The Impact of Web 2.0 on Public Engagement in the Israeli Home Front (From the 2006 Lebanon War to the 2014 Israel-Gaza Conflict)

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ABSTRACT

This article deals with citizen engagement and public participation being in crisis on the Israeli home front, in the era of Web 2.0. Since 2004, Web 2.0 characterizes changes that allow users to interact and collaborate with each other in a social media dialogue as creators of user-generated content in social networking sites: Facebook, Twitter, blogs, wikis, YouTube, hosted services, applications, WhatsApp, etc. Since 2006, Israel is involved in asymmetric conflicts. The research defines the impact of Web 2.0 on public engagement in the Israeli home front. The case studies examined in the research are: 1) The 2006 Lebanon War (July-August 2006); 2) The Gaza War (27 December 2008 and ended on 18 January 2009); 3) Operation Pillar of Defense (November 2012); and 4) The 2014 Israel–Gaza conflict.

KEYWORDS

Applications, Asymmetric Conflicts, Crisis, Crowdsourcing, Facebook, Home Front, Missiles, Public Engagement, Rockets, Shelters, Smartphones, WhatsApp

INTRODUCTION

The world has changed completely: first, at the end of the 20th Century, the internet (Web 1.0) entered into people’s everyday life; second, at the beginning of the 21st Century, Google and the social media revolution (Web 2.0) together with the invention of the smartphone, iPhone, Android, tablets and apps (application software) became life itself. Nowadays 85% of the people in the world have internet access and nearly 25% of the people in the world use social media (Ahmad, 2013). The Web 2.0 Era (Anderson, 2007) is one of users who fill the empty platforms with information and know-how by means of Google searches and by uploading statuses, posts, photographs, video clips, films and music, tweeting tweets as well as location updates on social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google maps, Pinterest, YouTube, Waze, WhatsApp, etc.).

Emergency situations characterized by special needs relating primarily to the local community and absorbed centrally, damage the body, mind and material (Procopio & Procopio, 2007). In an emergency situation, some of the difficulties cannot be entirely solved through mass media. However, internet, e-mails, smartphones, social networks and apps constitute individually or jointly a suitable tool for particular assistance and support in these situations, thanks to the possibilities they offer like: sharing and engagement between the public, communities, entrepreneurs, developers and corporations.
During a crisis three players are engaged in emergency activities in social networks: 1. The companies managing the networks like Facebook and Twitter, who invest in upgrading and adapting themselves to the requirements in order to meet all the needs during emergencies; 2. The emergency authorities that are attempting to develop systems and methods of using the social media routinely and during emergencies; 3. The citizens who make regular and continuous use of networks and have exhibited their tremendous power and ability during emergencies.

Official authorities have given way to international digital corporations such as Google, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and digital entrepreneurs (applications inventors, for example) in coping/dealing with emergency situations. More often than not the authorities implement ad hoc cutting edge technology these companies have to offer (Beneito-Montagut, 2013).

Numerous governments claim that information supplied by citizens can be unreliable or incorrect. Moreover, government personnel point out that no action can be taken nor forces sent out in response to a posting in Facebook or a tweet in Twitter (Brasseur, 13 January 2014).

Public participation is done by the authorities through what is today known as crowdsourcing. Tomer Simon identifies two ways emergency authorities requested assistance from the public during the crisis: 1) a direct call for information 2) Requesting the public to retweet their messages or share information on Facebook (Simon et al., 2014).

The World is Changing: “New Wars”, Asymmetric Conflicts, “Hybrid Wars” and “Wars Amongst the People”

Conflicts in the 21st century differ from past conflicts based on two central factors: the level of asymmetry and disparity between the actors taking part in the conflict and the amount of foreign media coverage that a conflict receives (Ayalon et al., 2014, 1). Although the essential nature of war or armed conflict has not changed, is not changing, and is not expected to change (in accordance with Clausewitz’s argument, the character of conflict has changed slowly but steadily (Ayalon et al., 2014, 1).

William Lind argues that all over the world, states find themselves fighting Non-State Actors, such as al-Qaeda, Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia. Almost everywhere, the state is losing (Lind, 2004). America had never lost a war until Vietnam. The French were defeated in Vietnam and Algeria, and the USSR in Afghanistan (McKinney, 2009). In asymmetric conflicts, state actors have failed to attain their primary political objective despite their immense war-fighting capacity (Sullivan, 2007). Joakim Kreutz, who analyzed over 690, armed conflicts that occurred between the years: 1946-2009 provides a different perspective; he concludes that “conflicts do not exclusively end with decisive outcomes such as victory or peace agreement but more often under unclear circumstances where fighting simply ceases” (Kreutz, 2010).

Mary Kaldor use the term “New Wars” as opposed to “Old Wars” (the idea of war that predominated in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries). “New Wars” are the wars of the era of globalization. Typically, they take place in areas where authoritarian states have been greatly weakened as a consequence of opening up to the rest of the world (Lebanon, Iraq, Afghanistan, Gaza Strip, Syria, etc.). In such contexts, the distinction between state and non-state, public and private, external and internal, economic and political, and even war and peace are breaking down. Moreover, the breakdown of these binary distinctions is both a cause and a consequence of violence. In “New Wars” there is no distinction between combatants and non-combatants, and those who organized violent crime and terrorism blurred, so the main victims are civilians (Kaldor, 2012).

General Rupert Smith defines that “war no longer exists”, that is, war as “battle in a field between men and machinery” or “a massive deciding event in a dispute in international affairs” is unlikely to happen again. Smith characterizes that the world is experiencing a new paradigm of war in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. It’s “war amongst the people”, in which nebulous, open-ended conflicts have become the norm. Industrialized armies, according to Smith can’t win “wars amongst the people”, as used to be in the past. “Wars between the people” are complex and nonlinear and do not differentiate between frontline and home front (Smith, 2005).
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