CHANGING DYNAMICS:
THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AS AN ADDED DIMENSION WITHIN CONFLICTS

By
Razanne Chatila

A Thesis Submitted to The Honors College
In Partial Fulfillment of the Bachelors degree
With Honors in
Political Science
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
MAY 2015

Approved by:

Dr. Faten Halawi-Ghosn
School of Government and Public Policy
I. Abstract

Access to information plays a critical role in a society and the lack of it especially during a conflict can make individuals desperate and easy to manipulate. The recent conflict between Israel and Palestine provides a prime example to use for further analysis of how in particular social media played a critical role in coverage. With trending hashtags such as #GazaUnderAttack and #IsraelUnderFire, individuals were able to follow and access information across mediums and news sources. This diverse range of information also highlighted the disparities in coverage among news outlets and mediums. The 2014 Gaza conflict saw a heavier reliance on the use of social media sites including Twitter and Facebook especially through the use of hashtags, to bring attention and increase supporters, while also creating new obstacles as biased framing and misinformation has formed a new type of medium for conflict that has changed the dynamics of both the conflict and the dialogue, to be one that also heavily relies on the strength of one’s own virtual presence.
II. Introduction

To better understand the way we are connected it is vital to understand the way we interact. In the age of the Internet there have become multiple platforms in which messages can be spread and accessed. This has created new avenues of unrestricted and unfiltered accessible information, which is clearly evident during a conflict setting. Within a conflict, there are often multiple parties that are involved that are trying to push their agenda and construct the conflict in a way that favors their image. This is a part of the conflict process and these propaganda initiatives are essential within all stages of the conflict. However, now with the increased use of social media by individuals, parties involved within a conflict have realized the sheer potential of expanding their initiatives using these mediums. The use of social media has now grown tremendously during a conflict that it has become in a sense a cyber-battlefield that accompanies the fighting on the ground. The strength of one’s online presence becomes quintessential in how the conflict unfolds and gets portrayed. It has expanded the traditional roles of the media and how individuals access information. This has given new meaning to the role of the media in a conflict setting to one that has become more influential, important and imperative that has truly become an added dimension within conflicts. This paper will address the ways in which social media can impact the conflict process by focusing on the role it has played in the latest Israeli-Palestinian conflict. By using this recent conflict as a case study for analysis, it can give us a better understanding of the changing role of media during a conflict. Furthermore, it can provide a more realistic insight on the increased use and importance of social media within a conflict setting.
III. Media and Conflicts

Access to Information

Knowledge and information are the channels in which we understand our world. They are the tools that enable us to process the complexities of life. For most individuals, our knowledge about events beyond our immediate experience comes from the media that one is exposed to. Often, this information is typically selected and filtered (Pilisuk & Achrod). It can also be sometimes exaggerated, trivialized, often used to demonize and consistently used to affirm underlying values that favor those with power. This type of power then can be used as a mechanism to dominate ideas through control over the public discussion of issues. The type of exposure then become critical in our understanding of current issues and public discourse.

Author Philip Seib talked about this idea with the coverage of the U.S. invasion of Iraq and how the international coverage by American news was then directly affected, with coverage rising substantially in 2003. Seib discussed the research done by Tyndall ADT Research that found that the three major U.S. television networks ABC, CBS, and NBC devoted 4,047 minutes of their principal weeknight newscasts to Iraq, however beyond Iraq, Tyndall found that the coverage on other pressing international issues were negligible. Breaking it down, they found that for all of 2003, the Palestinian conflict received 284 minutes, Afghanistan 80 minutes, the global AIDS epidemic 39 minutes, and global warming 15 minutes (Seib). These numbers illustrate the disparity in how information can be translated. Seib states, “The issues are complex and their impact is incendiary in parts of the world. A news organization that provides such scant coverage cannot hope to truly inform its audience and members of that audience cannot hope to truly understand what is going on” (Seib). Not only does this inconsistency in coverage lead to a lack of information and often misinformation, Seib states, “News coverage in itself will not create or
prevent intercultural tensions, but the flow of information has an effect, and that flow and its effect have been enhanced considerably by the Internet. As an interactive medium as well as conventional information provider, the Internet can bring unprecedented cohesion to the most far-flung community.” Researcher Gadi Wolfsfeld states that media can have a significant effect on which interpretation appears to make the most sense, which can influence the strategies and behaviors of those in power (Wolfsfeld). In essence, it has created a new dynamic in the dialogue of the coverage of these conflicts, which also plays a critical role during and after a conflict as the limited nature of information can strongly influence perceptions and understanding.

*Role of the Media in a Conflict Setting*

With the start of any conflict comes the inherent start of its coverage. Traditionally, this coverage has been done by both local and international media outlets. The information was typically spread via television, newspapers and radio. Digital media expert, Ivan Sigal states that non-traditional media have also played a major role in conflict-prone settings even before the Internet, with the spread of democratic ideas through the “samizdat” in the Soviet Union, to the dissemination of revolutionary Islamist thought in Iran on cassette tapes, to the fax revolution of Tiananmen Square. “There is an extensive literature of analysis and history that examines the relationship of media to conflict—from propaganda to incitement, and from conflict prevention to post-conflict stabilization and peace-building” (Sigal 9). Today, with the advent of new technologies especially social media, this information is now disseminated to more individuals at an even faster rate.

Researcher, Nathan Cohen states that there are certain, dubious assertions to describe the rise of social media. Cohen argues that social media allows for the facilitation of the
dissemination of anti-establishment information and propaganda, but similar to Sigal, Cohen agrees that historically this has also been the case with regular media. As such, Cohen states the revolutionaries of the Arab Spring are only the latest iteration of this phenomenon. He states, “The introduction of Twitter and Facebook in the political landscape is a matter of scale and not necessarily of invention. Secondly, social media, with its lack of gatekeepers and its ability to publicize events almost instantaneously, creates a better-informed public amidst the fog of war” (Cohen). It then becomes how the immediacy of information is coupled with an immediacy of propaganda. This has created greater access to getting a diverse range of information and multitude of sides in viewing a conflict. At the same time, this wide range of information also can highlight the disparities in coverage among news outlets and respective mediums. One often can see competing interests and point of views affecting the nature of coverage. This can play a role in managing the conflict, as understanding can be changed by the type of access an individual has to media. According to author Nora Kuusik, she states, “Lack of information can, at any stage of a conflict, make people desperate, restless and easy to manipulate. The ability to make informed decisions strengthens societies and fosters economic growth, democratic structures and the positive outlook on the future” (Kuusik). She also states how much of a role mass media can play, as media is often a universal part of daily life, especially in industrialized countries. As such, it is able to shine a light on conflicts anywhere in the world. Often then, with the nature of conflicts being governmental, “The parties are often concerned with making sure that the majority of people are on “their” side, which bears a lot of potential for misrepresenting facts and trying to seize control over the distribution of information” (Kuusik). Analysis also emphasizes that through the controlling of both the type and quantity of information that is focused on, it can greatly affect the perceptions of these conflicts.
Access to information within a society is essential in how individuals make decisions and understand what is going on around them. Not only is this access critical but the quality and quantity also plays a role. Often it is in this area, where governments or even powerful players can assert their power to dominate ideas in order to take control of the public discussion of issues (Pilisuk & Achrod). Within March Pilisuk and Jennifer Achrod’s research about the nature of disinformation within a society, they state that are two primary methods to stifle dissent: public relations and military force and oftentimes, control of the media or information is one of the strongest tool in rallying supporting and asserting one’s messages. This creates new perceptions of the possible reality and can often turn more into a propaganda campaign. According to Pilisuk and Achrod, there are four strategies of successful propaganda: to create an environment or climate in which the actual message will be believed; refer to a credible source, a public figure, or a likable and/or authoritative speaker; present a simple and clear message; and for this message to take hold, fear must be evoked and projected upon some target groups. These different strategies are often used by individuals as a tactic in both garnering attention and support for their side. Moreover, during a conflict, the media becomes critical in framing the event.

