

Audience – Batch of 09-19 AFPCRS Program for Social Media Product Development and Management

Be Focused and Consistent in your Messaging & Information Campaign

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MGen Bienvenido Datuin sir and Mrs Datuin.

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The 45 students of Batch 09-19 and the men & women of the AFP Civil Relations Service) Good morning.

I am happy and truly honored to be invited in today's opening ceremony of Social Media Product Development and Management batch 09-19. As a reserve officer of the Armed Forces, it is always a pleasure to serve the AFP in any way I can.

I would like to begin by stating the obvious – social media is huge.

In the 2019 Global Digital Report prepared by *We are Social* (a global social media consultant) and *Hootsuite* (a social media management platform), as of April 2019, there are 3.5 billion social media users globally out of 4.4 billion internet users today. The 4.4 billion of internet users represent a growth of 8.6% vs LY.

The same study said that Facebook continues to dominate the internet as the top social media platform with over 2.7 billion users, followed by YouTube with 1.9 billion users, messaging services WhatsApp (1.5 billion) and Facebook Messenger with 1.3 billion users. In the Philippines, there are 42.6 million users of Facebook. This is according to statista.com (a global statistics portal).

When texting became the rage many years ago, the Philippines was recognized as the text capital of the world. Based on the same study, we have now become the social media capital of the world. In 2018, Filipinos spend up to 10 hours and 2 minutes daily online, the highest in the world. Brazil is second at 9 hours and 29 minutes, while Thailand is third at 9 hours and 11 minutes. Last year, we came in second to Thailand at 9 hours and 38 minutes.

In e-commerce, latest data from Statista's *Digital Market Outlook* shows that the total annual spend in on-line retailing in 2017 has reached almost US \$ 1.5 trillion, with fashion products representing the largest single category. This amount represents a growth of 16 percent vs 2018.

With billions of users around the world, social media has the power to spread information and the ability to reach so many people across the globe in a short period of time. It is not limited by time nor distance. Web sites are open 24 hours a day and, barring a major catastrophe or government ban, web sites never close shop. Without a doubt, social media can influence the minds, decisions, and behavior of so many people.

It has become an integral part of our daily lives, especially among our youth (more popularly known as the “Millenials”). Even our young children. It has become the platform, to acquire and share information, to intermingle socially, to acquire knowledge & skill, to communicate, and to facilitate the exchange of goods & services regardless of currency.

Indeed, there seems to be no limit to what social media can do.

Unfortunately, not everything in social media is positive. There are concerns with data privacy, the proliferation of false information or fake news, hacking, and other negative experiences. Despite these controversies, the world continues to embrace the internet and its dominant organism – social media. Global digital growth and social media use shows no sign of slowing down.

To our budding social media developers and managers in the AFP-Civil Relations Service, this digital space, we call social media, in the realm of the internet, this is your theatre of war. Here, you must battle against the perpetrators of disinformation and mongerers of fake news. Their objective is to obscure the truth and mislead the public. Their ultimate goal - to destabilize our government and prevent us from achieving peace, development, and security.

As members of the AFP-CRS, your mandate is clear - provide timely and accurate information to our people and to counter-act false information so that our people are well-informed and can make respochoices.

You need to inform our people about the AFP and its programs. This will help create a more favorable atmosphere between the AFP and the communities we serve. Our people know that our soldiers are fighting in the battlefield. What we need to know is whether our soldiers understand the causes of conflict in our communities and what are you doing about it. Only the military has the resources, training, and capabilities to carry out these most difficult tasks.

Whenever I ask many of my colleagues in the private sector what they think of our Armed Forces, I observe that many of them are quite uninformed. Some are mis-informed. Some still recall stories of abuse in the past. Like fake news, these wrong impressions need to be corrected.

To help correct these impressions, I would show them pictures of our soldiers helping communities- whether it is rebuilding a school, leading a medical/dental mission, or helping with the distribution or transport of relief goods. I have these pictures because I follow the FB posts of several military units. I have FB posts from The Philippine Army, the Navy, PMC, WesMinCom, AFP ResCom, and the TAS Brigade. Facebook worked so effectively. When they read the posts, end of discussion. The right impressions or images are created.

