

Semantic Social Mashup approach for Designing Citizen Diplomacy

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Advancement in technology brought exceptional connectivity, as well as easy and open access to communication mediums via the Internet. Everyday millions of people are interactively communicating to each other and sharing multimedia content through Social Media/Networks, Web-based and mobile-based technologies. Social media provides a variety of interesting, engaging applications such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, and Blogs. People interested in contributing to global welfare and improving humanity are connected to various NGO's like Red Cross, [Ushahidi](#) (www.ushahidi.com), [eMoksha](#) (emoksha.org), etc. Social media and NGOs are acting as an excellent medium of communication and sharing, connecting diverse people irrespective of their nationality, religion, culture, etc. Social media and mobile communication are natural tools to support citizen diplomacy; they have played a pivotal role in activism for governance, democracy and other causes, as demonstrated in the Iran Election, Haiti Earthquakes, and Tunisia crises[1].

While the technologies have enabled unique information sharing and spontaneous coordination, there is a lot more that is needed to support citizen diplomacy in a systematic and sustainable manner. How effective are these tools in resolving conflicts between countries? Consider a recent survey in Pakistan. "The U.S. government has been largest donor to the Pakistan flood relief effort, allocating \$200 million to date. Yet a recent Pew Foundation poll found about 59% of Pakistanis describe the U.S. as an enemy, while just 11% say it is a partner." [2] Having the discussion on these platforms didn't help to change the image of the U.S. Citizens of Pakistan appreciate the generous help provided by the U.S. in terms of food, money, and other resources; but, they think that the U.S. is a selfish country who wants to buy their hearts with money and help.

The above scenario clearly shows that technology advancements, communication tools, and even providing financial help for development, doesn't really resolve conflicts and misunderstanding between countries. Social Media in its current state doesn't do enough to dissolve borders, and it doesn't help enough in influencing mindsets to avoid terror attacks or wars. Studies have shown that poverty and a lack of education are not the main reasons for terrorism. In fact, there are number of terrorists with a very good financial background and a higher education.[3] So how can we design effective citizen diplomacy tools to influence mindsets for global peace?

Agenda for designing Citizen Diplomacy

Citizen diplomacy is about taking action to prevent conflicts and promote peace. In a recent TED talk[4], Noble peace laureate Jody Williams also placed a great emphasis on taking action in order to achieve world peace in real life. This action requires engaging people from different parts of the world; then educating each other in all types of differences, misunderstandings, misinformation about religions, ideologies, cultures, ethnicities, as well as national and political differences. If unresolved, they lead to disagreements. Some of the severe disagreements, without resolution or redress, will result in conflicts. Citizen diplomacy is also about bringing attention to the conflict and injustice involving core human rights and values. It is about developing tolerance, better understanding, and supporting mobilization leading to improving engagement across communities, groups and individuals. Furthermore, citizen diplomacy can inform, set the stage for and complement traditional diplomacy involving governmental and nongovernmental institutions.

We frame the agenda for designing effective citizen diplomacy as that of developing socio-technical systems (facilitating advancements in social media and mobile communications) to support the four levels of support:

Level 1: meet, communicate and engage,

Level 2: converse and coordinate, gain insight

Level 3: influence and advocate

Level 4: sustain, educate and transform

Our hypothesis is that going up the levels dramatically increases the effectiveness of socio-technical systems that support citizen diplomacy. Kno.e.sis' research involving computer scientists and social scientists in semantics-empowered social computing seeks to go up each level of this ladder.

Kno.e.sis' Relevant Work

[Twitris](http://twitris.knoesis.org) (twitris.knoesis.org) is a Semantic Social Web mashup designed to understand multi-dimensional social perceptions over an increasing variety of social content and traditional media, including tweets, SMS, Flickr, Wikipedia and Linked Open Cloud, multimedia Web content and electronic news media ([more on technical agenda](#)). It provides a platform to observe summaries of what people are talking about regarding a topic, and from where and when they are talking [6,7,8]. Current work includes sentiment and network analysis with the addition of real-time social media analytics. Twitris can help citizen diplomats by facilitating an understanding of viewpoints expressed by citizens from various countries on the same topic, at the same time, and then the evolution of these viewpoints over a period of time.

Twitris is evolving towards a platform for coordinating needs and resources in cases of disaster/crisis situations by analyzing SMS and Web reports about emergency responses and help submitted to Ushahidi platform (pakreport.org/ushahidi/). For efficient and timely co-ordination, Twitris is working on the development of a variety of domain models that encompass modeling resources in needs, geo-locations, organizations, event specific taxonomy, etc. These domain models evolve as relevant real-time information is available, using tools based on our work on Continuous Semantics [10]. This work can help NGOs and government organizations working on global welfare, disaster and emergency management.

Another citizen diplomacy relevant research work driven by Twitris is the study of social perceptions to understand conversations between people. Understanding conversations plays a very important role in citizen diplomacy since conversations can lead to understanding, agreements and resolution of conflict. Unfortunately, at other times conversations lead to the disagreements which are the roots for conflicts between communities and nations. For this, we are working to develop and use Socio-Cultural-Behavior models which could serve as a lens for understanding conversation threads by correctly interpreting content biased with spatial, cultural, and behavioral attributes. This understanding of conversations provides a basis to form communities based on common interests; because people with similar interests are more likely to interact and thus build trust over time due to the Homophily nature of human society. These communities possess strength by a bond of common interests between members of diverse cultures, religions, or nations, and thus play a significant role when it comes to discussion about conflict understanding and resolution.

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