Within any conflict, ideologies play an important aspect of any major political conflict and have to be taken into consideration. With the rise of citizen media or community media, user generated content has greatly emerged from new technologies (Wolfsfeld). As Wolfsfeld states, “The news media become the most ethnocentric in the midst of violent conflict. Enemies appear especially cruel and vicious when they are killing our people. Emotions run high during such confrontations and media images and rhetoric amplify those feelings” (Wolfsed). The spread of digital media networks and communication tools for citizens to countries with chronic violence
and prevalent weak governance has become notable. Today, much violent conflict takes place in or near civilian populations with access to global information networks (Sigal 11). Now within a conflict, as Sigal states, “Soldiers in conflict zones record their own actions. Cell phones with cameras allow citizens—whether bystanders, victims, or sympathizers—to record and create journalism, and practice sousveillance—the recording of an activity from the participant’s perspective” (Sigal 19). This growth of citizen media is changing the information space around conflicts that is enabling more individuals to have the tools to record and share their experiences with the rest of the world (Sigal 11).

Wolfsfeld states that the media has three major types of influence on the peace process. These include: playing a major role in defining the political atmosphere, the nature of debate on strategy and behavior and how the media can raise and lower the public standing and legitimacy of antagonists involved in the process of their positions. The way it can influence this process often is also affected by the limited role of the media, as their coverage is typically about events versus processes. This can limit the amount of context that is presented, which can misrepresent what is actually occurring (Wolfsfeld). “The news media are more likely to cover personalities than institutions, to prefer good visuals over complex texts, and to deal with specific opinions rather than general ideologies” (Wolfsfeld). In a conflict setting this is then just amplified especially with the advent of the internet and new medias, in which information can be both accessed and spread.

According to a Pew Research study, over 50 percent of people learn about breaking news via social media, 46 percent of people get their news online at least three times a week, and as of 2012, online news revenues surpassed print newspaper revenue (Anderson & Caumont). As Bill Moyer stated, “The Internet, cell phones and digital cameras that can transmit images over the
Internet makes possible a nation of storytellers, every citizen a Tom Paine” (Pilisuk & Achrod). Researcher Seong Eun Cho did an analysis of media discourse by doing a comparison of the traditional media frame and the Twitter discourse and found significant differences between the two. Cho states, “The changing media environment challenges the traditional authority of news media. With its immediacy and swiftness of information distribution, Twitter, in particular, has shown its potential as an effective and powerful news channel. In fact, we can easily count several events in which Twitter was the origin of news reports…” (Cho & Shin). This shift has changed the basic facets of how a conflict is both presented and understood, which greatly influences how the conflict is being framed.

*Framing the Conflict*

The media are becoming increasingly essential elements of conflict, more than just the practical tools for those who are fighting. By using these outlets, governments seek to hold onto power through persuasion as much as through force (Sigal 8). With these new media technologies then, this dissemination of information has increased in the context of conflict. What makes these more vital is, “In particular, the growth of citizen media has changed the information space around conflict, providing more people with the tools to record and share their experiences with the rest of the world” (Sigal 8). Researcher Teresa Joseph looked at the growing role of the mainstream media in both the social and political processes. She states, “Given their significance in the dissemination of information, shaping of perceptions and setting agenda, the manner in which information is framed plays a crucial role in molding public opinion. The quality of information being disseminated by the media could help determine the behavior of social and political structures” (Joseph 225). Joseph argues that this is then solidified by how the media facilitates the construction of the public sphere and democratic politics,
emphasizing how the quality of information also becomes important. “It is through the process of framing that factors which support one’s position are selected and highlighted.” Identifying media frames, therefore, is essential to understanding the media and how public opinion is shaped (Joseph 225). As Joseph argues, these frames give the information a certain context that can greatly affect the way it is presented. This then becomes important in shaping the circumstances in which policy-making takes place, even if the media may not directly determine policy. “The media often shape agenda by means of placement, tone and repetition, and the frames of analysis and facts, which it chooses and excludes” (Joseph 226). Cho argues that frame building commonly involves three types of actors: a social interest group that attempts to provide an advantage to news frame; journalists or news media who make news public; and an audience who accepts the framed news (Cho & Shin). Despite the use of media to inform, persuade, or propagate audiences, in most conflict zones, lack of information remains a constant, according to Cho, and with the existence of media and communications networks in conflict zones that have the tools to record and create media in the hands of many citizens, it may increase available information about what occurs in war. However, there are also significant economic, political and technological factors that might mitigate against complete and accurate information about conflicts. These digital networks have as Cho states, created a massive positive supply shock to the cost and spread of information to both the range of public speech by citizens and the growth of group coordination.

With the relevant new nature of this media, there is little existing research looking at the role of the media in conflict zones beyond the same lens of traditional media (Sigal 8). Sigal states, that at present, the policy community that considers the role and use of media in conflict prone setting is just now beginning to formulate methodologies and strategies to consider how
changes in media technology could then affect fundamental issues of political participation and conflict. Often this relationship between the media and conflict are often viewed through the “prisms of state stabilization, sovereignty, rule of law, the creation of modern administrative structures of state control, and civil society support that complements state stabilization efforts” (Sigal 8). Additionally, the shift to digital media with the rise of networked and participatory media has allowed for the rapid spread of digital-based communications and information networks that is likely to have a strong effect on the nature of 21st-century wars that are increasingly centered on internal conflict, disputed borders of new states, and separatist movements. These effects, have yet to seriously be analyzed or fully understood in this type of contemporary relationship between digital media and modern conflict (Sigal 8). Much violent conflict today does take place in or near civilian populations that have access to global information networks, so this formation gathered by various parties to conflict may potentially be distributed in real time around the globe (Gladwell). As such, the focus of this current research is to take a closer look at better understanding the effects of this new global informational networks and how individuals are strategically using these in order to frame the conflict within their own agendas. By using a recent conflict as a case study, it allows us to better understand how these mechanisms are playing out in order to shed new understanding of the increased role of the Internet and social media as a viable added dynamic to a conflict.

IV. Case Study

Background

The Israeli-Palestinian conflicts can serve as a good case study on this subject because of how adequately and advantageously the progression of social media use was done by both sides. This conflict exemplifies what traditional researchers discussed about the role of the media in a
conflict setting but both sides also broke away from the normal molds by being innovative and resourceful in how they have adapted in the age of the Internet towards their benefit. Beginning with the 2008 conflict, both sides began experimenting with social media use through YouTube and Facebook campaigns. This was expanded through the 2012 conflict and then just amplified within the 2014 conflict. As evident with this comparison from 2008 to 2014, the rise of social media has added another layer to the conflict that has also been further illustrated through the analysis of these events.

