

Obama Team Effectively Utilizes Online Social Networking for Public Diplomacy ^[1]

Through the use of new technology, President Obama has made it clear that when he speaks in Ghana this Saturday, July 11, he intends to move from monologue to dialogue as the U.S. State Department opens up venues for greater public participation in the conversation.

The U.S. State Department expects an outpouring of people from all over Africa. They also recognize, however, that there will be millions who would like to be present and will not be able to attend. In an effort to further reach out to all Africans, they have created several different venues for citizen participation.

To begin with, President Obama has participated in pre-Ghana conversations with African citizens even before he embarked on his most recent overseas trip. He has spoken with AllAfrica.com, where Africans were given the opportunity to ask Obama questions and receive answers. He will also take questions from here and other sources in radio interviews when he arrives in Africa.

Additionally, the White House team for new media has created multiple platforms to encourage responses. These include text messaging with unique country codes, a Twitter feed ([#obamaghana](#)), and Facebook online chat for the event. Each of these venues promotes citizen participation in shared public spaces.

Finally, the U.S. Government has encouraged members in virtual worlds to pick up the event and host their own conversations. In Second Life, I have been participating with a group that is convening interested citizens for a conversation discussing what it means to be a global citizen and how technology has created a new virtual public sphere to develop a marketplace of ideas. These places offer individual citizens the chance to articulate their views and suggest viable solutions.

In short, these initiatives demonstrate the very best potential for new technology to facilitate public diplomacy for dialogue and citizen engagement. It allows Obama to answer tough policy questions in ways that encourage maximum participation while strategically influencing the general African population. No other U.S. Administration has thus far been either willing or able to create such an open public network.

And despite this "new media" push, there continues to be an emphasis on even more ubiquitous means of communication such as radio to acknowledge those who are on the other side of the digital divide.

In terms of public diplomacy utilization of new technology, this outreach is one of the most progressive in U.S. history. Of course, this openness is certainly easier to pursue when a President can expect tremendous support and high approval ratings in target regions.
