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# State Cyber Advocacy

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This paper reflects the opinion of its authors only

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# Executive summary

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This document presents the basic premise of the new media reality and the use of public diplomacy within it. It will also detail the new rules of this game, and present the main challenges and advantages that come from the Israeli political, cultural and social context. Our main claim is that a state must understand and use a wide range of new media techniques in order to create an efficient network of online influence. Specifically, we propose a model of a new media operations center (NMOC) operated by an NGO/research institute to mediate between the state and the networks.

A significant part of this analysis is based on the state-network cooperation model developed at the Asper Institute for New Media Diplomacy at the Sammy Ofer School of Communications, IDC Herzliya. The way we saw smart power manifested during Operation Cast Lead in 2008 and 2009 showed that Israel has already made a few initial steps toward the required transformation in this arena. However, much more has to be done.

The authors of this paper hope to provide practitioners with an indepth understanding of the new reality, along with the tools to manage successful strategies that address it. The aim of these strategies is to preserve Israel's ability to attract and persuade – crucial factors for a state's survival in the new information ecosystem.

The world is saturated with information and governments need to adapt to the fact that a state can no longer control information by controlling the mass media, instead it needs to influence and coordinate multiple networks of information.

New media diplomacy should be discussed both as a legitimate tool for influence and also as a somewhat menacing practice if used improperly. On one hand, the state has the right to represent itself as any other kind of global actor in the new information ecosystem. On the other hand, if a state kept its public diplomacy efforts transparent this would ensure it will not become a propaganda-brainwashing tool or conduct illegal warfare online, thus loosing legitimacy.

The **smart power** concept proposed by international relations scholar Joseph Nye states that governments should use not only their **hard power** (forceful methods such as combat or economic pressure) but also their **soft power** (the cultural values associated with it) to influence others. Smart power is the combination of both. We believe the most effective way for governments to use smart power is by using characteristics of the Web 2.0 internet environments such as creation and distribution of user-generated content (UGC) in addition to spreading their own content by viral means, while creating long-lasting relationships with the relevant audiences through social networks.

The audience, serving as both the **target and the channel** for the distribution of messages, helps to raise the visibility of desired content on the Web through the use of social bookmarking sites (websites used for posting and rating of web pages) or social network viral marketing (creating and 'seeding' easily distributable quality content).

Governments should maintain web presence on three interlinked levels: content, identity and interaction. **Content** can be exemplified by creating and uploading valuable pieces of information on appropriate platforms such as pictures to photo-sharing website [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com) or videos to video-sharing website [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com). Through the constant flow of content the government creates **identity**, which can be further enriched by creating personalized blogs by governmental employees (balancing personal and professional information) thus leading to **continued interaction** with audiences on such social network platforms as Facebook and Twitter. Therefore, **interaction** encompasses the first two concepts and can be summarized by three goals:

1. distribution of content;
2. development of a lasting relationship with a wide audience;
3. creating a community of citizens that express their commitment to the state by being a part of the state's network.

In order to better understand the audience, we have categorized it into three groups:

- a **'blue team'** – those who share the state's frame of reference and are willing to receive and spread the state's messages;
- a **'red team'** – those who share other narratives and are hostile to the state's messages;
- a **'grey team'** – the mass of non-involved general public who share neither frame of reference. Both blue and red teams fight to convert as many of the grey team as possible to their respective world views.

The state should offer help and support to local and world citizens who want to use their skills to benefit it. These blue citizens would then be engaged by the government to conduct public diplomacy on its behalf, using shared resources and messages to counter the parallel efforts of the red team's side.

The blue team would try to provide an Israeli perspective and interpretation through meaningful relationships, reach and influence **critical network hubs** (large websites, popular bloggers and the like who have large audiences), enhancing the impact created by their actions. Through the blue team's efforts in new media channels it is possible to reach mainstream media and foreign decision makers who monitor the aptitudes and interests of the general population (grey team).

The main actors in the Web 2.0 ecosystem are private individuals who use the Web to share information with others. Sharing personal information helps build trust and legitimacy in the networks. Governments - by their nature large, impersonal bodies - must adopt new information strategies if they wish to take advantage of this ecosystem. They will be required to transform parts of their organizational structure, delegating power to mediating organizations or individuals. This is a must, as Web 2.0 advocacy is going to play meaningful roles in diplomacy, directly affecting a state's smart power.

We believe that because governments are massive bureaucratic organizations they do not work well in networked environments and in mobilizing volunteers, especially in times of conflict or crisis. Therefore we propose creating a semi-autonomous NMOC operated by NGOs or research institutes which would share common interests and objectives with the government. The center would operate continually and reach full potential in times of crisis, activating the dormant networks it created earlier. The center's goals would be:

- to establish a system of monitoring and distribution of information;
- to identify and promote user generated content in real time;
- to implement a new approach toward crisis management with new media technologies;
- to develop cooperation with social networks;
- to develop new online tools for approaching foreign journalists; and
- to present a system that makes possible effective interaction and cooperation between various platforms and dimensions of the information ecosystem.

This center should be constructed from four small target-oriented units.