2008 Conflict (Operation Cast Lead)

As the bombs and bullets were flying, Israel and Hamas invested in a less violent but very effective weapon, social media. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) created its social media unit as part of its public affairs department in 2008 during Operation Cast Lead. The unit was formed by Lt. Col. Avital Leibovich, who retired from her post as head of the department two months before fighting broke out during the recent Operation Protective Edge (Gewirtz). In an interview, Avital Leibovich said, “Social media is actually a war zone for us here in Israel. Here we can have our own campaigns, we can decide on the size of the headline, what that headline will be and exactly which pictures and which footage to upload,” she said. The group's use of Twitter has been the medium most noticed and followed by the international media, Leibovich said, even though inside Israel, Twitter is the least popular of the social media networks.

Researcher Uri Zigelboim described Israel’s government concentrated efforts on social media. He states that the Israeli government in particular conducted a Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube campaign to try to neutralize or expose some of the negative impressions and criticism which circulated widely on the web during recent conflicts (Zigelboim). Both sides developed social media accounts including YouTube channels to try to disseminate its message during the war,
including criticism of the opposition. Journalist Jaron Glinsky wrote about this new initiative in February 2009. He described how both sides deployed new media weapons during the 2008 conflict by saying:

Armed with Facebook profiles, Lavazza Espresso, warriors fearlessly and tirelessly scoured the cyber battlefield searching for enemy (blog) outposts. Outfitted with high-tech ammunition like HD videocameras, firewire 800s, and white phosphorescent keyboards, they attacked one-sided videos, slanted essays, and enemy propaganda with propaganda of their own. Instead of grad rockets, they launched grad school wits. Instead of anti-tank missiles, they battled with anti-spamming technology. In 22 days of combat in Gaza, these were the young fighters tasked with winning the merciless war of public opinion for their side (Glinsky).

Operation Cast Lead really began the shift towards a social media and internet war beyond just fighting on the battlegrounds. Social media became a key weapon in what the press termed an “arsenal of Internet tools” (Kuntsman & Stein). One of the driving factors for this new push toward social media, was the multiple restrictions on traditional media with both Israeli and foreign reporters allowed no closer to the fighting than a few desert hillsides in southern Israel. At the same time, following the information directorate from state operatives, specially recruited volunteers were tasked with using social media to stress the morality of Israel’s war aims to the international cyber-public (Kuntsman & Stein). On YouTube, the most popular were the clips that circled bombing targets in color and added captions to aid the viewer: “Although the site appears to be empty, the secondary explosion confirms the presence of concealed rockets” (Kuntsman & Stein). This footage according to researchers Adi Kuntsman and Rebecca Stein that was taken from the vantage point of the bombardier, “functioned to sterilize the air
campaign by rendering all persons and buildings as proto-targets.” A number of YouTube viewers and human rights organizations subsequently disputed some of the IDF’s targeting justifications, but the controversies did little to affect the popularity of the clip (Kuntsman & Stein). Only after two days after its launch, it saw 4,000 subscribers and by the war’s end, some of the videos would be viewed more than 2 million times. Israeli officials even delivered private briefings to international bloggers and maintained personal video blogs (Kuntsman & Stein). Even by the end, Israel had mounted video cameras at the Kerem Shalom crossing in order to broadcast, online in real time, its transfer of humanitarian goods into Gaza after the end of the operation.

Author Thomas Zeitzoff also examined the use of social media to measure conflict dynamics in the 2008-2009 conflict. He found that “The Gaza Conflict saw the emergence of social networking and new media sources that vastly increased the speed and dissemination of information from the battlefield” (Zeitzoff 942). Zeitzoff found through this research that the sheer difference in the coverage of conflict came with the amount of details that emerged to describe what was going on. He said:

It was in the details (i.e., individual rocket attacks, statements by ministers, low-level skirmishes, and psychological operations), where these new sources fleshed out the micro-interactions of the conflict. This level of detail is particularly important when analyzing interactions in asymmetric conflict, as weaker actors such as Hamas may choose to respond to Israeli escalation in nontraditional manners— precisely the kind of response that mainstream media does not report with as much frequency or accuracy (944).
This allowed for greater coverage of the event from a multitude of sides, which greatly increased the reach and impact far more than traditional mediums would have been able to. This had a poignant effect on how information was relayed, while creating new obstacles in analyzing and sifting through all the information. As Zeitzoff states, it has created additional dimensions to a conflict, therefore requiring a better understanding of their implication in order to truly understand the effect it has on these different parties and conflict management in the immediate future.

This model although was basic was just still in the preliminary stages. According to Daniel Bennett in 2009, Twitter was mainly used as a way of “linking to exceptionally dry updates on the IDF Spokesperson blog which were often written in impenetrable military jargon” (Stein). Even so, in the Twittersphere, the hashtag #Gaza ranked among the world’s top ten throughout the war, with six new posts on the topic per minute (Stein). Al Jazeera’s Twitter feed played a central role in this discussion and even the Israeli consulate in New York opened its own Twitter account two days after the start of the offensive. Its first initiative was a Twitter-based press conference held on December 31 and many argued that it was “ushering in a new era of accountability and transparency” (Stein). Unable to handle the volume on Twitter, the consulate launched a blog to continue its dialogue with the public, revolutionizing Israeli diplomacy (Stein). In 2009, Noah Shachtman also revealed in Wired just how ad hoc the planning for the social media element of the information war had been during Operation Cast Lead, describing the IDF's YouTube campaign as "off-the-cuff" - a last-minute idea by a group of "twenty-something" soldiers (Stein). Despite widespread international condemnation of Cast Lead, the Israeli military claimed a decisive public relations victory in the arena of social media, trumpeting the popularity of its YouTube initiative (Stein).
According to Stein, in the years that followed, the IDF investment in social media would “grow exponentially both in budgetary and manpower allocations and in scope, building on this ostensible wartime triumph” (Stein). Stein states that in the IDF’s assessment, Operation Cast Lead had “proven the need -- indeed, the imperative -- for the military to become a skilled and fluent operator within the digital domain” (Stein). She argues that in the office of the army spokesperson, where social media work was initially housed, they deemed these tools particularly essential during episodes of military confrontation and as a senior member of the military’s new media team outlined it, “We gather Twitter followers in times of peace, so that they are ready to disseminate our message when we are at war” (Stein). The use of these social media platforms have also posed challenges. One of the chief challenges according to Stein has been the negotiation of the informal tenor of communication on these popular platforms. A senior IDF spokesperson stated about this describing how at times social media could be contradictory to the military institution, as it is a closed organization that has a less open language. Stein describes this new strategic state endeavor as “digital vernacularization” or a method to open new channels of public relations in the informal tone that social media demands. At times, Stein argues that the adoption of the digital vernacular has yielded manifestly positive results according to the state as it points to the massive viewership of the IDF’s YouTube clips during the 2008-2009 Gaza war. At the same time, this initiative also carries a set of risks for the army’s message, particularly given that the digital field is heavily populated by anti-occupation activists who are much more digitally proficient than the IDF (Stein). Therefore, while the army can generate social media content in prodigious amounts, the outcome of this work still less than certain.
Operation Cast Lead began building the foundations for the use of social media as an essential element to the conflict. There was dissemination of information from the battlefield. From live reporting from citizens sending SMS and Twitter messages, to the level of details and response to main events, the mainstream media did not focus or flush out all of these like social media was able to. Through both the obstacles and the triumphs of this experimental stage, both the Israeli and Hamas side were able to maintain supporters and increased their messages, especially as tensions rise and conflict ensued. Using these building blocks, during the recent 2014 conflict, Operation Protective Edge, these tools were augmented in a manner that was not seen before. Both sides were able to create their own messages and connect with followers across the globe to the benefit of each of their own agendas.

