

ICTs for Citizen and Peace Journalism

Summer 2011, markus.sabadello@gmail.com

“Too strong a media emphasis on death and violence can lead to despair.”

-- The 14th Dalai Lama

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1. Introduction

The profession of journalism has traditionally often been described as playing an important role for maintaining a strong civil society and therefore contributing to democracy and peace. Today, modern Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) such as the Internet, cell phones and other “new media” have decisively contributed to the globalization process and had numerous impacts on social and political structures and the ways in which we interact with each other world-wide¹. These technologies have greatly transformed the way in which information is being generated, processed, transmitted, interlinked and received. As a medium, they are cheaper, faster and more interactive than more traditional media such as radio or television. It is therefore obvious that the introduction and widespread availability of modern ICTs have also in multiple ways affected the field of journalism, a field in which the creation, handling and publishing of information lie at the very core of activities.

Two ideas have within the last few years led to new types of journalism – the idea that everybody can participate not only in the consumption but also in the production of information, and the idea that journalism should be shaped by and used for promoting the ideal of peace. It appears to be an interesting and promising endeavor to more closely examine the various roles which the use of modern ICTs can play in these fields. This paper will touch on a few of these roles, including how ICTs can help journalists to gather as well as disseminate information, and how ICTs can be used for new types of journalism such as citizen and peace journalism.

2. ICTs for Journalism

In journalism – and perhaps especially in war journalism and peace journalism – information and communication technologies have always played a critical role. Even before the mainstream availability of the Internet and other new media, advances in technology have had a direct impact on the professional collecting and reporting of information. For example, when comparing the 1990/1991 Gulf War with the 2003 Iraq War, it can be observed that the availability of modern live and portable technology in the second war has led to a higher number of active journalists in the affected region, as

¹ See for example (Castells, 2000)

well as to more and better pictures and to a generally higher output. Roughly speaking, modern ICTs can affect the work of professional journalists in two ways: They enable them to collect more information, and they make it possible to disseminate their own work through new publishing channels.

2.1. Collecting Information

For journalists, the collection of information is perhaps the most important aspect of their profession. It is obvious that in their work, Facebook, Twitter, Wikipedia, weblogs and other new media applications and services constitute valuable sources, and that they offer access to a vast amount of information which can sometimes not be obtained through more traditional channels. Due to the fact that the flow of information via such technologies is today a highly integrated component of our society, professional journalists must be aware and pay attention to important events and trends that emerge through online social networking platforms.

Examples of this realization include the fact that BBC journalists have been told that they must embrace social media and use them as a primary source of information². And Sky News has ordered its journalists to install TweetDeck, a popular application for monitoring updates on Twitter³. According to a 2010 survey⁴, 89% of journalists said they turn to blogs for story research, 65% to social media sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn, and 52% to micro-blogging services such as Twitter. The same survey also found that 61% use Wikipedia, the popular online encyclopedia. One obvious challenge when using platforms such as Facebook, Twitter or Wikipedia as information sources is that of verification. Due to the pseudonymous nature of such Internet services and the resulting limited accountability and reliability, all information must be independently verified when used for quality journalism. One example of a hoax that has generated a lot of media attention is the alleged disappearance of Syrian lesbian activist Amina Arraf, who later turned out to have been a completely fictional person.

Besides passively monitoring new media for relevant and useful information, journalistic techniques can also include actively engaging in research and dialogue with

² See (Bunz, 2010)

³ See (Kane, 2010)

⁴ See (Cision, 2010)

the general public, e.g. by enabling “comments” (and therefore a simple feedback functionality) on online news articles, or by launching online surveys.

2.2. Publishing Information

In addition to providing new opportunities for collecting information, ICTs also offer journalists new ways of publishing articles, videos and other content to their audiences. During the early days of the Internet, dystopian prophecies predicted that new media would eventually completely replace newspapers. While this has obviously not come true, the Internet has definitely become an established distribution channel for media corporations. Usually the content provided online is similar or equivalent to what is also published in traditional media, e.g. a newspaper may publish the same article in their printed and online versions. Often, media corporations do not only publish content via a website, but also on social networking services. For example, German newspaper “Der Spiegel” has both an active Facebook community⁵ and several Twitter accounts. In some cases, news broadcasts shown on television can also be watched online⁶. In other cases, a broadcaster may publish certain content exclusively online⁷.