1. **Content monitoring unit:** Its goal would be to develop data mining methods for correlation in information overloaded reality through various data mining techniques. The unit would focus on monitoring different Web 2.0 and other media platforms while looking for state supporting content that should be promoted (identification of valuable user-generated or traditional media content) or negative content aimed at harming the state's image that should be taken into account and balanced with an appropriate response.
2. **Distribution unit:** This unit would promote content on multiple platforms using search engine optimization techniques. It would receive and distribute content from government and various organizations, and also from the monitoring unit.
3. **Social networks unit:** This unit would develop a lasting relationship with key social networks in various locations and facilitate collaboration within these networks. This would include getting information from the networks (crowd sourcing), distributing information through the networks (viral marketing) and developing capabilities for network

activation (for example, locating specific content in specific locations according to a given situation, approaching specific audiences, organizing online action and promoting content).

4. **Journalist unit:** This unit would be in charge of online interaction with a social network of professional journalists. It should use the internet to approach journalists throughout the world who cannot be reached by other means.

As a case study we shall present an example of an NMOC operated by the IDC Herzliya School of Communications during Israeli operation Cast Lead (December 2008 to January 2009). Operating in English, French, Spanish and Dutch, this center provided tools and messages for coordinated networked actions to web users interested in helping the Israeli position online.

# Preface: Framing the discourse.

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A state, whether democratic or totalitarian, always tries to influence the flow of information its citizens receive. Whether this attempt to influence is called propaganda, public relations or censorship, the methods of doing this has changed significantly in today's reality of networks (including Web and online and offline social links that individuals and organizations share).

This paper aims to present a balanced view of the current situation and to provide recommendations for governments and policymakers, specifically in Israel, on how to conduct public diplomacy efforts in a new media networked world.

However, a paper of this nature also raises important questions: Should a modern democratic state try to create a channel of unmediated communication with its citizens and try to engage these citizens in activities that present the state's interest? Consequently, should we be discussing these issues openly at all?

On one hand, it could be argued that it is not a government's prerogative to interfere with the characteristics and flow of the World Wide Web in providing free information. Followers of this perspective believe the Web should be a free playground for global citizens, unhindered by any governments' grasp. In their view, major liberal values are contradicted though this paper's assumption that governments should be engaged in web-based network activities.

On the other hand, a government's efforts to improve its international image using new information technologies might be seen as linked to psychological and information warfare used by said government. As such, its activities should be conducted in secret. The followers of such a perspective would see this discussion as an unforgivable disclosure of need-to-know-only information.

While both claims have validity, we are presenting a new perspective on the matter that can be understood through three main points. These are:

1. Rather than 'using' or 'interfering' with the networked world, governments need to **adapt to it** and **transform** accordingly in order to remain relevant in the future.
2. Most of the techniques described here are well known and used by private, corporate and governmental actors, as well as terrorist organizations and other such groups. We believe that online advocacy in the new information ecosystem requires transparency in order to obtain legitimacy and for the information to be effective. By following this principle, access to networks ensures that governments do not and will not step out of line and build 'big brother' campaigns for their citizens. Transparency will also allow public debate that benefits the effectiveness of those techniques.
3. Networked activities are based **on collaboration** and a government is a single actor among many others competing for the publics' attention. Therefore governments cannot **control** networks or **manipulate** them in the way they did with traditional press, but they can **work with them** and **advise** them. All actors have the same democratic right to sound their voice, provided that they are willing to play the game as presented in this paper, rather than changing its rules (or at least trying to change them) in ways that will also undermine their legitimacy in today's new world.

This document is an attempt to benefit the state of Israel's online conduct in a newly networked world.

# Part one: The new diplomacy

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## Smart power in today's information ecosystem

Many researchers emphasise the crucial role of information in diplomacy and governance. For example, Clay Shirky, a specialist on economical and social effects of the internet from New York University, refers to a “**new information ecosystem**”<sup>1</sup> – the changing landscape of information consumption and distribution patterns.

One example of this is the ability of anyone to make their content public through the phenomenon of user-generated content (UGC), coined as **Web 2.0**. Furthermore, what makes such content so valuable is that it is accessible to almost everyone at any time. This creates a whole new flow in the information world and has brought about what is now known as ‘**a world of networks**’. These online-based networks offer new methods of communication and a new social order, thus changing the ways the concept of soft power is manifested.

The idea of **soft power** was developed by Joseph Nye, a former dean of Harvard's Kennedy school of Government. It is considered as one of the classic ideas in the world of modern diplomacy. Nye argues the ability of a nation state sits not only in its active actions such as warfare or economic moves (**hard power**), but also in its appeal to others in terms of culture, perceived image and values (**soft power**).

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**Soft power** – the ability of a state to influence others through ‘attraction’ and ‘persuasion’. For example, its culture, values and image.

**Hard power** – the ability of a state to influence others through the application of force, such as war or economic means.

**Smart power** – the combined application of both soft and hard power, in the correct ratio, in order to achieve the desired effect.