*Operation Protective Edge*

The effects of this change in coverage can be further illustrated by looking at the conflict between Israel and Palestine in the summer of 2014. This conflict named “Operation Protective Edge” or the Gaza Conflict, ranged from July 8 through August 26, killing an estimated total of 2,131 Palestinian, of whom 1,473 have been identified as civilians including 501 children and 257 are women and 67 Israelis, according the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Report as of August 26, 2014 (OCHA). In the report it states that “The scale of damage resulted from the 50-day escalation in hostilities is unprecedented since the beginning of the Israeli occupation in 1967.” During the conflict, all districts of Gaza witnessed extensive aerial bombardment, naval shelling and artillery fire that resulted in a widespread loss of life and livelihoods (OCHA). There was also a larger scale of damage to public infrastructure that left hundreds of thousands of people without adequate services, including electricity, clean water and quality healthcare. This conflict also saw for the first time a heavier reliance on social media than prior conflicts.
Social media added new dimensions during this conflict and became a vital tool for both sides in conveying their side of the story. One analyst, Shahar Halperin, looked at the presence of Facebook, Twitter and Instagram posts to evaluate the magnitude of supporters on either side. Collecting data starting on July 6, Halperin found that there was 41 million posts and interactions that were made by 12 million people. One important aspect in uniting these messages, were the increased use of hashtags. Often, as Halperin said hashtags can create a common idea or theme that others can easily borrow and use to express their opinions and share as part of a “group think mentality.” During his analysis he found that 67 percent of the content related to the Palestinian side of the conflict carried one or more pro-Palestinian hashtags, while less than 25 percent of the content describing the Israeli side of the conflict contained one or more pro-Israeli hashtags (Halperin). He said, “With the rise of a more visual sharing ecosystem, hashtags are quick snippets of text that don’t detract from the images shared, but instead, add a viral-inducing component” (Halperin). Some of the most popular hashtags that were used included: #Gaza; #GazaUnderAttack; #IsraelUnderFire; #PrayforIsrael; #PrayforGaza; #ProtectiveEdge; #Zionists and #resistance. These hashtags become a rallying point in unifying followers and for individuals to easily follow the latest updates, while also aiding in grouping ideas and messages to support specific ideologies or opinions, often favoring one side during the conflict. This conflict can serve as a case study to further study this relationship between media and conflict because of how quintessential this role of media became as both a strategic tool and as a rallying point in unifying messages and support.

Methodology

The 2014 Gaza conflict saw a heavier reliance on the use of social media sites including Twitter and Facebook especially through the use of hashtags to bring attention, increase
supporters, while creating new obstacles in framing the conflict. To further understand this role, a cross-analysis of two major events (UNWRA School Bombing and the First 72-Hour Ceasefire) in the 2014 Israeli-Palestinian conflict was done by looking at Twitter accounts from both sides including the Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel and the Haaretz News on the Israeli Side, Al-Qassam, the Hamas Affiliate and Al Arabiya for the Palestinian side and to represent the middle side, Al Jazeera and BBC were analyzed. These events were chosen because of their significance in this conflict. Both served as both major events that garner both domestic and international attention and were some of the most discussed via social media. With this analysis, how social media was used, developed and what messages were presented were compared to the 2008 conflict, Operation Cast Lead. It was also used as a point of comparison as a means to further understand the effects and changes in the vibrant coverage of these conflicts. An analysis chart (Figure 1) was constructed to serve as a consistent tool of analysis for each event and for the basis for further discussion.

UNWRA School Bombing

One event during the conflict that saw the heavy reliance of social media in conveying what occurred, was after the bombing of the UNRWA school in the Gaza Strip that was used as a shelter for many refugees. The Jabaliya refugee camp was struck by Israeli shells on July 29 that killed 19 people, including six children. Twitter just exploded with commentary from individuals from both sides expressing their versions of the story and casting blame towards the opposite party.

Analyst Gilad Lotan, also did a media analysis of this event and mapped the connection between keywords and hashtags used, while looking a type of framing these posts had. He said, “While war rages on the ground in Gaza and across Israeli skies, there’s an all-out information
war unraveling in social networked spaces.” He found that as the news broke of the attack, English-language news portal lead with the story while the Israeli side had little mention of the incident at all. Lotan said, “There’s a clear difference in frame when we compare one side of the graph to the other. None of the information shared is false per se, yet users make deliberate choices about what they choose to amplify.” This type of framing inherently creates a type of bias in the information one receives. Lotan said that as we get better at modeling user preferences, the more accurately we are able to construct recommendation engines that are able to capture user attention. This in turn is creating a new type of personalized propaganda that feeds user content and is tailored to only feed content that will appease the user and disregard the uncomfortable parts. In turn it has created a more narrow view of exposure to opinions as especially as often our online profiles are based on what one already knows and what one is already interested in (Lotan). It is as Lotan states, perfectly designed to reinforce our existing beliefs.

During the analysis of these tweets during this event, parties from both sides such as BBC News, Al Arabiya and the Israeli Prime Minister’s Twitter accounts included pictures in their posts (Figure 2), while other accounts relied heavy on the use of hashtags including #Israel, #Gaza, #Hamas, #IsraelUnderFire and #ProtectiveEdge. One notable difference between coverage of this event was by doing a simple search, one could find an interesting trend when looking at the Israeli Prime Minister’s twitter account, “PM of Israel”, tweets around the event. They were heavily based propaganda type posts that condemned Hamas and also relied heavily on such hashtags as #IsraelUnderFire and #ProtectiveEdge (Figure 2). Although they danced around the subject of firing rockets near the school, these tweets in return saw a larger number of retweets or reshares by followers, with over 1,000 retweets. Even though there were multiple
parties including the United States and the United Nations that blamed Israel for the attack, there were no recognition of this event by the Israeli side. This was reflected within their tweets where there was no tweet that mentioned the UNWRA School or acknowledging this event from occurring both on and after the date of the event. The only “Israeli” type coverage of this event was from the 

Hareetz newspaper (Figure 2) that had two tweets, one on the date of the event stating, “White House: Little Doubt UN School in Gaza was hit by Israeli artillery,” and the second a few days later on August 3, stating “U.S ambassador to the UN Samantha Power calls Sunday’s strike outside an UNRWA school in Rafah ‘horrifying’”. These more neutral tone messages highlight the differences in coverage between powerful players in the conflict versus the news organization. Although the same event occurred, the message was definitely not consistent.

Another interesting point of coverage of how this event was covered was how Al-Qassam Brigade decided to cover the event. Rather than simply condemn the events, they decided to tweet directly their retaliation method. They only had one tweet in relation to this event and it stated, “21:45 In response to the UNRWA Jabalia School massacre & the massacre of Shojaeyya, Al Qassam Brigades fired Ashkelon with 5 Grad missiles” (Figure 2). This message in comparison to some other tweets that had a more neutral tone, had much more of an aggressive tone and retaliatory tone. Using words such as “massacre” can have a strong effect in casting blame, while also being a mechanism for justifying any post actions. Furthermore, it can influence the opinions of the “other side” beyond the actions of this one event.