Pure online newspapers and magazines exist as well, which in many cases are not any less professional than their traditional counterparts. One of the best known and most respected examples of a pure online newspaper is The Huffington Post⁸, founded it 2005. Besides large media corporations, independent journalists also use ICTs for publishing their work online⁹.

Another interesting mechanism enabled by new media is the potential to “watch the watchers”, i.e. to observe and criticize the work of journalists, and when appropriate point out mistakes or violations of journalistic standards. Websites that are dedicated to

⁵ <http://www.facebook.com/spiegelonline/>)

⁶ See for example the “TVThek” (<http://tvthek.orf.at/>) of the Austrian Broadcasting company

⁷ See for example the “Elektrischer Reporter” (<http://elektrischerreporter.zdf.de/>) of Germany’s ZDF broadcaster

⁸ <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/>

⁹ See for example <http://www.medialdigital.de/>

this purpose are sometimes called “Watchblog”. One famous example in Germany is BILDblog¹⁰, which observes and criticizes the highly popular tabloid Bild.

3. Citizen Journalism

Due to the modern ubiquity and interactive nature of new media services, the production of public content and information has ceased to be the province of professional journalists alone. Today, every connected citizen – whether through a personal computer, mobile phone or other electronic device – has the technical means to not only consume, but also potentially to publish and share digital content with a broad audience. This interactivity is the defining property of the so-called Web 2.0 paradigm, and has among other things given rise to citizen journalism. One definition¹¹ is as follows:

“The idea behind citizen journalism is that people without professional journalism training can use the tools of modern technology and the global distribution of the Internet to create, augment or fact-check media on their own or in collaboration with others.”

When considering this phenomenon of a high number of potential publishers with a very diverse background and level of education, then some of the questions that have to be asked are whether the individuals who are publishing information abide by basic journalistic principles, and whether an actual audience exists for their activity. In a public sphere that is inherently unstructured and little regulated, competition arises, and complex social processes decide how the interesting “signals” get separated from the insignificant “noise”. While the casual “blogosphere”, “twittersphere” or the otherwise general public sphere online is not always likely to produce articles or other content of widespread interest, great relevance, and deep impact, there is however also a segment of more dedicated individuals who actively endeavor to publish content which actually constitutes valuable content for political or cultural processes. This can range from weblogs dedicated to someone’s professional expertise, to alternative media platforms with more or less regular contributors.

¹⁰ <http://www.bildblog.de/>

¹¹ See (Glaser, 2006)

Examples of such media platforms and other successful citizen journalism initiatives include:

- Groundviews¹² is Sri Lanka's first citizen journalism website founded in 2006. According to an interview¹³ with founder Sanjana Hattotuwa, it focuses on narratives and issues that mainstream media do not report, which is critical to Sri Lanka's post-war democratic future.
- The blogging platform "Global Voices"¹⁴ runs a so-called bridge-blogging service where volunteer authors, translators and editors attempt to provide reports from a local perspective that cannot normally be found in the mainstream media, therefore raising awareness and cross-cultural understanding.
- The Independent Media Center¹⁵ (also called IndyMedia) is a network of online platforms where anyone can contribute by writing articles. It covers political and social issues and was created as an alternative to large government and corporate media.
- Similarly, GroundReport¹⁶ also enables anyone to submit news. In addition, it provides interactive feedback and review functionality on articles, with the stated goal to "democratize the media".
- iReport¹⁷ is an initiative by CNN, which encourages individuals to publish reports from their own local towns and neighborhoods. This example is interesting insofar as it is citizen journalism operating within the infrastructure of a large media corporation.
- WITNESS¹⁸ uses primarily video content. What makes this service special is its explicit goal to promote political change, especially in the field of human rights. It

¹² <http://groundviews.org/>

¹³ <http://ict4peace.wordpress.com/2011/08/04/civic-media-citizen-journalism-and-role-of-information-in-democracy/>

¹⁴ <http://globalvoicesonline.org/>

¹⁵ <http://www.indymedia.org/>

¹⁶ <http://www.groundreport.com/>

¹⁷ <http://ireport.cnn.com/>

¹⁸ <http://witness.org/>

does so by enabling people to publish personal stories of abuse and therefore helps to raise awareness.