**World of networks** – the World Wide Web, freely available on, that links people to one another, as well as to computers and many thousands of websites through different means of interaction

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He defines the qualities of soft power's *modus operandi* in terms of **attraction** and **persuasion**. He also claims that by combining the necessary hard power and soft power strategies, **smart power** can be achieved by tapping into the influence potential that a nation state has on public opinion throughout the world.<sup>2</sup>

This attraction and persuasion depends on two major factors: attention and interpretation. **Attention** is the ability to convince others that your issue is important. In an information-overloaded reality, the task of holding someone's attention is increasingly challenging. Moreover, attracting attention is not enough. Once attention on a particular topic is gained, one must then work to persuade others that **their interpretation** is the most suitable way to approach an issue/event and its subsequent meanings.

State actors, governments and traditional media had the advantage when setting the public agenda and framing<sup>3</sup> the representation of events in the old system of hierarchical structures. However, the new information

ecosystem does not recognize power of hierarchy. Instead, the world of networks provides two new faces of power - the **crowd** and the **friend**.

The crowd is not merely a group of people, but rather a **smart mob** (a concept developed by Howard Rheingold<sup>4</sup>). Online, a **friend** no longer has the classic definition it used to. It may be people you know or complete strangers, united by the desire to receive information from you. According to Shirky, what matters in the new system is an expanded network of people that a person might find themselves interacting with online<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Shirky C. 2008. *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations*. Penguin Press.

<sup>2</sup> Nye J. S. 2005. *Soft Power: The Means To Success In World Politics*. PublicAffairs.

<sup>3</sup> The way events are presented by media, with an emphasis towards a certain side or narrative.

<sup>4</sup> Rheingold H. 2003. *Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution*. Basic Books.

<sup>5</sup> Shirky C. 2008. *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations*. Penguin Press.

While it is generally accepted that smart power is a key concept for achieving influence in the international arena, the question of how to gain such power is increasingly challenging in our ever-changing world of technology.

As stated earlier, the manifestation of soft and hard power was based on a hierarchical structure in the previous information ecosystem. The world of networks and convergence is much more horizontal. State actors and traditional media are now almost equal and sometimes even weaker among a diversity of other actors. Consequently, state actors lost their role as the ultimate source of soft power and cannot achieve a soft power effect by independent action without building a coalition with networks and new media while acting according to principles of convergence.

In addition, the new ecosystem creates a challenge for the state to not only to ability to manifest soft power, but also hard power – the second component of the smart power concept.

It should be remembered that the new information ecosystem is not only a world of networks but also a world of **convergence**. Convergence is the process of technological and economical merging between companies and platforms that previously operated on an unrelated basis. One example of convergence is the acquisition of technology companies by major media conglomerates (such as AOL's merger with Time Warner in 2000, and the purchase of Myspace.com by Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation in 2005) or the growing use of personal computers or mobile phones for consuming content previously exclusive to the television. Henry Jenkins, from Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the author of *Convergence Culture*, describes global convergence as a state of being where events, trends and moods from one area in the world can affect the entire world<sup>6</sup>. It means that everything is interrelated. So if a state wants to achieve even a single result, it can no longer focus on just one platform, one medium or one task. To be successful, it has to be everywhere. In addition, it cannot differentiate between new and traditional media, because each has a mutual impact on each other and in our new reality, they belong to the same system.

The world of networks can be viewed as a group of **new entities based on a networked identity** which aims to compete against state actors. For example, a network of immigrants who are committed to their state of origin or a particular set of values which may contradict the values of their current state. This commitment is sustained and strengthened through online networks and online interaction with others belonging to their network. This follows the idea of the so-called 'Al Jazeera effect', in which the audience of a particular source of information develops its own identity and creates a 'virtual state'<sup>7</sup> to purport that identity. In this reality, state actors should use every means available to attract, persuade and also defend themselves as independent and sustainable actors. This is especially important in a situation where they become unable to generate or frame agendas, as a result threatening the continuous sustainability of the citizens' support of the state's frameworks.

These growing networks provide a new mechanism for the rapid growth of conflicts that are out of a state's control. The state does not have the ability to retaliate as the networked world erodes its' ability to control **the scope of a conflict**. This both exposes citizens to conflict and also offers various alternatives for one's personal engagement in activities related to a particular conflict. Consequently, one spark of conflict can kindle a huge global flame in the networked world<sup>8</sup>.

This idea goes alongside the introduction of the modern media 'prosumer' (producer plus consumer). New media platforms require a different form of user engagement than those used by previous media methods of television, radio or newspapers. In the global, technology-filled world, new media users strive to not only locate and process information on topics of their choice, but to also **actively create and promote** content related to these topics.

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**Smart mob** – a group of people working together towards a common goal. They work in a self-organized manner while using computer mediated communications such as the the Web and mobile (handheld) devices.

**Friends** – in computerized social networks this concept holds broader meaning. A 'friend' is an individual you might know in person, or they may be a complete stranger who wants to receive information from you or about you and/or is linked to you in some indirect way.

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<sup>6</sup> Jenkins, H. 2006. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University.

<sup>7</sup> Seib, P. 2008. *The Al Jazeera Effect*, Potomac Books.