The types of replies and retweets for example from both the Israeli PM and Al Arabiya tweets, both that included pictures, illustrate the range of replies and individuals who are responding to these messages (Figure 5). With Al Arabiya’s tweet for example, replies included
statements from individuals who Twitter handles ranged from @StopTheCarnage to @tabster_1. Some replies included questions, while others included more statement type responses and even included some hashtags. One follower tweeted in opposition to these claims by stating, “Wasn’t that the school Hamas launched rockets from?? #StandWithIsrael” (Figure 3). Another follower who wanted to show their support for their side tweeted “Israeli’s ethnic cleansing will continue unabated.” These range of replies can illustrate how this information is being disseminated and how individuals are responding to these descriptions of these major events. This holds true on the other side, with the replies on the Israeli PM tweet that included a range of supporters and oppositions. What was interesting was the fact that there were a lot more negative responses with comments calling the Prime Minister a terrorist to claiming Israel was committing war crimes. One tweet was filled with hashtags and use of strong terms such as “slaughter” and “innocent children”. It stated, “@IsraeliPM @netanyahu Making up excuses for your slaughter of innocents @IsraelKillsKids @IsraeliWarCrimesinGaza @IsraelisAWarCrime” (Figure 3). These type of replies can strengthen support and also be a new method for individuals to rally around followers, messages and ideas that might be similar to one’s own beliefs, while it can also influence new opinions. These varied tweets then can map out new connections between users across multiple platforms.

Beyond Twitter, how coverage of this event was presented on both respective websites and Facebook, also saw some variance. Although, the event sparked a lot of attention, the story was not necessarily a front page story but rather tended to be a top news within a subsection such as the Middle East or Politics section of the website. This can be illustrated with both Al Jazeera, BBC and Al Arabiya. With these articles, individuals have the option of sharing the story to their respective Facebook, Twitter or other social media accounts. This can be illustrated within the Al
Jazeera story that saw 5,383 shares on Facebook. This ability is similar to retweeting on Twitter and often the reasons why an individual does decide to share the story can be very similar to the reasons that prompt individuals to do the same via Twitter or Facebook. The use of dominant and often graphic images coupled with statistics and vivid details, can really influence the attention span of the reader that in turn can influence perceptions and understanding of the event.

First 72-Hour Ceasefire

Another main event during this conflict that heavily used social media as a means to strongly emphasis viewpoints that was analyzed was the first 72-hour ceasefire on August 3 that took place after a month of fighting. Haaretz tweeted out a graphic that was also visible within the body of the tweet (Figure 5) that outlined the Gaza operation by the numbers. This gave an unbiased outline of the number of casualties, destroyed infrastructure and the number of rockets fired on both side. This was just one of 15 tweets that Hareetz did during this period. This tweet saw 68 retweets versus other tweets that saw very little retweets that did not include any graphic elements. This just illustrates the impact of a tweet that included a strong image. (Figure 4). In the tweet, the picture shows a younger boy covered in debris being carried. The tweet read as followed, “Gaza photo journalists go where mainstream media won’t: War images you won’t see on Israeli TV.” This tweet saw 215 retweets and 64 favorites. This was the highest retweet amongst the tweets done by Hareetz during this period. This image provided another avenue in coverage of this event especially to the individuals who might only follow the Israeli side of coverage. Not only that, but these posts overall had a neutral tone, not favoring one side over the other.
BBC also took a similar approach by posting a video that summed up the four weeks of conflict. This video that was embedded in the tweet also utilized #Gaza. Unlike Hareetz, it saw 287 retweets and 108 favorites. This video also emphasized the costs of the war for both sides, really highlighting the monetary costs for each side. The BBC had other tweets as illustrated within Figure 3 that had a combination of both hashtag and graphic use that saw a lot higher number of retweets and favorites. This was also evident with the tweets made by Al Arabiya that included a variety of pictures and hashtags such as #Israel and #Gaza. The images varied from heads of states such as President Barack Obama, United States Secretary of State John Kerry to images from the destruction. All of their tweets included links to the full articles on the website.

This was something that was unique to the way Al Arabiya tweeted out information versus other accounts that were analyzed. Al Jazeera’s tweets for this event were neutral tone and did not include graphic nor hashtags.

On the other hand, the PM of Israel’s Twitter account only had one tweet during this time but it included a graphic illustrating both the UN and U.S (Figure 4). It stated, “The UN & the US received assurances for an unconditional ceasefire in #Gaza.” Unlike Hareetz’s more neutral tone tweets, this tweet had a lot more of an accusatory tone in trying to push blame towards Hamas. It also had 1,000 retweets and 454 favorites, a substantial difference. Another interesting point was this tweet was done on August 3, the first day of the ceasefire. No other accounts talked about this supposed “quick” end to the ceasefire but rather claimed the end of this first ceasefire being later on August 7 with rocket fire in Gaza. These different ways of coverage also illustrate the multiple accounts of when this event both occurred and ended. Accounts from both sides mitigated the information in a certain style.
This event saw some front page coverage just by the nature of the event. Individuals from both sides wanted to see an end to the fighting and when confirmations were blasted over the virtual sphere, claims on which side suffered the most or which side would break the agreement became dominant conversation points. It was also evident that there a lot of misconceptions on the agreements surrounding the ceasefire and which side had more in the process or more to lose. Each side was quick to cast blame on how the other side would act during and after this agreement. News outlets also took suit in the amount of information about the ceasefire was covered and presented. Although there was some front page coverage, the amount of coverage was fairly limited. This then can really illustrate how the increase amount of information could lead to such great disparities within just one conflict, which can also lead to a lot of misunderstanding of some basic agreements.

Overall, with both events it was evident there were targeted messages that were being spread. Each side took to social media to garner supporters and depict the events unfolding within their own lenses. These events garnered a lot of strong word usage as illustrated by Figure 6. From ceasefire, to sacrifice, to damages, these words alone can have a profound effect on conveying more than just the facts. It is also clear that each of the accounts analyzed took different approaches in both the tone and type of message (Figure 7). Typically, a news organization tended to stay on the more neutral, unbiased side while particular players within the conflict such as the Israeli Prime Minister or Al Qassam Brigades had very particular worded messages that really tried to hit the sore points for each side in order to increase favor towards their side. By looking at these two critical events in the 2014 conflict and how the tone, type and word usage was done by both sides, it can give us a better understanding of the effects of these controlled social media campaigns.
V. Discussion

Changing Messages: 2014 compared to 2008

It was evident that the way the social media was used was a revamped initiative from the beginning initiatives in 2008. This journey to a more sophisticated use of social media was solidified during the 2012 conflict, Operation Pillar of Defense. This conflict saw a more concentrated effort in social media use and saw a more prominent use of the hashtag that came into full fruition during the 2014 conflict. Although 2008 saw for the first time the use of social media as a tactic to control and synthesize information, 2012 saw the heavier reliance of application of these various models that was greatly expanded on in the 2014 conflict. It was to say simply a culmination of trial and error combined with innovation.

