

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST



Network Science Center at West Point

Advancing the Study of Network Science

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6th Annual Network Science Workshop

The Network Science Center at West Point is pleased to announce the 6th Annual Network Science Workshop which will be held from April 22-24, 2012. The focus of the workshop is to explore interdisciplinary approaches to Network Science that impact and

enhance military applications. We will explore the following topics: Networks in Command and Control, The Networked Patrol Leader (ex: Warrior Web, TIGR), Networks and Social Media, Organizational Analysis, and the Progress of Network Science.

For more information about submitting a paper or attending the workshop, please see [workshop](#) tab on the NSC website.

Workshop registration is open now through 1 April at <http://conta.cc/zTGn7x>.

Check out the [Central Node](#)

For information on current research and events.

Top three blog posts this month:

- [Understand the People](#)
- [Minerva Research Initiative at West Point](#)
- [Research Notes from ASEA Conference](#)

To learn more about the Network Science Center at West Point go to our website:

[http://
www.netscience.usma.edu](http://www.netscience.usma.edu)

Social Networks:



[Central Node](#)

Future of Social Media in the Military

By Kate Coronges, Evan Szablowski & Chris Arney

As our globalized world becomes more networked the newest generations of Americans are growing up in an increasingly connected society. Through use of modern technologies people are transforming the ways and means they talk to each other. Social Media (SM) have taken a central role in this transformation. Through various applications SM have caused us to change the way we communicate and how we think about social engagement. Young generations who have grown up enmeshed in SM have higher expectations about access to information, and young soldiers expect the military to be at the frontier of this communication revolution. As the military tries to innovate and stay relevant with new generations of soldiers it will have to confront these changing expectations.

In response to these challenges, the Army Research Labs sponsored a USMA team to explore SM in the military. The team was asked to analyze how younger generations use SM, what their expectations are around military SM and what issues the military will face as they try to meet those expectations. Utilizing new SM tools is an opportunity, but can also be seen as a necessity -- the Army must adapt to be relevant for the upcoming generations of Americans.

The SM phenomenon is a revolution of communication that has changed the way we share and create information. For many, Facebook has become synonymous with social media culture. For the younger generations Facebook is no longer a trend but a social requirement. A study found that 48% of 18-34 year olds check Facebook right after they wake up. It is a growing standard to not only have a profile, but to interact with it daily. Many people use Facebook as their main form of communication with their friends, especially those at a long distance. Facebook and other major social media tools such as Twitter and Google+ have revolutionized social interactions, and function as a good starting point from which to explore SM functionalities.

The military has begun to develop a host of new tools and systems that take advantages of SM features. For example, TIGR is used as an after-action system for reporting activity geospatially using text, pictures and videos, and which can be shared and amended over time. Another tool currently used in the military is FBCB2 ("Blue Force Tracker") which

facilitates battle tracking and situational awareness and shares information in real-time within vehicles and command posts. Current efforts are underway to equip soldiers with smart phones to create a universal and unified system of communication and applications that could help daily tasks and missions. Existing technologies show that the military is beginning to embrace the basic ideas of SM. However, the average soldier probably has not experienced any of these changes. So far the changes in military systems are far from reflecting the revolution in communication driven by SM and Web 2.0 innovations.

The cadet research team identified five main innovations that SM tools have advanced and thus, represent expectations that have grown out of the SM generation:

Interactive experiences: the ability to report and respond to events as they unfold. In current SM platforms, users have their own voices and can interact with others by responding to posts and presenting their own recommendations and opinions.

Integration of information: integration of information, from news to friend activity. Younger generations use SM everyday for messaging, photo sharing, calendars, news, music, organizing events, sharing documents, video chat, making friends, and building communities based on social or political causes. SM is not simply a place to share your latest thoughts, gossip or are updates on what you doing right now, but instead offers versatility by integrating many existing tools and technologies into a centralized platform with multiple capabilities.

Widespread audience: exchanges with entire groups at once. Another aspect of this platform is that it allows SM users to extend beyond a targeted recipient and share information with an entire network of friends and acquaintances.

Data immediacy: have access to information in real-time. The SM experience is largely based on its immediacy where real-time activity can be recorded and tracked,

and the user can interact or respond as events unfold.

Usability: logical and simple computer interfaces. SM users have come to expect a streamlined experience where there are a multitude of capabilities which are easily navigable through a point-and-click interface and intuitively organized and categorized.

The younger generations have grown up in a SM world that has shaped their understanding and expectations of how communication and collaboration work. The questions for the military are, "How can new innovations be applied within the military to meet the communication expectations of young soldiers?" and "How can SM be used to improve military operations?" Currently the military communicates mostly in a vertical manner; information flows up and down the hierarchy of the chain-of-command. SM by its principles facilitates a more horizontal flow of information. This horizontal flow results in SM users being exposed to multitudes of information and data every day and raised a number of issues about the access and spread with which the information is shared.

There are five important issues that should be addressed if the military is to move from a top-down or hierarchical information exchange to a horizontal one: (1) *quantity of information* (does unfiltered access mean information overload?), (2) *open access to secure information* (how do mission/roles change if the Army moves from a 'need to know' to a 'need to share' basis?), (3) *validation of information* (how is validation ensured when there is little or no authority or oversight), (4) *speed of exchanges* (does information exchange need to be real-time to be relevant to the young soldier?), and (5) *security* (what's the right balance of sharing important information within the organization with threats of security breaches from outside).

The bottom line is that the younger generations communicate differently and the Army must adapt to meet future expectations in communication. As we now live in a world of instant information, sharing and collaborating. We are not only learning to communicate differently, but actually beginning to think differently altogether. As new generations look at the world in new ways, the military must continue to anticipate and adapt.

Important Dates:

6th Annual Network Science Workshop - 22-24 April, 2012
Upcoming Brown bag lunches - Jan. 18 and Feb. 1