<sup>8</sup> Schattschneider E. E. 1975. *The Semi-Sovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America*, Harcourt Brace College Publishers.



Today, state actors have two new hard power-related responsibilities. First, they must preserve a citizen's commitment to his state's identity. Second, they must prevent global destabilization through the online network-based proliferation of conflict (or at least to counterbalance the escalation of a conflict by ensuring online network support by citizens on the state's side).

Shirky says we have passed a milestone in creating "new social strategies"<sup>9</sup> in regard to the new network system's requirement. David Ronfeldt and John Arquilla, the authors of the Netwars concept<sup>10</sup>, have introduced us to the main principle that they feel should be used in the new information ecosystem - collaboration. They say "it takes networks to fight networks".

## New media: The rules of the game

Traditionally, the problem with efforts to attract and persuade people is there are various rival actors who promote their agendas and points of view on particular events and issues. The new information ecosystem not only increases the number of competitive actors, but changes the ways this information is distributed. Smart power requires an effective global outreach policy. Consequently, in order to effectively use the Web, several key concepts must be understood.

### User-generated content

The emergence of user-generated content (UGC) was a revolution that changed the face of the Internet. Web 2.0 made the online world a space for everyone. Social media created and provided a huge flow of diverse content containing information that could not be created by traditional media or initiated by big organizations. In this new world, people received the ability and tools to speak for themselves without the mediation of traditional media. Previously, someone had to be focused on creating content or engaging traditional media in order to present their position.

Today, the flow of UGC on social networks helps those who seek to influence. This means that alongside state actors' need to focus on traditional media content creation, they also need to monitor social media for favorable content and assistance with promoting their messages. For example, a video on YouTube depicting a wrongdoing committed by an opponent and filmed by the local populace using a mobile phone camera carries more weight than a recorded speech by an official condemning the aforementioned wrongdoing. The most effective action would be to provide support to a network of followers to enable them to best promote this video.

### Information overload

Web 2.0 also creates a significant problem. In a reality where everyone can create content, **the major issue is not content creation, but its promotion and distribution** – the battle for the audience's short attention span. UGC has gradually become more professional due to the simplification of production techniques and the proliferation of video and photo tools (including those that allow anyone to edit like an expert). As a result, UGC has become more competitive, thereby causing a major shift in the power struggle among content providers, as well as the struggle between traditional and new content.

When a current affairs content provider competes for an individual's attention, it does so against other content providers of the same sort and also against a multitude of other information sources. For example, a CNN breaking news segment competes with a FOX news segment on the same subject and also additional UGC output (political blogs, civic journalists) that may be

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**New media** – Collective name for platforms and content developed around modern communication technologies that are characterized by speed and increasing socialization parameter.

**User-generated content** – Online material created by amateur or semi-professionals.

**Social bookmarking** – Websites on which users share URLs of their favorite web pages.

**Social media marketing (SMM)** – The use of various marketing/persuasive tools to engage users on social network websites in order to influence them.

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<sup>9</sup> Shirky C. 2008. *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations*, Penguin Press.

<sup>10</sup> Arquilla J. & Ronfeldt, D. 1995. 'Challenges for US Policy and Organization', *The Advent of Netwar*, Rand.

related to the issue. This news segment will also compete against comedy shows, cable channels, UGC on YouTube and other videos of numerous kinds, video games and so forth.

There are two crucial factors to ensure content visibility. One is the initial screening conducted by the information's gatekeepers. The other is the acceptance of this content and further dissemination by the public. Most decisions in the traditional information system were made by a human-based environment of gatekeepers such as news editors, and most of the information was consumed through traditional media or received through friends offline. In the new system, there are almost no human gatekeepers; instead there are technical factors that make information more or less visible.

However, human gatekeepers still play important roles because much of their news content is taken and distributed through various different channels. Creating valuable content is important, but an actor's goal today is instead to produce a strategy to make existing messages and content as visible as possible. Above all, an actor must pay attention to the new algorithms of the search engine and social network dynamics that now play an important role in gatekeeping.

### *The new gatekeepers: Wisdom of the crowd*

The audience's inability to consume a huge amount of content has triggered the development of various mechanisms for content evaluation without a gatekeeper. While the precise formulas of the different evaluation methods are a commercial secret, the basic tenet of automatic evaluation claims **the most popular content is the most valuable**.

Here are several different categories used for ranking and evaluating content on the Web.

#### 1. Voting by viewing

The easiest way to determine content value is through supply and demand: evaluate what information has **most of the demand** during **the shortest period of time**. For example, if a particular YouTube video was accessed by one million people during the course of an hour, this could give the video a high ranking value. However, visits to a particular web page or content item are not enough of a measurable parameter for popularity. Many websites have elements that trigger their consumers to evaluate the information provided and then to share it with others. As a result, the piece of information that got the highest grade or was the most shared/emailed has more chances of reaching the largest audience and being the most visible overall. Traditional factors and methods for information evaluation are certainly still used and, obviously, the source of information might also need to be taken into account as one of the factors of popularity. But in most cases the system is based on automatic evaluation and an editor or other actor has to choose out of the items ranked highest by the audience.

