

# Social Communication during Modern Conflict

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## **Abstract**

Today's armed conflicts have different backgrounds. Some countries are fighting to gain independence, others for influence, and still others are experiencing civil wars. Among the most frequently cited causes of conflict, there are primarily cultural, ethnic and religious differences. Increasingly, they also include environmental threats. These can occur when, for example, one country uses a chemical agent that threatens the environment or the people of a neighboring country. The purpose of this article is both to present the relationship between social communication and modern conflict and to point out the dangers that can be caused by social communication conducted inadequately. The authors also wished to provide insight into the impact of the democratization of social communication on the conduct of modern conflict and the value of properly conducted social communication.

**Keywords:** social communication, conflict, media, democratization

## **Introduction**

Social communication is the domain of all human activities in which there is contact with at least two social units. It refers to the exchange of information between them at both the verbal (words) and non-verbal (gestures, symbols, body language, space, etc.) levels. The cultural content of a message is of particular importance in the process of social communication.

Communication, understood as a system of multiple relationships between political actors, organizations, media or people, today has a special ability to shape relationships with each other, promote established behavior and political, social and cultural patterns. An important role in these processes is played by the media, which, as a tool, has become not only the main source of images and descriptions of social reality, but also an effective tool for activating and promoting innovation. As a result, modern conflicts are among the phenomena characterized by a high degree of mediatization.

## **Media and Conflicts - A Case Study**

The media has become a vehicle for the transmission of information, aimed at dynamically shaping, modifying or changing knowledge, attitudes and behavior in a direction that is consistent with the values and interests of the interacting actors. The main purpose of any message, verbal or non-verbal, is to try to convey information to the recipient, who ascribes specific meanings to the words and gestures coming from the sender.

In the communication process, conflict can be defined as a clash of differing views and interests. An example of using information to start a conflict is the 2003 attack on Iraq. At the time, the testimony of a witness, an Iraqi chemist, was used to describe mobile biological weapons factories placed on trucks.

Rafid Ahmed Alwan al-Janabi worked at the Jerf al-Nadaf Military Factory near Baghdad in the mid-1990s. He left Iraq for Germany, where he was granted political asylum because he allegedly agitated against Saddam's regime. In March 2000, he was contacted by the German secret service Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND). An officer of that institution began to question Janabi about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and the man came up with a

story about truckloads of biobombs that were supposedly kept at the Jerf al-Nadaf facility, among others. The interrogations continued for several months, with Janabi developing his story and providing more details. In November 2000, German and British agents met with Janabi's former boss. The latter vehemently denied reports of trucks with biological weapons in Jerf al-Nadaf. At the time, Janabi admitted that he had made the whole thing up.

For almost two years the case went quiet, until in May 2002 BND operatives returned to get more information about the weapons, despite denials. In return, they promised to help Janabi bring his Moroccan wife and child to Germany. The talks touched on various issues, but it wasn't until February 2003 that the agents returned to the most important topic. A month later, Powell<sup>1</sup> gave a famous speech in which he referred to descriptions of Janabi. According to the Iraqi's story, the Germans were so eager to find confirmation of the presence of weapons of mass destruction that they believed everything Janabi had previously said. He himself claims that the descriptions he gave them could have been invented by any chemical engineer. Janabi also alleges that the BND's intelligence service broke the terms of the agreement as it agreed not to pass on his confessions to other intelligence agencies. The Iraqi's confessions are further evidence of how fragile the decision to invade Iraq was made on.

### **Democratization of Social Communication**

Strategic communication is also used in the conduct of conflicts. It involves planned and thoughtful communication activities aimed at achieving the long-term interests of a specific entity. It allows you to reach specific target groups to promote your own conviction. Strategic communication within the defence framework is the responsibility of the Ministry of Defence, having at its disposal the Operations Center of the Minister of Defence. The center manages the public communication process - external and internal to the ministry - except for reporting on the mood of the military community. It also manages

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<sup>1</sup> 65-th Secretary of State of the United States from 2001 to 2005

matters in the field of defence-related social research. The center shapes the ministry's image and studies public sentiment in the context of the activities of the ministry.

Media and social communication sciences in the context of strategic communication emphasize the importance of the media in the communication process. With the progressive evolution of civilization and the spread of free access to information, the media have gained a monopoly on manipulating information and policy makers as well as entire societies. In the context of information warfare, the media has become an effective tool of the enemy in psychological operations. Through the media message, concrete, personified information reaches the enemy, appealing to emotions related to one's own safety and the health and life of one's family.

To understand the democratization of social communication, first it is necessary to know the definition of democratization. It is the process of transforming the political system to expand the political participation of citizens in the activities of a state, that is, the process of transition from a non-democratic to a democratic system. It takes place at 3 levels: institutional or formal, legal and social, and mentality. Juxtaposed with social communication, the democratization of social communication should be understood by involving a growing community of citizens in social media and online engagement.