Stuart Hughes, a BBC correspondent also discussed this and quoted famous leader Napoleon by stating that “there are only two powers in the world the sword and the mind.” The increasing role of social media use by both sides was unprecedented in the later 2012 conflict. As Hughes described, rather than a news conference, the Israel Defense Forces chose Twitter to alert the world to the start of its campaign. Then as soon as the operation got underway, the official spokesperson announced the following, “The IDF has begun a widespread campaign on terror sites & operatives in the #GazaStrip, chief among them #Hamas & Islamic Jihad targets” (Hughes). It wasn’t long after that, Hamas’ military wing, the Al-Qassam Brigades, swiftly followed suit. Using its own hashtag, #gazaunderattack, it gave warning to Israel on Twitter that: “Our blessed hands will reach your leaders and soldiers wherever they are (You Opened Hell Gates on Yourselves)” (Hughes). The quote was immediately picked up and used by a variety of news organizations around the world. Hughes went on to describe this by saying, “Ultimately, as Napoleon knew, the court of public opinion can be the most important battleground of all
because ‘in the long run the sword is always beaten by the mind’ (Hughes). Twitter among other social media platforms has presented its own problems and possibilities.

As of the fall of 2011, the IDF had assigned four officials to tweet in the army’s name becoming increasingly aware of the time-sensitive nature of social media content (Stein). “The new media team was beginning to prepare Twitter messaging ahead of time -- drafting boilerplate that might become army communiqués during military actions in the Occupied Territories” (Stein). These carefully constructed narratives such as statistics highlighting the IDF’s humanitarian interventions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, become central pillars of Israel’s public relations efforts to the military occupation (Stein). Members of these social media teams argue that such preparations would enable the military’s social media team to deliver real-time responses to detractors in times of crisis, that in turn can effectively “deflate political critique that it has been hard persuading the upper echelons to embrace the shift, given its radical departure from conventional military protocols and modes of IDF self-presentation” (Stein). Since then, the army has endeavored to reevaluate the internal reluctance through education, in part as officials emphasize, to minimize the simple disconnect between the conventions of social media and the traditional practices of the state (Stein).

With both conflicts, there was shift of how information was presented. This was clearly evident especially in the 2014 conflict where there was no longer the need for news organizations to be the sole intermediaries and information gatekeepers. This is considered a media strategy that has been labeled Propaganda 2.0 (Bennett). Part of this is the nature of these social media platforms, Bennett, argues. These parties then are learning to better utilize these platforms for the most effective result that would be in their favor. The IDF has switched to prominently English posts, with the more concentrated effort of using hashtags such as
#IsraelUnderFire more frequently, in order to encourage Twitter users to retweet their content and creating imagery that the IDF believe will be circulated by online communities (Bennet). It is also posting in a manner of facts and figures and commenting on the issues which might affect the outcome of the battle for public opinion (Bennett). It has become a template for future information operations online as militaries attempt to influence a more fiercely contested informational battlespace.

With the development of the use of social media, the relationship between the media and conflict has only just become amplified as information is spread quickly, across multiple platforms, and with a variety of tones to the message. Eli Pariser, the founder of Avaaz.org and Chief Executive of Upworthy discussed the implications of this in his TED talk about the Filter Bubble stating, “In a broadcast society, there were gatekeepers, the editors, and they controlled the flows of information. Along came the Internet and it swept them out of the way, and it allowed all of us to connect together, and it was awesome. But that’s not actually what’s happening right now” (Lotan). As evident with the coverage of the 2014 Gaza conflict there was a tremendous surge of social media use by both sides that acted as dissenter of the selected information that painted the conflict within the strokes of their own color palettes. Through hashtags, individuals used as a way to easily unite messages and help create a more centralized way to find information. Social media has become a new factor as both a conflict instigator and conflict manager that has created a new type of dialogue when analyzing these events.

Since Israel sent ground troops into Gaza on July 12, the IDF has tweeted hundreds of times. The images they send are clearly designed to get public opinion on Israel's side. The team designs highly produced graphics in coordination with intelligence units showing Hamas gunmen launching rockets from schools and firing from the windows of hospitals (Gewirtz).
unit also uses YouTube to post videos collected from helicopter and fighter jet cockpits, and from cameras aboard Israeli drones. Nonetheless, Leibovich argues that despite the unit's efforts it is clear that public opinion doesn't always line up behind Israel but proportionally there tends to be more pro-Palestinians online (Gewirtz). Part of this, Leibovich cites “an aggressive online presence from the BDS movement, a group that advocates boycotts, divestment and sanctions against Israel, for fueling the atmosphere online against Israel.” From Operation Cast Lead to Operation Pillars of Freedom to the most recent Operation Protective Edge, as Nathan Cohen said “The media had become militarised and militaries had become twitterised.” Although there is no guarantee that social media can combat preexisting biases, the selectivity of social media -- the user chooses who to follow on Twitter or who to befriend on Facebook -- means that the user is likely exposed to similar minded people, which in turn can create like-minded communities that regurgitate statistics, photographs, and videos in an exercise of self-edifying vindication (Cohen). Social media also is able to capture the attention of a wider audience. Cohen argues that the same conclusion from Operation Pillar of Defense is replicated exactly the same of Operation Cast Lead that was fought four years earlier without as sophisticated social media tactics. Cohen goes on to defend these observations to emphasize social media’s value, especially because of its ability to self-correct almost instantaneously has surpassed any other medium. This was evident during the latest conflict, after the Al-Qassam Brigades tweeted an image of a bloodied child purportedly injured from an Israeli air strike. A few hours later, several people, including Hamas sympathizers, had identified the picture as taken a month before in Syria. Therefore, the impact of social media is real but also can be considered a nuance, Cohen argues. It is often a variable, not a determinant that can influence the narrative that by no means solely shapes the narrative.
Stein further talks about the impacts of social media by describing the work that the IDF has done to embrace the use of social networking that has called into question the so-called digital democracy narrative that was rationalized. That storyline not only attributed the toppling of tyrants to social media but often went further to propose that these technologies were naturally suited to liberatory politics from below, particularly when led by youth enthusiastically in early 2011 to explain the success of popular uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt (Stein). Stein also states however, that the case of the Israeli army can muddy this narrative at both ends including the troubling presumptions at both about the organic grassroots and about the autocratic state where social media is concerned. “Rather, the IDF case points to the highly variable political functions that social media can serve, bolstering the corrective to digital utopianism most famously associated with Evgeny Morozov’s The Net Delusion. Certainly, the Israeli state continues to employ social media as a means of classic counterinsurgency, engaging in digital surveillance and the like” (Cohen). This continued expansion of social media use illustrates another interesting factor of how the Israeli army is also striving to position itself as a lateral social media user in its own right and as such, the army employs the language and norms of networking platforms, always striving to fine-tune its sense of the social media vernacular, while adapting these tools in pursuit of wartime public relations objectives (Cohen). This model of digital militarism invites new approach in looking at these effects in the political sphere.

These new approaches are usually left behind by traditional media. Cohen argues that in the recent conflict as the Israeli barrage escalated and ground troops mobilized, as fatalities mounted and as images of the Gaza devastation circulated, media outlets often by and large left the social media angle behind. Cohen notes that it took the satirists at The Onion, to point out the multiple ironies of the first two days’ viral social media story: “Palestinian Family Trapped
Under Rubble Thrilled to Hear ‘Gaza’ Trending on Twitter” (Cohen). As The Onion headline illustrates, the initial focus on social media tended to function more of a backdrop to these events and violence.