Media-related activities by the general public can include not only the direct production of original information, but also the influence over information flow, filtering and structuring. For example, Twitter is regularly used by individuals not only to broadcast their original content, but also to “re-tweet” information that is considered interesting, or to share links to professional news and blog articles¹⁹. Within social networking services, many tools exist for influencing which information is proliferated and preferred over others. Such tools range from Facebook’s famous “like” button to social bookmarking services such as Digg. Whether this amount of public influence over information flow is good or bad is subject to debate (see section 6.2). One negative example is the widespread “re-tweeting” of news about an attack on the Marriot hotel in Mumbai in 2008, when in fact it was the Ramada hotel next door that was attacked²⁰.

4. Peace Journalism

Peace journalism is a special kind of journalism which – besides being built on values that are common to all journalism, such as honesty, modesty, integrity and impartiality – also puts a special emphasis on the additional values of peace, democracy and human rights. These values are on one hand important guidelines in practicing peace journalism, but also serve as its very goals. One definition²¹ is as follows:

“Peace journalism is when editors and reporters make choices – about what to report, and how to report it – that create opportunities for society at large to consider and to value non-violent responses to conflict.”

In other words, peace journalists endeavor to actively promote values, and therefore in their work they often fulfill additional roles such as activists, investigators or social workers. In their work, they avoid sensationalism, and they focus on root causes and possible solutions of conflicts, rather than on the violence that emerges. They attempt to

¹⁹ 10% of Twitter posts contain such links, according to (Twitter, 2010)

²⁰ See (Chamberlain, 2008)

²¹ See (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005)

expose views from all perspectives, and to report on directly affected people rather than elites.

Today, the idea of peace journalism is a widely accepted (although maybe not widely practiced) concept that continues to evolve, and which is more and more recognized as a powerful instrument in working toward a more peaceful world. This emerging field can of course benefit from ICTs in similar ways as traditional journalism and citizen journalism have been able to do so. It has been suggested that the use of ICTs has the potential to “lower the threshold of entry to the global debate for traditionally unheard or marginalized voices, particularly from poorer parts of the world which are too often represented by others”²², and to “transcend geo-political barriers created by national media systems, therefore boosting the efforts of moderate voices to redefine the nature of ongoing conflicts”²³. Both of these abilities are powerful assets for peace journalism.

There are already several examples of peace journalism online:

- The United States Institute for Peace runs PeaceMedia²⁴, a collection of media to promote peace.
- On Facebook, several groups related to peace journalism can be found²⁵.
- The Transcend Media Service²⁶ is a weekly editorial to practice peace journalism and deliver solution oriented news and analyses.
- The Peace and Conflict Journalism Network (PECOJON)²⁷ in the Philippines offers extensive resources online, including an online magazine, a conflict database, and a toolbox for peace journalists.

5. Next-generation ICTs for Journalism

The exact technological means for both professional journalists and average citizens to share information with an online audience are diverse and can range from simple

²² See (Coleman, 2005)

²³ See (Terzis & Smeets, 2008)

²⁴ <http://peacemedia.usip.org/>

²⁵ For example, see <http://www.facebook.com/groups/170638403613/>

²⁶ <http://www.transcend.org/tms/>

²⁷ <http://www.pecojon.org/>

websites and weblogs to social networking services or the popular video sharing platform Youtube. It is however interesting to note that, as a response to the rise of citizen journalism, ICT entrepreneurs and engineers have reacted by developing communication technologies that are specifically designed for empowering individuals to collect and disseminate news. Many of these technologies are aimed at guaranteeing access to information and communication networks in environments where such access might sometimes be restricted. For example, during the 2011 Arab Spring, the reason why the Egyptian government succeeded in shutting down the country's Internet connectivity was that almost all of its connections were controlled by only four major companies, which implemented the shutdown in a concerted action within only 15 minutes²⁸. Also, social networking services such as Facebook or Twitter are highly centralized, making it easy to monitor and manipulate all communication that takes place on such services.