### **The Value of Information**

Having already understood the definition of democratization and social communication and realizing the impact that information can have, one can focus on the value that information has.

We have come to live in a time when we lie to ourselves, claiming that the world is ruled by money. A simple example can be given to confirm these words. Looking at a large corporation such as Coca - Cola, one can easily come to the conclusion that they trade in sums that the average person will not have a chance to experience in his entire life, but what would Coca - Cola be without its unique taste? The greatest value of this company is not the sphere of influence, revenue in general or recognition, because it is not difficult to imagine a situation in which this giant withdraws from a country reducing all the features

mentioned earlier. The greatest value of this company is the formula, namely the information about the composition. At this point, only three people in the entire world possess it and there is a provision in the terms of their contract that obligatorily prohibits them from traveling on the same means of transportation, because if all three die at the same time, the company will lose its *raison d'etre*. At this point, we begin to see the true value of information in itself, because receiving a large amount of cash at one time is less profitable than having the knowledge of how to make millions. Moving on to the substance, information is a powerful means used to achieve one's own goals, whether they are the interests of individuals or entire societies. Referring to the previously mentioned arguments and realizing the real values of social communication, democratization, information and interests, we can move on to the use of these in modern conflicts.

### **The Power of the Internet**

More than half of the world's population is an Internet user, which provides the opportunity to reach an unimaginably large audience. It is not difficult to guess that this provides a huge number of opportunities, but also poses a large number of risks. Such a powerful tool in the wrong hands can spread evil of the best quality and best quantity.

Taking into account that only less than a quarter of people verify the information they read on the Internet gives us an idea of how big a problem we may be dealing with here. The Internet community, as an interest group of military circles, is a powerful tool that will exert a certain influence on the *de facto* target group through the mass media through properly given information and opinions.

Analyzing the example of hybrid warfare that has been going on for several years in Ukraine and Russia, we can see the use of all the previously mentioned instruments to achieve not only political, but also military goals. The growing number of informed Internet users translates not only public sentiment into shaping, but also has an impact on a very important military parameter, namely morale. The use of public opinion as a tool to influence large corporations that, for example, are withdrawing from the Russian Federation territory has become one of the most widely used means to make the average

representative of that country aware that something is happening behind the propaganda curtain. At this point, even if the ordinary citizen is not given true information, he is able to see the hidden problem. To confirm these words, one can cite the case of the McDonald's chain, which, after an uninterrupted 30 years, withdrew from the market of Russia due to its military aggression against Ukraine. Ordinary residents, observing the changes that took place in the market, the emptiness of the stores and the little information that came from across the border, began to express their concerns through mass protests that ended in arrests and the suppression of riots. This is one of many examples of one side of the conflict exerting influence on the other through the mass media.

Any propaganda is able to be coped with when accusations come from the mouth of an individual, but when real information comes directly to citizens via instant messaging that cannot be controlled, people will begin to be aware of the realities they face. The Internet community as a collection of people from all over the world who have their own ideas have invented a new way to fight the idealized information published by the propaganda of the Russian Federation. Despite the fact that they can't fight on the front lines they began to participate in the information war by creating numerous memes, ridiculing images while belittling the power of the aggressor. In this way they have found a very simple, yet effective and accessible tool to almost everyone to raise awareness of the conflict and current events even to people who do not follow news portals. On the other hand, however, we can see a different use of social media as a means of relief.

When considering the situation of Ukraine and the generally understood sympathy towards their citizens by the international community, one can observe solidarity with the people of this country. People from all over the world united in their actions through various portals show support and send material aid to those in need, affected by the conflict. Following this example with the help of mass media, certain groups have been forced or voluntarily taken action to start or end the actions taken. One of these groups is Anonymous which is a group of activists who are taking an active part in the ongoing hybrid warfare. Acting in line with prevailing public opinion about Russia's aggression

against Ukraine, they have undertaken a series of attacks on civilian and military information infrastructures revealing the truth and obstructing the Federation's troops.

## **Conclusion**

Summarizing all the information previously given, we can easily come to the conclusion of how important social communication is as a tool for increasing awareness of people using the Internet. Knowing the true value of information and how to use it, we come to the conclusion that it is an important instrument especially during modern conflicts. Given that it is only a means to achieve the goals of individuals or groups, we must realize that despite growing awareness it can still pose a threat even to the modern-day giants of the international arena. The Internet community seems to be confirming this rule and taking the first steps towards globalization in the broadest sense in order to create transnational structures and create a world village. Having in mind that the technological boom has really only just begun, more than 60% of the population is going beyond its reach and is able to contact without any problems across all borders with other people even on the other side of the world. Let's hope, as it dies last, that such a powerful weapon will spread goodness, because it is solely up to us how we use it.

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