- Using best practices in crisis communication planning. (essential)
- Building crisis response team. (desirable)
- Communicate effectively in a times of crisis. (essential)
- Using techniques to control the narrative in times of crisis. (essential)

Subject 8: Internet Safety and Security
- Identifying main cyber-threats. (essential)
- Using tools to secure electronic devices, webpages, etc. (essential)

MODULE 2: Applications of Digital Communications

Subject 1: The Importance of Visuals and How to Build Infographics
- Using free/open-source software for visual and infographic creations. (essential)
- Identifying key principles of visual and infographic creation. (desirable)

Subject 2: Storytelling Through Photo: Smartphone Photography
- Using main concepts – light, composition, perspective, self-portraits, editing – for a high quality photo with smartphone. (essential)

Subject 3: Storytelling Through Video: Smartphone Videography
- Using main concepts – exposure, light, composition, landscape – for a high quality video with smartphone. (essential)
- Using software for editing videos. (desirable)

Subject 4: Mastering Your Rhetorical Skills
- Identifying key principles of rhetoric. (essential)
- Enhancing speaking and presentation skills. (desirable)
- Improving the ability to convey information (essential)
- …and convince and motivate others. (desirable)

Subject 5: Message Development and Storytelling
- Using tools, frameworks and examples to enhance storytelling and message development. (essential)
- Acknowledging the importance of storytelling and its impact on the effectiveness of message delivery. (essential)
- Creating quality stories and messages. (desirable)
- Edutainment – Using entertainment to educate and to engage younger generations.

Subject 6: Influencer Marketing
- Reaching the audience with local influencers and getting message out to the audience. (essential)
- Ways to collaborate with local influencers. (essential)
- Conversation with a local influencer. (desirable)

Subject 7: Wits and Manners Online
- Avoiding hate speech and flagging. (essential)
- Adapting communication style according to written and "unwritten" rules in the online space. (desirable)
- Using manners and wits to enhance communication effectiveness. (essential)

Subject 8: How to Use Open Source Tools to Verify Information
- Using most popular open source tools to search for anomalies and to verify information. (essential)
- Easier identification of online content that needs verification. (desirable)

Subject 8: Simulation Exercise
- Putting all gained knowledge in practice and combining it in the cohesive whole. (essential)
- Enhancing and improving performance by accepting constructive feedback from the panel of experts. (desirable)

5. **TRAINING METODOLOGY**

The course will use various training methods. In the first (theoretical and virtual) part, lessons will be based on the case studies, more theoretical and will include guided discussions and experience sharing. Even though the lessons will take place virtually, they will be constructed as interactive as possible so participants will have to maintain high level of concentration and engagement to get prepared for the second (practical, in-person) part, which will be more practical and task/skills-oriented and will involve high amount of group-work. The highlight of the course is a simulation exercise, which will include components such as teamwork, interactivity, case study and demonstration of practical skills.

6. SUGGESTED ASSESMENT PROCEDURES AND STRATEGIES (To evaluate the actual achievement of learning objectives)

The assessment procure will be executed pre-, during and after the course with surveys, which will demonstrate knowledge acquisition of the participants. The surveys will evaluate learning and skills by comparing them against benchmarks. The assessment procedure will be as following.

Pre-course survey – will be done at least 10 days prior to the training event and will provide more specific information on participants' level of experience, seniority on the subject matter and specific expectations and special needs.

In- and Out- tests – In- tests will be done prior to the start of the training, or immediately at the beginning, while out- tests will be conducted at the end of the training. Both tests will measure participants' learning progress/success and identified principles, facts, and techniques that were understood and absorbed by the participants.

Panel of expert's feedback - at the end of the simulation exercise, panel of experts will provide immediate feedbacks, comments and will evaluate participants' results of the exercise.

Post-course evaluation – will follow immediately after delivery of the training. It will provide general estimate of the course's success and satisfaction based upon participants'' views. In addition, it will also addressed trainers' behaviour, participants' experience and reflected participant' opinions.

6-month-post-questionnaire – will be done 6 months after the closure of the training and will assess training-related transfer of learning/knowledge into behaviour.

7. LOGISTICS AND TRAINERS' REQUISITES

The first (theoretical) part of the course will take place virtually. Therefore, only Zoom link, quiet office, their time and dedication is needed for successful participation. For the second (practical) part of the course, more effort will be invested into logistics – particularly transportation, accommodation, conference hall and materials (such as cameras, flipcharts, lights, etc.).

Trainers will be carefully selected based on their expertise, experiences and practicality in terms of delivering the knowledge efficiently and effectively.

8. COURSE SYLLABUS/ESSENTIAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

The participants are required to take a test My Digi Skills (https://mydigiskills.eu/) at least 3 working days before the training and share the results with the training implementer.