#### 2. Votes from other websites

The **Google page rank** is another example of information evaluation based on 'crowd wisdom'. The evaluation formula is complex and mostly secret, however one of its main criteria is the need for a number of links to lead readers to a particular web page. Providing a link to a specific web page gives that page a level of importance and results in a higher ranking than it would have by just having many people visit it. The Wikipedia website has an impressive page rank of nine out of 10, mostly for its constant linkage to and from big and small websites. Another web page popularity factor is the perceived quality of the page the link came from. Thus, if websites linked to your content increase in rank, then your website will probably increase in rank too.

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**Social bookmarking sites –** websites that allow users to share and rate URLs (links) to featured content. Examples include digg.com; delicious.com and reddit.com.

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#### 3. Social bookmarking

Another crowd-based tool that evaluates content and contributes to its visibility is **social bookmarking**, whereby websites evaluate content outside the web platform that presents its content (for example, delicious.com, digg.com, reddit.com). These websites - which have no connection to your website - contain evaluation results of certain/specific content, in most cases according to their popularity or worth. The appearance of content on these websites improves the site's visibility because those are independent platforms where people share their recommendations. Nevertheless, the most effective visibility of any particular content depends on an interrelation of all these factors. For example, if a particular item on

YouTube gains a high ranking on Delicious then this can increase its ranking on YouTube as well as with broader search engines.

So why should you trust anonymous people's opinions without knowing them or their agendas, rather than simply following your preferences? The answer to that might come from the recent online tendency for an individual to rescale the search and reference to fit the smaller group of their close social circle. We call this 'the wisdom of friends'.

'The wisdom of friends' means people consume information first consumed and distributed by their friends and members of their own online networks rather than relying on the general public. This notion is based on the idea that **everyone in a social network is not only a creator but also, and in many cases primarily, a distributor of information.**

This concept should work in both passive and active methods of information consumption. By passive we mean the main sources of information are distributed by friends (for example, a Facebook feed). Active consumption means if we look for particular information – such as a delivery company or details about a particular event – the first results will come from information most popular among friends and not the general crowd of internet users. Though such consumption is still largely a prominent direction rather than reality, the first signs of it can already be seen in event searches on Facebook and in reviews on music service website last.fm.

### *Distribution strategies*

The fact that **consumption of content is an integral factor in raising its visibility** makes its continuous

**promotion** crucial for any policy that aims to reach an audience. To make content important, a network of people who are interested in consuming this kind of content and in supporting you as their source of information must first be developed. To some extent, an actor has to become a 'friend' to these people. This is the first level of engagement with the audience, but more effort is needed. The main goal **is to motivate your audience to distribute and promote your content** by viral marketing means. This can involve the audience ranking the content on social bookmarking sites, posting it on their blogs, sending it by email, sharing with friends on Facebook, re-tweeting on Twitter and so on.

While the traditional media relied on a few sources of information and a big audience, the new reality makes every information consumer a source, thus making the concept of a 'captive audience' nearly non-existent.

### *Search engine optimization*

One popular strategy for increasing the visibility of particular content is **search engine optimization (SEO)**. Since the evaluation of any website is made according to a particular algorithm, the content can be changed, according to this formula, in a way that will increase its visibility - mostly by cultivating the mentions (links) of your own web page on other websites. Understanding how search engines work is important when trying to disseminate information. However, the impact of SEO is limited and it cannot be seen as a magic solution for lack of visibility. Search engines work constantly to improve their threshold

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### **Three types of new media content.**

When discussing new media content it is easier to divide the idea of content into three different categories.