Governments seek to hold onto power through persuasion as much as through force. Media are increasingly essential elements of conflict, rather than just functional tools for those fighting. “There will also be differences in the nature of coverage of the same conflict by various media on the basis of the location of the conflict, who the participants are, the intensity of the conflict, strategic implications, etc.” (Joseph 227). It is now clear that increased access to information and to the means to produce media has both positive and negative consequences in conflict situations. The question of whether the presence of digital media networks will encourage violence or lead to peaceful solutions may be viewed as a contest between the two possible outcomes. It is possible to build communications architectures that encourage dialogue and nonviolent political solutions. However, it is equally possible for digital media to increase polarization, strengthen biases, and foment violence (Sigal 8) “Construction of a common enemy has become an integral part of political processes. Governments use the idea of a common enemy as a method of social control, of reinforcing its own values and getting the support of its opponents” (Joseph 231). In justifying strategic geopolitical policies and corporate interests around the world, the demonization of opponents is considered useful or even essential and is often used by both sides during a conflict.

Enemy images are often used in propaganda and war preparation by both sides in a conflict and the mass media are often willing participants in this process of demonization. How the media frame and present threats, as well as the amount of attention that is paid to such issues influence the threat perceptions and responses of the audience (Joseph 231). “There will also be
differences in the nature of coverage of the same conflict by various media on the basis of the location of the conflict, who the participants are, the intensity of the conflict, strategic implications, etc.” (Joseph 227). Information that moves through these networks can have a real impact on the course and outcome of conflict, especially in an age when war is not only about holding territory, but about gaining public support and achieving legal status in the international arena (Sigal 20).

**Cyber Battlefield**

These conflicts are illustrating not only a changing dynamic within a conflict but also an added dimension. The concentrated efforts to hone in on the social media was eloquently demonstrated within the recent conflict, shedding light on the new tactics parties have to add to their strategy plans. With the new age of technology, it has become more important now than ever to not only have strengths on the battlefields but how one can effectively engage its audience and maintain its supporters on the virtual battlefield as well. Even if one side has a stronger military presence, if it is not coupled with a strong online presence, the ability for the side to come out as dominant, becomes limited as false opinions, mismatched stories and a lack of rallying support become diminished. Both the Israeli and Hamas players quickly learn these effects and can serve as an example of study into the changing nature of conflicts and its effects. As social media grew and expanded from 2008 to now, they grew with it. They both understood the power of learning about what medias would be most effective in getting their own message and they capitalized on it. It truly allowed an open forum for each side to send out the information they could tailor to their own agendas. What made these conflicts unique was how little the role of the traditional media played in portraying the conflict but rather there was a clear shift to social media being pivotal in shaping our understanding of the conflict.
With the neoteric nature of technologies, our ability to access information has become easier but the credibility is not always verified. There are multitude of methods in how an individual receives or listens to the news. From traditional news outlets, social media or other online medias, there a multitude of platforms in which information can be received. At times, it can be considered an information overload and prove to be daunting to sift through it all. With this, comes new challenges in what facts and opinions individuals receive, especially when it comes to current events and important issues. This disparity in information not only causes miscommunication but can really cause a rift within society, as it creates new barriers with societal participation. Among younger populations, this disparity is even more present, as their main source of news, often comes from online or social media sites where the line between fact and opinion can often be blurred. Although all the information is out there, be able to distinguish between what is relevant and what is not makes getting accurate information even harder to find. Often, there is less context within these social media platforms than with traditional media. Within a news story, there is typically some background provided to the reader to help them better understand what they are covering. However, within social media, especially with Twitter, one is limited to 140 characters. Usually, proving some context to one’s message is not given priority. Rather the message becomes the central focus to what is being delivered. At the same time being able to cater to how individuals do receive the news, is what adds to the strengths of these social media campaigns. The messages that were sent via Twitter were not only clear and concise but also used wording that could be targeted to a wide range of individuals. Primarily done in English, with wording done in a simple manner within the constraints of 140 word limits. This then made the language in essence universal to understand. Nonetheless, another important
factor that can come out of these carefully crafted messages, is the possibility for disinformation and the lack of exposure to all sides of the story.

One of the main limitations with social media is that individuals tend to stay within their own network. These circles that an individual creates can often limit them to those ideas, principles and stories. This is just reinforced for example with the use of hashtags. It becomes an added element to these messages as they act as easily followed rallying point. Individuals who might be on one side over the other, could not only follow the users that they side with but also can search those specific hashtags to get a centralized feed with just those individuals or groups who were using that hashtag, where often these messages tend to all lean towards one side.

Oftentimes, individuals will tend to stay within these feeds, which can create a limited or narrow view of the events unfolding. This is especially critical within a conflict as it is unfolding in framing the messages and perception of the other side. It also can play a role in how the messages are spread and how even traditional new sources might transcend these messages. Both sides also are using this ability for their advantage in being able to reinforce existing ideas and push for new support. These personalized propaganda campaigns can create new messages and understanding but also leave less room for credibility.

These new initiatives that tend to stray away from traditional new sources, also leave a lot of responsibility to the users who are creating and spreading these messages. Within a professional news organization setting, there are guidelines that have to be followed including fact-checking, verification and being mindful of including biases. However with these concentrated campaigns, individuals are often being paid or tasked to carefully construct events or messages in their favor. There is no longer the need per say to have the news organization as a platform to get ones messages across but rather every one now basically has an equal access to
spread their messages in both the quantity and quality that they desire. In essence, it is blank and open canvass for anyone to use. As evident with the coverage of the 2014 Gaza conflict there was a tremendous surge of social media use by both sides that acted as dissenter of the selected information that painted the conflict within the strokes of their own color palettes. Social media has become a new factor within a conflict that has truly created a type of dialogue when analyzing these events.

The role of media plays an equally quintessential role in all stages of a conflict. Post-conflict this role is important in facilitating peace and for economic recovery. Numerous researchers agree that the impact of the media on peace and conflict dynamics should not be underestimated (Majcenovic). By supplying credible information and reaching a large audience, the media help in managing conflicts and promote democratic principles. In the aftermath of a conflict, reconciliation and societal development can be encouraged as well (Kussik). One reason that the media carries such an important role is that messages from media go beyond just reporting the events and facts but also influence the way people think and act. The shaping of ideologies was evident within this conflict as we noted earlier and can have a strong effect in promoting peace and reconciliation or facilitate war and hatred. This is then only amplified according to researcher Natalie Majcenovic with the global expansion and diversification of media channels, which is especially apparent in the advent of new information and communication technologies that can hold some great potential for encouraging non-violence and peace. With that, Majcenovic argues that in order for these new tools to be effectively used in these settings, individuals have to be educated or taught how to be able to critically appraise the messages that they encounter and be able to adequately sift through the abundance of information. “The media interpret events beyond our physical realm and help us make sense of
them. With the improvement of technologies and the advancement of new media such as the internet, media plays an increasingly more prominent role in our daily communication and entertainment” (Majcenovic). The goal of the conflict prevention and especially peacebuilding is to try to move from polarization to positive relationships. And to do this, there has to be a multitude of sides expressed to give a more accurate reflection of these events. A pluralistic media sector can be beneficial in allowing a wider range of views and voices to be opened and therefore publicly expressed. Usually, in a conflict environment, a narrow range of more extremist views tends to dominate, while credible information is tremendously difficult to access (Majcenovic). “During the peacebuilding process, transparent media can become a credible source of information and can support the expression of competing perspectives, therefore becoming a peaceful channel for public dialogue. Free and open communication helps prevent the manipulation of populations” (Majcenovic). However, as evident with Operation Protective Edge, this free and open communication that took shape with Twitter posts and shares, was not geared as a mechanism to prevent unbiased coverage but rather it was the opposite. Both sides heavily relied on these channels as a way to rally support and unify supporters. Author wrote about the work both Israeli and Hamas did to control the type and quantity of information during Operation Protective Edge. He describes for example how the Hamas Interior Ministry issued guidelines for whom it called its “activists” on social media. Some of these guidelines stated, “Don’t forget to always add ‘innocent civilian’ or ‘innocent citizen’ in your description of those killed in Israeli attacks on Gaza… Avoid publishing pictures of rockets fired into Israel from city centers… Do not publish or share photos or video clips showing rocket-launching sites or the movement of resistance [forces] in Gaza… Avoid entering into a political argument with a Westerner aimed at convincing him that the Holocaust is a lie and deceit” (Majcenovic). Similar
to Israel’s paid social media team, the ability to control how and what information is sent out becomes essential to the success of these media campaigns. The media can therefore not only influence society before the conflict by recognizing and properly addressing the issue but also afterwards.