There are technical approaches to circumventing such obstructive measures, for example proxy servers, anonymizing peer-to-peer networks, alternative DNS root name servers and private alternative network devices. A number of technology projects are underway that promise to make access to information, social networking and other interaction on the Internet more free, open and democratic, more empowering for individuals, less vulnerable to manipulation or restriction, and therefore more suited for journalism. The most common recipes to achieve these goals are to use both hardware and software that is inherently decentralized and supports anonymous and encrypted communication, in order to make it hard to identify individuals and control their communication. The following is a list of some hard- and software technology projects that can have a direct impact on the effectiveness of journalism and activism:

- One of the most popular projects is Tor²⁹, which has been used extensively during both the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions³⁰. It allows users to transmit messages and access websites in an anonymous way, by sharing and disguising their communication with other participants in a distributed network.

²⁸ See (Cowie, 2011)

²⁹ <http://www.torproject.org/>

³⁰ According to (Niiler, 2011), downloads of the Tor software have increased significantly when Egypt's Internet connectivity was shut down.

- Psiphon³¹ is a so-called proxy server software, which enables users to access censored websites by establishing connections through an intermediate, non-censored system. The project views the Internet as a “global commons” that should not be
- FreedomBox³² is a software project initiated by Columbia University law professor Eben Moglen, who has frequently criticized the Internet’s ability to monitor people’s behavior. The project’s stated purpose is to “facilitate free communication among people, safely and securely, beyond the ambition of the strongest power to penetrate”, and the project’s website explicitly describes itself as a “platform that resists oppression and censorship”, and “an organizing tool for democratic activities in hostile regimes”.
- Tonika³³ promises social networks based on principles that human societies implement organically in daily life, with robust security, anonymity, resilience and performance.
- Similarly, Diaspora³⁴ is also a decentralized social networking software that tries to provide Facebook-like functionality without being dependent on a single entity which controls all participants.
- The serval project³⁵ (“uniting the world through communication”) goes as far as stating that communication should be a human right. It focuses on mobile phones and tries to develop software that makes them work under any circumstances and without infrastructure.
- The Commotion wireless project³⁶ specifically references the protests in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, and argues that “democratic activists around the globe need a secure and reliable platform to ensure their communications cannot be controlled or cut off by authoritarian regimes”.

³¹ <http://psiphon.ca/>

³² <http://freedomboxfoundation.org/>

³³ <http://5ttt.org/>

³⁴ <http://joindiaspora.com/>

³⁵ <http://www.servalproject.org/>

³⁶ <http://tech.chambana.net/projects/commotion>

- Wireless community networks such as Freifunk³⁷ attempt to provide Internet connectivity for everyone in a grassroots effort independent of commercial providers.
- OpenBTS³⁸ in conjunction with the Asterisk³⁹ open-source software can enable classic telephone devices to function in an environment where no commercial, centralized infrastructure is available.
- Bambuser⁴⁰ is a set of software tools that enable users to stream video to an audience in real time. For example, this can enable activists to broadcast live images from their cell phone or webcam directly to a social networking service such as Facebook.

The list of such projects is growing, as is public awareness of the deficiencies and technical vulnerabilities of current highly centralized ICT infrastructure. Political, financial and academic resources are also more and more devoted to such efforts, for example by the New America Foundation⁴¹, which supports projects to build technology for a distributed, open-source telecommunications system, by MIT's Center for Civic Media⁴², which researches and invents "new technologies that support and foster civic media and political action", by the University of Toronto's Citizen Lab⁴³, or by the Harvard Berkman Center for Internet & Society's "Internet & Democracy project", an initiative with an explicit focus on the Middle East⁴⁴.

6. Problems with ICTs for Journalism

Despite the fact that ICTs offer a wide range of possibilities to professional journalists as well as citizens, there are problems as well. Some of these problems, such as online security or the digital divide, are generic and common to any use of ICTs. Some other problems however are especially relevant to journalism and are directly related to

³⁷ <http://start.freifunk.net/>

³⁸ <http://openbts.sourceforge.net/>

³⁹ <http://www.asterisk.org/>

⁴⁰ <http://bambuser.com/>

⁴¹ <http://newamerica.net/>

⁴² <http://civic.mit.edu/>

⁴³ <http://citizenlab.org/tag/internet-freedom/>

⁴⁴ <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/research/internetdemocracy>

identity as well as to the openness and interactivity of new media which allow anyone to participate.

6.1. Anonymity vs. Veronymity

*“Identification, that’s how it starts.
Then ends with being rounded up.
Experimented on, eliminated.”*

-- Magneto, from the movie X-Men First Class (2011)

“For us anonymity will be the first line of defence.”