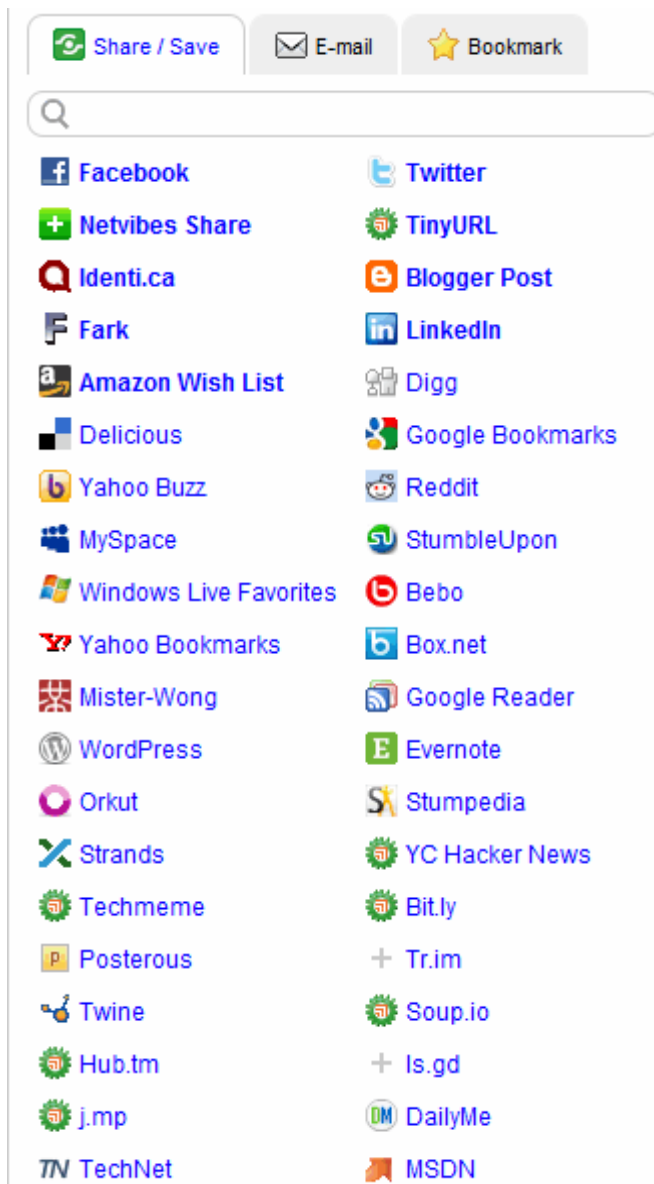
The first is content **created and distributed by the user themselves on an amateur basis**. Into this category is most of the text, audio (podcast) and video content. Whether the user is updating their personal blog, uploading family photos to a shared album, or posting a video on Youtube, it falls into this category. The user usually does this for fun and for a limited group of people.

In the second category, content **found on the internet is distributed by the user to their close personal circle**. Users who are exposed to or locate content they find interesting take active steps to promote such content around the Web. One of the main uses of social networks such as Facebook, Bebo, Myspace and Twitter is sharing selected content. By providing links to the selected web page, or embedding parts of it into the network, users share what they find interesting. Though such networks are personally oriented, content has the potential to spread through social networks like wildfire in an exponential (viral) way.

The third category is a mix of the first two in terms of production and distribution, but greatly differs in scope. Into this category falls **content created by various individuals or organizations especially for promotional and/or for commercial needs**. The content is usually original or syndicated from other websites or platforms owned by the distributor (such as TV show videos promoted by the station's official profile on YouTube). The aim from the start is to reach wider audiences so content is tailored for specific audiences (a not for family/friends circle) and uses more conventional marketing techniques.

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on SEO manipulation, so the boundaries of what is normative and what is not are continually shifting. Moreover, such techniques are more relevant for websites than for particular items of content (videos/pictures/news stories).



**The content should be promotion friendly** so anyone interested in becoming a content distributor would find it easy to do so. For instance, every item should offer easy ways to embed it on various platforms (see graphic, left). This could include links to post it on social networks, social bookmarking sites or to send it by email to friends. Moreover, it means that content should be posted on platforms that trigger content sharing and promotion by its own users.

Using various platforms brings up the important point of **convergence**. Engaging networks in promoting content and outreach of various audiences is more effective if that same content and type of activities are managed on various different platforms that support and link to each other. So any particular item should be published not only on an organization's website, but also on various social networks, blogs, microblogs (such as Twitter) and specific content platforms promoting or displaying various types of content (such as Flickr, YouTube). While the popularity and impact of platforms can change, the principle remains that any effective strategy should include **a multi-platform presence**.

The same principle can be applied to different languages to expand the outreach of the message. This means making content understandable in other languages and also engaging with networks affiliated with a particular language or languages when promoting that content. Convergence also crosses not only various internet platforms but also between traditional and new media. It should be noted that traditional and social media work as communicating

vessels and therefore successful outreach strategies have to address both.

### *Handheld (mobile) device strategies*

Convergence in content consumption also includes other **technological platforms**. For instance, several years ago there was a clear differentiation between the computer as a platform for the internet and TV/radio devices as a platform for traditional media broadcasting. Today a computer can now be used as a platform for many different purposes, and more devices (especially TV sets and TV services) integrate online and computer-like elements (such as digital video recording or video on demand). However, perhaps the most important result has been the emergence of handheld devices. The report 'The Role of Cell Phones in Carrying News and Information' by the US-based Center for International Media Assistance says: "There seems to be no limit to how cell phones can transform societies around the world."<sup>11</sup> Internews Europe research on the use of mobiles

<sup>11</sup> *The Role of Cell Phones in Carrying News and Information*, 2008. Center for International Media Assistance, NDE.

as media platforms argues: "Mobile telephony will be the world's first ubiquitous communications platform and is getting there faster than anyone expected."<sup>12</sup>

The Internews Europe report notes the proliferation of the iPhone shows how mobile phones have become the major platform for information consumption. As a result, we believe content should be adjusted to make information consumption successful through mobile phones. For instance, different media are increasingly now building iPhone applications to make content consumption easier. Moreover, the emergence of handheld devices as a multipurpose content platforms changes how content is consumed. People are now able to access content anywhere and anytime and now tend to **consume content in real time** and **provide real time responses**.