To our social media developers and managers in the AFP, we need you to correct the many wrong impressions out there. Most people have become preoccupied with their day-to-day concerns that they have lost interest or have lost touch with their Armed Forces. Who can blame them? There was a time when our military and police organizations had a bad rep. You and I know that such is no longer the case, so we need you to work a little harder.

Social media is your theatre of war. And what an interesting time it is to be in this kind of warfare. They say that the Chinese have a curse – “May you live in interesting times”. Like it or not, we live in interesting times. The environment is volatile, the future is uncertain, the issues are complex, and the competitive landscape is ambiguous. However, these times are also filled with so much opportunity. And one great opportunity that we have now is the opportunity to build a stronger, united, and conflict-resilient country. Imagine the possibilities.

With so much information to process and a myriad of issues to address, the information campaign must be focused and consistent. Your campaign must convey a consistent message across the key dimensions of our society.

On the political dimension, your campaign should convey strength, victory, and stability. For the first time in our history, we have a strong leader who has the political will and strong determination to wage war on two fronts: the war against illegal drugs and the war against corruption in government. Our people need to understand these wars. They need to understand why it needs to be fought and why the President’s methods make sense. You need to show that, despite his idiosyncrasies, rude behavior, or foul language, this administration under his leadership is winning these wars. And he is winning by strengthening our political institutions.

Be confident. Take confidence in the latest SWS survey. As of 1Q 2019, President Duterte has a net satisfaction rating of +72% (81% satisfied, 9% dissatisfied). He is performing his job very well. So, on the political front, these are the three key messages- strength, victory, and stability.

On the economic front, your messages should convey strength, sustainability, and confidence. Strong government and household consumption drove the Philippine economy to grow by 6.8% in the 1st quarter of 2018, despite a slower agricultural output, elevated oil price, a weak peso, and wider trade deficit. Our gross domestic product, or GDP, grew by 6.8% in Q1

2018. This is the 10th consecutive quarter that the economy grew by 6.5% or better. This is slightly higher than the 6.4% growth in the same period a year ago.

Inflation rates are back to the 3%-4% range after jumping to 6.7% in Sept 2018. Its back to NEDA's target levels. Bank lending rates are stable hovering in the 6%-8% range which provides an encouraging environment for our businessmen and entrepreneurs. So, in terms of the economy, our economic foundation is strong. Its growth is sustainable and foreign investors are taking a serious second look at the Philippines.

In the socio-cultural sphere, three cultural trends seem to stand out, namely: diversity, equality, and the potential of our youth. More women are performing more significant roles in our society today. More women are occupying positions of leadership in our public institutions and private organizations. Aside from improved education, this is due to an increased awareness for social equality.

More and more husbands are staying at home. There is a rise in the number of single parents and adultescents – people who have jobs, are thirty something but still live with their parents, have no mortgages, and no responsibilities. The millennials have become more expressive of their opinions, not only in the workplace, but also in the political space. So I hope that you would engage our women and our millennials for they are eager to participate and have much to offer.

On the technological space, advances in technology continue to improve our lives. Some of these technological improvements have made a huge impact on our information and communications systems. Cheap smartphones have enabled more people to communicate more on free texting via apps such as WeChat and Messenger. There is a reemergence of voice calls, thanks to WhatsApp and Viber. Advertising has shifted from the traditional to digital.

We have become a multi-cultural society because of advances in the ICT. Think about American music, K-pop, Korean tele-novelas, Indian Yoga, Chinese feng shui, Japanese anime, to name a few. Because of these advances, the number of netizens and their reliance on online tools to keep in touch have also grown tremendously.

With technological advances in the background, I am curious as to whether your systems and capabilities in the AFP-CRS are at par with the capabilities of your adversaries. It goes without saying that the AFP-CRS should upgrade its equipment and systems to ensure that these young managers/developers in front of us now can do their jobs. Invest in your capabilities for handling, storing, accessing, and disseminating information. These are your weapons.

With regard to the environment, we can see that people are more aware of climate change, its causes, and its destructive effects. The devastation brought by and the lives lost from Super

Typhoon Yolanda is a grim reminder of nature's destructive power. Because of these, we can see that government policies and directives now favor the environment more than private or business interests. Thank you again President Duterte and Sec Roy Cimatu.

