

Sciullo, Maria. "Facebook, Twitter, Instagram Part of Political Landscape." *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* (November 7, 2012).

Wortham, Jenna. "Facebook to Buy Mobile Start-Up for \$1 Billion." *New York Times* (April 10, 2012).

Instant Messengers, IRC, and ICQ

Instant Messengers (IM), Internet Relay Chat (IRC), and ICQ are all protocols or software clients enabling online chat. As predecessors to social media platforms, these forms of Internet communication enable users to engage in real-time, text-based discussions. IRC is the Internet's first chat network, developed in 1988 in response to the popularity of online discussions on Bulletin Board Systems (BBSs) in the 1970s and 1980s. BBSs only allowed asynchronous communication.

Blossoming in the 1990s, the IRC network currently still operates from more than 2,000 servers worldwide, and the top 100 networks serve 500,000 people at any given time, according to Netsplit. IRC, accessible through clients or Internet browsers, enables real-time conversations. IRC is mostly collective, taking place in channels. Invisible to fellow users, one-to-one exchanges are also possible in private mode.

Political Role of IRC

Little attention is given to how IRC was used for political purposes among citizens, similar to contemporary social media applications. IRC is a historical predecessor of today's use of Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube for airing dissident voices (e.g., by Occupy or Arab Spring protesters). When Communist Party hard-liners sought to overthrow the Soviet government led by pro-reform president Mikhail Gorbachev during the Soviet coup d'état attempt (August 19 to 21, 1991), IRC played a key role in circulating information within the Soviet Union and beyond. A media blackout affected traditional media and communication networks, including newspapers, TV, radio, and telephone. However, RELCOM (one of the Soviet Union's first Internet service

providers [ISPs]) was not censored, allowing alternative information to be circulated among the Soviet people and the outside world, which in turn assisted Gorbachev to regain authority. Similarly, IRC was used to circulate bottom-up citizen perspectives on events such as the 1992 U.S. presidential election, the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, Gulf War events, and the 1994 earthquake in California, according to Ibiblio. Besides political and everyday use, IRC is known to be used for terrorist recruitment, criminal activities, and the dissemination of pirated and illicit sexual materials through private messages. By virtue of its decentralized workings, the intelligence community has difficulties in proactively monitoring all chat sessions. Furthermore, IRC chat is prone to hacker attacks, because exchanges are often collective and unencrypted, and activity typically spans long time periods.

ICQ

ICQ was the first IM client, launched in 1996 by the Israeli company Mirabilis. IM is a social media technology that allows users to privately exchange written messages in real time. Users can add people to their personal lists of contacts. Besides one-on-one communication, one-to-many communication consists of the broadcasting of personalized screen names to the audience of fellow users added to the contact list. In 1998, ICQ was acquired by the America Online (AOL), and in April 2010, it was bought by the Moscow-based investment group Digital Sky Technologies (DST).

The client has fallen out of fashion among users in the United States, but its popularity continues across eastern Europe and Russia (with 50 million active users in 2010). The transfer of servers to Russia that resulted from the latest transaction is feared to hinder U.S. law enforcement monitoring and investigations of user activities. Furthermore, the Russian Federal Security Service has achieved a greater stronghold over ICQ activities because it has rightful access to user data in the event of suspected security threats. Unlike other IM clients, on ICQ, only a five-digit unified identification number is permanent; other details such as personal information, display name, and contact details can be altered without having to reregister. This feature allows users great influence over their

privacy; great anonymity simultaneously provides increased opportunity for malevolent use.

Other Instant Messengers

Other prominent IM clients are Windows Live Messenger (formerly Microsoft Messenger, or MSN) with an active user base of 330 million in 2009, Apple's iMessage with 140 million active users in 2012, AOL Instant Messenger (AOL) that dominated the U.S. market but diminished to 4 million active users in 2012, and the Chinese Tencent QQ with an estimated 440 million active users in 2011. Recent additions to IM are the inclusion of voice and video chat and casual games.

IM remains relatively understudied because data gathering within this private space is not straightforward; users control who they let into their networks, and exchanges are not stored in a publicly accessible environment online, but mostly on the computers of users. On the level of identity politics of everyday use, it should be noted that text-based digital interaction was initially celebrated by scholars for its theoretical potential for sustaining disembodied identity, including gender, race, and looks. Separated from the offline physical world, IRC, IM, and ICQ, by virtue of their disembodiment, would be equalizing, democratizing, and empowering. Recent scholarship has, however, proven that offline power relations also pervade online written interaction.

Koen Leurs
Utrecht University

See Also: Activists and Activism, Digital; Chat Rooms; Evolution of Social Media; Identity Politics; Platform; World Wide Web, History of the.

Further Readings

- Atlas, Amelia. "Team Obama Told to Ditch Instant Messaging." *Newsweek* (January 18, 2009). <http://www.newsweek.com/story/48239/team-obama-told-to-ditch-instant-messaging.html> (Accessed January 2013).
- Ibiblio. "Logs of Major Events in the Online Community." <http://www.ibiblio.org/pub/academic/communications/logs> (Accessed December 2012).
- Netsplit. "Internet Relay Chat." <http://irc.netsplit.de> (Accessed December 2012).

Institute for Public Diplomacy and Global Communication

The Institute for Public Diplomacy and Global Communication (IPDGC) at George Washington University (GWU) examines public diplomacy on a global scale in the 21st century. IPDGC is a new vehicle for public diplomacy to connect with foreign publics. By combining the power of social media with leading U.S. and global political figures, the institute has established itself as a center to both inform and influence the global dialogue. As the institute's director Sean Aday notes, the lines between public diplomacy and diplomacy and that of the people and those in power are now blurred.

Established in 2001, the institute lies within the School of Media and Public Affairs of the Columbian College of Arts and Science, and the Elliot School of International Affairs, in collaboration with the University's Public Diplomacy Council. It is part of the university's global communication master's program and is led by Sean Aday. Aday joined the university's School of Media and Public Affairs in 2000, and focuses his work on the intersection of the press, politics, and public opinion.

The institute has five primary core focus areas: new media, security, and public diplomacy; the role of women and gender in security, communication, and diplomacy; 21st-century U.S. foreign policy priorities, such as China, Iran, and Africa; "whole of government," interagency challenges, particularly in the areas of public diplomacy and strategic communication; and global perspectives and approaches to public diplomacy.

It studies how fast information moves, how people connect with one another, and the impact of mass communications. Through conferences, panels, research talks, and workshops, the institute seeks to advance public diplomacy through scholarship, research, consultation, and professional services.

IPDGC has welcomed leading scholars, leaders, practitioners, and undersecretaries of state through its doors, and has offered training for nongovernmental organizations and embassies. Diplomatic officials from around the globe have