Real-time oriented activities are now crucial to build strategies that will have an impact. The information should be immediate, make it possible to develop new ways to further interaction with networks and also allow for new modes of cooperation between traditional and new media. One example of this is the CNN iReport iPhone application, which claims to simplify the process of submitting UGC and aims to develop a network of content contributors.

The most significant development caused by the emergence of handheld devices is the **convergence of online and offline (physical) reality**. The mobile phone is not only a platform for content consumption and interaction, but also a sensor (with photo and video functions) and navigation device (GPS). This capability makes possible the almost immediate transfer of any picture or video content from offline to online. More importantly, GPS-based geo-location technologies offer the ability to link between consumed content and the physical location of the user. It means that outreach strategies have to be able to make content relevant to particular locations in a physical dimension, as well as know how to optimize interaction with networks by using geo-location technologies. In both cases, the adjustment to using and creating content for handheld platforms is vital as mobile phones have become the main **mediators** between a person's offline and online reality.

## Summary

Producing, uploading and sharing content by particular actors or content creators, or finding someone else's content that furthers your views or cause is the foundation for any policy to attract and persuade others. Nevertheless, cooperation with networks and among their members who will promote and distribute the content is needed to make this content as visible as possible. The main challenge of establishing a web presence is to make this process sustainable in the longer term. We believe the smart power paradigm solves this problem by first creating momentary cooperation and then by building sustainable relationships with online communities of people committed to furthering of particular values and goals. As a result, actors interested in impact building should focus on helping to create communities of people with an interest in contributing their time and energy to reach a particular goal.

In the case of Israeli smart power, this must be manifested through the ability to engage people around a particular item or topic and by developing sustainable pro-Israeli communities that will focus on these issues again in the future and disseminate relevant content as widely as possible. These communities must also have the potential to become a platform for collective intelligence and decision-making that will maximize their engagement and the results of their actions by making their work more dynamic and autonomous.

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<sup>12</sup> *The Promise of Ubiquity: Mobile as Media Platform in the Global South*, 2008, Internews, [http://www.internews.fr/IMG/pdf/Promise\\_of\\_Ubiquity\\_Full\\_Version.pdf](http://www.internews.fr/IMG/pdf/Promise_of_Ubiquity_Full_Version.pdf)

## Part two: Strategy and tactics

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In the first half of this paper we discussed how the new information environment creates new game rules for state actors. New patterns of interaction and information distribution have changed the format of traditional diplomacy. Consequently, if a state is to preserve its' ability to manifest smart power then it must undertake a number of changes to best take advantage of this new reality. The second half of the paper will examine how this could take place. This discussion will be divided into three parts:

- how a state should shape its online presence and represent itself;
- Audience analysis and what the main strategic directions for audience interaction should be;
- How the state should manage itself in a crisis and in particular, in a conflict situation.

The final chapter contains a case study to demonstrate how these elements work.

### The shaping and management of online identities

Web 2.0 has created new models of information distribution, making the competition for attention much more competitive. The state, being too much of an impersonal entity to make its' identity interesting, must instead attract attention by becoming personalized through the people affiliated with it. The management of a state's online identity and its presence in virtual space is no longer a question of luxury, but a necessity for a state's legitimate existence.

The networked nature of this environment throws up new questions about state-related issues such as territory, borders and sovereignty. At the same time, the networked environment provides a platform for the emergence of new actors (such as NGOs, minority identities, and transnational corporations and brands) which compete against the state for people's attention. To remain relevant to its own citizens while still relating to a worldwide audience, states have to be not just a source of information, but also **a networked hub** connected to as many nodes (people/organizations) in the network as possible.

In this paper we identify three dimensions of online presence management that should be followed by state actors. These are exemplified by **three questions**:

1. **Content:** Should a state have an account on YouTube and Flickr?
2. **Identity:** Should a state have a blog?
3. **Interaction:** Should a state have an account on Facebook?

The following three sub-chapters will address each of these dimensions of online presence management.

#### CONTENT

Generally, every online action can potentially be 'translated' into content for distribution, whether text, voice, picture or video footage. Under the Web 1.0 model (the early days of the Web up until the late 1990s), government content was uploaded to a single website and was sometimes distributed to journalists (for instance through press releases). Journalist outreach was then a relatively easy task as they were a small and stable group with clear identities and a well defined goal of receiving the content.

However, content just uploaded to a website with no clear goal or following is 'dead content'. If this dead content is not promoted through traditional media and there is a low probability that it will reach an audience, then its' message will be lost in the world of information overload unless it contains dramatic content of a viral nature. To increase its outreach efficiency, the content must be expanded to various platforms where a variety of audiences tend to consume information. Furthermore, the



same item should be reflected in a number of media channels such as text, audio (podcasts), pictures and video. Mobile devices should also be addressed separately. Such an approach can be referred to as a **multi-platform** or **cross-media** approach. For instance, content relating to one event could not only be presented on the official website and through press releases for journalists, but could also be promoted on YouTube, Flickr and distributed through SMS. Hence, a state should definitely be present on content platforms such as Flickr or YouTube, providing quality multi-platform and multi-language content to ease network distribution.