We are a disaster-prone country. As practitioners of social media, your people (constituents) deserve more information as to whether our government agencies (both at the national and local levels), our military, and other stakeholders in these disaster-prone communities have all learned from their past failures. Do we now have the processes and capabilities to coordinate with each other? Have we learned how to handle these disasters better both during and post-disaster? One of the AFP's key mission areas is humanitarian assistance and disaster response (HADR). We need to know that all of the key players have improved their policies, systems, and capacities to perform their respective roles.

So please find out. Validate and let us know.

On the Legal front, there are several issues I personally would want you to handle very well. In no particular order, these are the BBL, EO70, and the ROTC bill.

We eagerly await the implementation of the Bangsamoro Basic Law. We look forward to a lasting peace and sustainable development in the conflict areas in Muslim Mindanao. For decades, our people in Mindanao have suffered. Conflict has discouraged investments. Conflict was not able to create meaningful employment. Conflict did not deliver a better life for many of our Muslim and Catholic brothers in Mindanao. Please convey the message of hope for a lasting peace and the promise of the much-awaited development of a resource-rich Mindanao.

There are so many exciting opportunities in a peaceful Mindanao. As previously mentioned, Mindanao is rich in natural resources. Under the Build-Build-Build program, there are plans to build new airports and seaports. There is even a railroad project being planned for Mindanao. Imagine the possibilities of a peaceful and invigorated Mindanao.

However, there are interest groups who want us to fail. They do not want to see a peaceful Mindanao and an invigorated/excited Philippines. I hope that you can target these groups and neutralize them.

Recently, the President signed EO No. 70 institutionalizing the Whole-of-Nation approach in attaining inclusive and sustainable peace, creating a National Task Force to end local communist armed conflict and directing the adoption of a national peace framework.

Please inform our citizens about this Whole-of-Nation approach. Everyone needs to understand what it means. So please provide more opportunities to discuss the concept and preferably in multiple formats so that everyone can be informed and participate. Lead us. Lead the call to action. We will participate.

There are two versions of the ROTC bill which are pending in both houses of Congress. I believe the AFP-CRS should take a more active role in the dissemination of right information. Again, it is your duty to correct the wrong impressions about the ROTC.

I believe in the ROTC program. It builds character and hones the leadership skills of our young people. Both MGen Datuin and I are products of the ROTC program. We wouldn't be here with you today had we not joined the ROTC program in UP.

Aside from a leadership training school, the ROTC program is a force multiplier. Reservists and ROTC cadets can be called to action and relied upon in times of national emergencies especially natural disaster. We need the youth to be organized, trained, and capable of response.

You need to engage the youth. You need to listen to them and provide more opportunities for meaningful discussions toward the revival of an ROTC program that is relevant to the times and more relevant to our youth.

Your resources are limited. That is why you need to reach out to more people and build more partnerships. In an environment of limited financial and human capital, building partnerships are strategic.

I am happy to know and am quite proud of my classmate, MGen Datuin, because through his initiatives, the AFP-CRS has built partnerships with private organizations such as ABSCBN, PAL, Phil Jaycees, etc. These partnerships are extremely important and, therefore, more partnerships need to be formed.

Private corporations have annual budgets for their corporate social responsibility programs, or CSR programs. Annually. If you can organize, train, and deploy a team of CRS soldiers capable of presenting CRS programs to companies, you could align your programs with the CSR programs and budgets of these private corporations. THEN your capabilities will be enhanced and more CRS programs may reach out to more people and sectors of our society.

When all your hard work is done and all your plans and programs have been implemented, how do we know that you have performed your mandate? How can we say that you have accomplished your mission?

In my opinion, you would have accomplished your mission when more people have become more informed AND when more sectors and stakeholders are actively participating in your programs. THEN we can say that, indeed, a more favorable atmosphere between the AFP and its various stakeholders has been created and sustained. Mission Accomplished.

Thank you once again for giving me this opportunity. My congratulations and best wishes to the new batch of social media warriors.

Mabuhay ang AFP-CRS. Mabuhay ang AFP. Mabuhay ang Pilipinas.

Magandang umaga po muli sa inyong lahat.

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