-- Professor X, from the movie X-Men First Class (2011)

The question of how much personal identity should be revealed when using Internet applications and services is a political one that influences citizen and peace journalism, but also goes far beyond it. It is essentially a mirror of the age old question of how much private sphere and how much state power is healthy for a democratic and peaceful society, and how the resulting conflict between freedom and security should be approached. Since the Internet has become widely available to mainstream society, the question of personal identity has continuously been subject to heated discussions, and many initiatives, communities and even entire conferences⁴⁵ are dedicated to this subject. This ongoing debate is also known as “nymwars” and can be summarized as a trade-off between anonymity and veronymity (i.e. revealing one’s true identity). A wealth of proponents and arguments exist on both sides, some of which are directly relevant to journalism.

Arguments and statements for little or no personal identity include:

- Anonymity is the best guarantee for privacy and free speech online, which are fundamental human rights⁴⁶.
- For example, Austrian privacy expert Hans Zeger explicitly calls anonymity online a human right⁴⁷.

⁴⁵ For example, the Internet Identity Workshop (<http://www.internetidentityworkshop.com>)

⁴⁶ See Articles 12 and 19 of (United Nations, 1948)

⁴⁷ See (Apfl, 2011)

- Anonymity can be a powerful asset for democracy, because it reduces one's inhibitions, and it enables one to freely voice opinions without the fear of consequences. This may be most important in societies where governments are known to excessively monitor and restrict free speech and the free expression of opinions.
- The online activist / hacker group "Anonymous", which strongly advocates the right for anonymity online, and which has received a lot of media attention for its alleged actions against high-profile entities such as the IMF, the Pentagon, and the government of Iran, states in a video message⁴⁸:

"We have the right to not be surveilled, not be stalked, and not be used for profit."

- Social media researcher Danah Boyd says that anonymity provides protection for political dissidents, ethnic minorities and marginalized groups⁴⁹, and that members of such groups are most likely to rely on anonymity:

"Real names policies aren't empowering; they're an authoritarian assertion of power over vulnerable people."

Arguments and statements for much or full personal identity (veronymity) include:

- Anonymity can be abused for spam, defamation, propaganda and other malicious purposes, while the use of real names results in more trust, transparency and accountability, which are important foundations of a democracy.
- In addition, the use of real names would likely result in more security, facilitate law enforcement, and reduce criminal acts online (cybercrime).
- Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg is known to be an advocate of the use of real personal identities online, stating for example in an interview⁵⁰:

"Having two identities for yourself is an example of a lack of integrity."

- His sister and Facebook's marketing director, Randi Zuckerberg, has argued that the use of real names prevents phenomena such as cyberbullying⁵¹:

⁴⁸ See (Gray, 2011)

⁴⁹ See (Boyd, 2011)

⁵⁰ See (Kirkpatrick D., 2010)

“I think anonymity on the Internet has to go away. People behave a lot better when they have their real names down. I think people hide behind anonymity and they feel like they can say whatever they want behind closed doors.”

- Google CEO Eric Schmidt is similarly arguing against anonymity online and has stated in an interview⁵²:

“If you have something that you don’t want anyone to know, maybe you shouldn’t be doing it in the first place”.

- On a different occasion, Eric Schmidt has also said the following⁵³:

“In a world of asynchronous threats, it is too dangerous for there not to be some way to identify you. We need a verified name service for people.”

- In the wake of terrorist attacks committed by right-wing extremist Anders Behring Breivik in Norway, German politician Hans-Peter Friedrich has demanded an end to anonymity⁵⁴:

“Normally, people account with their name for what they say. Why should this be different on the Internet?”

Many examples exist where the question of anonymity has affected success or failure of Internet services. The social networking service Google Plus has been criticized for its initial „real name“ policy, which has later been relaxed. In the case of online journalism, many media corporations are facing the challenge of whether to accept information from anonymous sources, and whether to allow interactive functionality such as commenting on their online content by anonymous visitors.