This level of communication and transparency then becomes important in every part of the peace process, in particular during negotiations. Mediators and power brokers are often reluctant to communicate during negotiations, but according to Majcenovic, securing a free flow of accurate and constructive information at this stage can help ensure sustainable agreements and prevent leaders from manipulating such negotiations to secure their own power and position.

Majcenovic states that during the peacebuilding phase, media is an even more important tool for policy makers to get their message out. Part of this is the necessity to inform the public about what activities are underway, raise public awareness and educate citizens. Educating citizens is one of the largest factor in improving popular participation in public life, especially as citizens rely on the media not only for basic information but also to explain complex negotiations and frame overall issues. This sort of communication then, according to Majcenovic, is one of the most effective tools in earning and building the confidence of the population in the peace process. It helps people feel connected to the reform plans.

VI. Conclusion

Social media is going to continue to evolve as will its effects on a conflict. Parties within a conflict have realized the importance of such a tool and have begun to use it early on. From preplanned messages, concentrated analysis and continued updates across platforms, it has truly created new dimensions to the conflict that have not been seen prior. Through the analysis of the 2014 conflict, Operation Protective Edge and the comparison of the 2008 conflict, Operation
Cast Lead, a more thorough understanding of the role of social media within a conflict was illustrated. By comparing central actors from both the Israeli and Palestinian side’s tweets and Facebook posts from two central events, it better illustrated how important of a platform social media has become. Also the profound effect of hashtags that become a rallying point for followers by centralizing messages and opinions. It was clear that each side had a specific message that they aim to convey and the strength of how effective each side uses these new social media platforms becomes indispensable to that side’s overall success within a conflict. Now, with every conflict comes its counterpart in the realm of the Internet. These two pieces now form a fundamental relationship in how a conflict unfolds. Military strength now has to be coupled with media strength and tactics with tweets. This information is often biased and favored to one side, which can also play a role as an influencer during the peace process. Through hashtags, individuals were able to easily find unified messages in a more centralized and faster way and its use was just amplified during the recent conflict as another mechanism in framing the events towards one side. Through this case study, how social media affects the amount of information being provided was better understood, including the obstacles that can come with it, especially in controlling what messages are being sent. Furthermore, continued research can look deeper on the role of social media as it instigates reaction and how that can then create obstacles in managing the conflict. As with the vibrant nature of the role of social media during a conflict, continued research and analysis is still needed to look at the continued effects beyond the lens of traditional news media.
**VII. Appendices**

Figure 1: Analysis Chart used as a guide to evaluate events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event Name</th>
<th>Number of Tweets</th>
<th>Number of FB Posts</th>
<th>Hashtags Used</th>
<th>Tone of Post</th>
<th>Number of Reposts/Share</th>
<th>Graphic Used</th>
<th>Tone of Graphic Used</th>
<th>Front Page Coverage</th>
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<td>C) Neutral</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>C) Neutral</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: UNWRA School Bombing: Tweets from analyzed accounts
Figure 3: Comparison of replies for UNWRA School bombing

**Responses to Israeli PM’s Tweet**

- Chatila
- Memes
- UNWRA
- Gaza
- Israel
- Palestinian

**Responses to Al Arabiya’s Tweet**

- Chatila
- Memes
- UNWRA
- Gaza
- Israel
- Palestinian
Figure 4: First 72-Hour Ceasefire: Tweets from analyzed accounts
Figure 5: Haaretz News Graphic after 72-Hour Ceasefire

After the cease-fire: The Gaza operation by the numbers
With the hostilities between Israel and Hamas in the coastal enclave subsiding, Haaretz sums up the month of fighting.

Gaza
- 30,920 Houses damaged
- 485,000 Displaced persons
- 141 Schools damaged
- 120 Mosques damaged

Israel
- 2,657 Rockets exploded in Israel
- 584 Rockets intercepted by Iron Dome
- 4,762 Total IDF attacks
- 32 Tunnels destroyed
- 82,201 Reserve soldiers drafted

Rocket explosions, interceptions and attacks

July 8: Israel launches Operation Protective Edge. 5 Gaza militants infiltrate Israel from the sea near Zikim, and are shot dead.
July 12: 18 people killed in an Israeli strike on the home of a senior Hamas commander in Shijaiya. IDF admits no prior warning was given.
July 15: IDF calls on some 100,000 residents of Shijaiya and Zeitoun neighborhoods to leave their homes.
July 16: Four children killed by an IDF shell on Gaza beach.
July 17: IDF starts ground operation in Gaza.
July 20: Thirteen soldiers and dozens of Palestinians killed in Shijaiya.
July 30: Twenty-five members of the Abu Jamaa tribe killed in an Israeli airstrike near Khan Yunis.
July 21: IDF battalion commander, three soldiers killed in a tunnel attack by Gaza militants near Net Am.
July 24: Fifteen Palestinians killed in shelling of an UNRWA school in Beit Hanun.
July 26: Seventeen members of the al-Najar tribe killed in Khan Yunis.
July 28: Four Israelis killed by mortar fire in Erez Regional Council, near Gaza.
July 28: At least 10 Palestinians killed, including 6 children, when missile hits park in Al-Shati Refugee Camp.
July 28: Five soldiers killed in a tunnel attack by Gaza militants near Nahal Oz.
July 31: Five soldiers killed by mortar fire in Erez Regional Council near Gaza.
August 1: Two officers and a soldier killed in Rafah. 2nd Lt. Hodar Goldin, defined MIA.
August 3: Goldin brought to rest after IDF determines he died in action.
August 3: Ten Palestinians killed in UN school shelling in Rafah.

Casualties

- Israelis killed: 64 Officers and soldiers, 4 Civilians
- Israelis injured: 1,620 Soldiers, 684 Civilians
- Palestinians: 1,865 Total killed, including: 672 Women and children, 9,536 Palestinians injured
Figure 6: Tone of Most Common Words Used in Tweets From Analyzed Events

![Tone of Most Common Words Used in Tweets From Analyzed Events](image)

Figure 7: Overall Tone of Messages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accounts Analyzed</th>
<th>Overall Tone of Messages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Israeli PM</td>
<td>Negative, strong bias towards Israeli side</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Hareetz</em> News</td>
<td>Neutral, no clear bias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Qasaam Brigades</td>
<td>Negative, strong favor towards Hamas side</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Al Arabiya</em> News</td>
<td>Positive (wording not casting blame; providing inspiration, hope), no clear bias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>BBC News</em></td>
<td>Neutral, no clear bias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Al Jazeera</em> News</td>
<td>Neutral, suggested bias favoring Palestinian side</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VIII. References


Chatila