Perhaps one of the best known examples of the question on how much anonymity there should be on the Internet is the Wikileaks whistleblower platform, which has become famous for having released several high profile documents containing sensitive and secret materials, such as the “Collateral Murder” video or the “Afghan War Diary”. Wikileaks undertakes great efforts both on the technological and political level to

⁵¹ See (Bosker, 2011)

⁵² See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A6e7wfdHzew>

⁵³ See (Kirkpatrick M. , 2010)

⁵⁴ See (Lischka, 2011)

protect the anonymity of its contributors, and consequentially the service has become subject to a controversial debate on whether this anonymity is justified or not. While proponents argue that anonymity is necessary to protect the whistleblowers' identities as well as the freedom of the press, opponents state that the released information present a danger to national security⁵⁵.

6.2. Online Collectivism

*"It's been my policy to view the Internet not as an 'information highway,'
but as an electronic asylum filled with babbling loonies."*

-- Mike Royko

(Pulitzer Prize winner)

In addition to anonymity, another important challenge is that in spite of the open and relatively unregulated nature of interactions taking place in online platforms, they might not actually support democratic discourse, citizen journalism and other beneficial processes, but instead rather resemble a state of anarchy or other organizational forms that ultimately contradict and hurt the nature of a democratic system. While ICTs definitely enable large amounts of individuals to exchange information and to communicate and collaborate in networked social structures, with every individual being able to participate in a roughly equal way, this ability and the resulting concept of online collectivism can produce either a beneficial or a destructive outcome.

On one hand, online collectivism is often described in a positive way. The main arguments in this case are:

- The idea of freely accessing and exchanging information is not only based on human rights, but also a fundamental basis for democratic societies. Larger numbers of participants result in more opinions and more information, which in turn results in healthier democratic discourse. Proponents of this line of argumentation state that the speed and flexibility of modern ICTs provide the perfect framework for such processes to take place.

⁵⁵ See (Sifry, 2011)

- When information is aggregated by groups, content can be generated, and decisions can be made that are ultimately better than they could have been if they had been made by any single member of a group. In this sense, online collectivism can be compared to the economic concept of a free market which would regulate itself, find mistakes, and therefore improve incrementally. This phenomenon is sometimes described as “collective wisdom” or “swarm intelligence”. (Surowiecki, 2004) mentions cognition, coordination and cooperation as the three advantages of collective decision-making. One example for this is the online encyclopedia Wikipedia whose quality is often said to rival that of professional encyclopedias such as the Encyclopedia Britannica.

On the other hand, there is also significant criticism of online collectivism:

- For example, (Lanier, 2006) criticizes the blind fascination that is sometimes attributed to collective activities enabled by ICTs. Just like proponents of online collectivism, he also uses the online encyclopedia Wikipedia as an example and states that he is not concerned with the knowledge itself that is being accumulated by collectivist processes, but rather with the trust that many people attribute to it, calling online collectivism a “fetish” to some. In addition, he warns of the emergence of any kind of system that claims universality even when based on collectivist principles. Finally, he also mentions that works created by collectives are devoid of any personality, and that any traits and voices of individual authors are lost.
- According to (Keen, 2007), most of modern social culture has existed with specific intellectuals acting as gatekeepers whose purpose is to analyze, evaluate, filter and regulate information as it reaches the masses. In a system where the construction and flow of information and knowledge are conducted in a very collectivist and egalitarian manner, these gatekeepers do not disappear, but they can be more easily circumvented. As a result, online collectivism might deliver superficial observations of the world rather than deep analysis, shrill opinion rather than judgment. Keen’s conclusion is that “history has proven that the crowd is not often very wise”, embracing unwise ideas like “slavery, infanticide, George W. Bush’s war in Iraq, Britney Spears.”

- Interaction on the Internet can actually serve to mostly reinforce existing beliefs and opinions, rather than enrich and broaden them. According to one study⁵⁶, people are likely to consume sources on the Internet that match their already existing views. Also, the Internet makes it easier for us to find and join groups that we already agree with, which might, in turn, make our views more extreme⁵⁷.
- Another potential problem of online collectivism is groupthink, which is characterized by group pressure, a belief in the inherent morality of a group's decision, the illusion of unanimity, and barriers to voicing one's own, contradicting opinions (self-censorship). In online communication systems, where it is all too easy for large numbers of individuals to participate in group discussions, where messages and replies often appear in rapid, chaotic patterns, and where therefore the problem of information overload can make it hard to treat all given opinions with equal attention and consideration, perhaps the above mentioned phenomena associated with groupthink are even more likely to appear than in face-to-face interaction.

The lesson to be learned is perhaps that the goal in judging and addressing online collectivism should not be to aim for the availability of a maximum amount of information within the public sphere, but rather an optimum of information, which has to be operationalized in some way. It is one of the tasks of professional journalists to filter this wealth of information, to decide what is relevant and what is not, and to verify information from unreliable sources.

6.3. Propaganda

Historically, attempts by established authorities to control and manipulate information and communication have a long tradition, from the Catholic Church's early attempts to control Gutenberg's printing technology to the fearsome propaganda machine of German National Socialism. In this tradition, it is not surprising that today, authoritarian regimes attempt to maintain their power to a great extent by controlling the dissemination of information, and that information and communication technologies

⁵⁶ See (Hsu, 2009)

⁵⁷ See (Morozov, 2009)

become powerful weapons for all sides of a conflict. While some countries provide Internet services in a very free and unrestricted manner, others exert tight control in the name of security⁵⁸. Evgeny Morozov – known for coining terms such as “digital dictatorship” – suggests that the Internet may actually be more useful for oppression than for democratic empowerment⁵⁹.

Often, the borders between journalism, marketing and propaganda are not clear. The following is a list of examples how the use of ICTs might be used to disseminate information in a fashion that must be considered propaganda rather than journalism:

- One example is the concept of paid blogging, i.e. the spreading of favorable opinions via weblogs for money. This strategy has been used by the Chinese government to post comments favorable toward its policies, in an attempt to influence public opinion on the Internet⁶⁰.
- Similarly, the government of Israel has enlisted bloggers speaking a second language, in order to represent the country’s interests on “anti-Zionist” blogs⁶¹.
- During the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts, the U.S. military has started using software that allows it to create multiple, fake online profiles, also known as “sock puppets” or “virtual armies” to sway public opinion, using tactics like posting fake comments on blogs⁶².
- In Nigeria, the Umaru Yar’adua regime has budgeted \$5 million to sponsor pro-government websites⁶³.

7. Conclusion

The nature of information production, flow and consumption in a peaceful and democratic society is an important topic. The old saying that “knowledge is power”

⁵⁸ For a report on Internet freedom and censorship world-wide, see (Freedom House, 2011)

⁵⁹ For example, see (Morozov, 2010)

⁶⁰ The online commentators engaged in this activity are sometimes called the “50-cent party”. See (Bristow, 2008).

⁶¹ See (Liphshiz, 2009)

⁶² See (Olson, 2011)

⁶³ See (Sahara Reporters, 2009)

summarizes the responsibility and risk associated with control over information, and indeed, history has shown again and again that the abuse and withholding of information can lead to suffering, oppression and war, while the fair, balanced and inclusive availability of information is essential for democracy and peace. From this perspective, one of most important roles of professional and responsible journalism has always been to ensure a well-informed civil society which is able to preserve its democratic principles.

Today, the mainstream availability of ICTs has opened up new possibilities for traditional journalism to collect and publish information, as well as given rise to completely new forms of information flow involving not just professionals, but also potentially any connected citizen. It is important to point out that despite the many obvious advantages of such new possibilities, new questions and challenges also have to be addressed, such as striking the right balance between anonymity and veronymity, and finding ways to select the relevant parts from a vast space of information.

The new opportunities offered by ICTs are especially interesting with regard to citizen journalism and peace journalism. Even though they are wholly different concepts, initiatives from both fields do often share common values, and they both have the potential for beneficial political change. While it is often said that technology is inherently neutral, and that it can be used for good or evil, it is still noteworthy that several new technologies are currently being created by visionaries and engineers who share certain values that are also well-known in citizen and peace journalism – such as the protection of human rights or the empowerment of underprivileged people. If we can succeed in using both existing and newly developed technology to better publish and emphasize information that is focused on truth, people and solutions, rather than on violence, propaganda and elites, then we will have achieved a beneficial synergy between the fields of peace journalism and technology. To some extent, this synergy exists already today, e.g. it is possible to find news on the Internet that focus on peace topics, however, it shall be the opinion expressed in this conclusion that this synergy has much more potential, and that idealistic types of journalism, as well as the ICTs that support them, ought to be further developed, in order to establish an effective counterbalance to the large amount of today's mainstream journalistic practices based on violence.

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