A good example of global outreach based on a **multi-platform, multi-medium** and **multi-language approach** was the media strategy used for US President Barack Obama's speech at Cairo University in June 2009. In this case, the harnessing of new media did not decrease the role of traditional media and the speech was still broadcasted live on many TV and radio channels. However, the speech's promotion was largely based on using a broad range of new media platforms where the goal was to both reach and engage with the audience.

The White House YouTube page provided a live stream of the speech and a chat platform for viewers' discussion. President Obama's spokesperson Robert Gibbs said the goal was to "not only draw people in to see the speech, but to have them discuss it as well"<sup>13</sup>. The US administration estimates the potential Arab online audience on Facebook included 20 million people. An event page was created on Facebook, the speech also was covered on Twitter, and sent through SMS to thousands of subscribers. A special page was created on the America.gov website that offered SMS texting in Arabic, Persian, Urdu and English, and the speech was translated into at least at 13 languages. It was also highlighted on MySpace<sup>14</sup> and Google's social network Orkut which is popular among South Asian populations.

According to Simon Rosenberg, the president and founder of the political advocacy group New Democratic Network (NDN): "Global webcasting of presidential addresses and press briefings, perhaps translated into multiple languages, is likely to become routine."<sup>15</sup> These tools are used for outreach not only by the US president and diplomats but also by various governmental offices. Rosenberg added: "You are going to see competition at the weekly cabinet meeting between the Department of Homeland Security secretary and the Health and Human Services secretary over who had more views on their YouTube video, and who had more comments on their blog."<sup>16</sup>

## IDENTITY

Although content is undoubtedly the basis of any information-related activity, outreach success depends primarily on the audiences' perception of the source of the information (its identity) and the way this content is communicated (interaction). The relationship between identity and interaction is especially important as any interaction is shaped by the perception of one side towards the other. The management of an online identity is a skill and, as such, should be taught and constantly improved.

### Anonymity

When the World Wide Web became popular at the end of the 1990s, concealing one's real identity was a common phenomenon as the Internet was perceived as a space of anonymity. Now, more than 10 years later, the reverse is happening. Social networks have encouraged the use of real identities as a tool to build a meaningful network - both personal and professional. Today, online information can be one of the first sources of information that one encounters about another person and the actual acquaintance often follows this. Governments can and should capitalise on this trend.

### Identity management

Managing an online identity is a requirement of the new informational reality for private internet users, various non-government organizations and state actors. While this demands certain skills, it is mostly about understanding the importance of the concept of online identity and the basic rules of online conduct.

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<sup>13</sup> Press briefing by press secretary Robert Gibbs, speechwriter Ben Rhodes and deputy national security advisor for strategic communications Denis McDonogh, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, June 3, 2009 [http://www.whitehouse.gov/the\\_press\\_office/Briefing-by-Senior-Administration-Officials-on-Cairo-Speech-June-3-2009/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Briefing-by-Senior-Administration-Officials-on-Cairo-Speech-June-3-2009/)

<sup>14</sup> Zeleny, J. 'Multiple Channels for Obama's Cairo Speech', *New York Times*, June 3, 2009. <http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/06/03/multiple-channels-for-obamas-cairo-speech/>

<sup>15</sup> Boyle, A. The Wired White House, November 21, 2008. <http://cosmiclog.msnbc.msn.com/archive/2008/11/21/1684129.aspx>

<sup>16</sup> Boyle, A. The Wired White House, November 21, 2008. <http://cosmiclog.msnbc.msn.com/archive/2008/11/21/1684129.aspx>

The borders between platforms for content, interaction and the shaping of an online identity are vague. Today, identity is seen as an information mix created by various platforms, with the source (person/organization) behind it being the only common denominator. Still, the main purpose of YouTube remains to be a platform for content, Facebook's primary aim is to serve as a platform for interaction, and blogs (and to some extent micro-blogging services) are chiefly identity platforms. One of the main concepts behind blogs is to chronologically reflect content it connects to, while keeping the same identity.<sup>17</sup> A research paper about online identity published in *Psychology in Russia: State of the Art*, notes: "The use of the internet space as a universe of growing social networks requires us to venture beyond the limits of logic, oriented only to the identity whose content is situated offline. This, while the social networks are a space of ties between the 'nodes of personalities', the Internet also needs a space for the 'content of identities', some sort of a 'vessel for the personality'." <sup>18</sup> In other words, the Internet must be a space where the personality can fully open up its content - its inner world - so that it could be a reason to create social ties without knowing the person in the real world.

Although different organizations use a blog, the question is whether a government should operate a blog to shape its online identity and, if so, what should be the nature, aspect and identity of this blog? The easiest solution is to have a blog that includes the organization's identity in addition to the main activities of its owner. However, this kind of blog's impact is limited and is similar to the 'press release cache'(websites filled with press releases without any attempt to interact with broader audiences) described earlier.

One of the main problems governments have when interacting with its citizens is the lack of personalization. From the citizen's point of view, a government is a huge, faceless bureaucratic organisation that is hard to interact with on a personal level. Moreover, the lack of personality or anonymity creates a significant credibility problem. The development of an online personality through a blog should solve this problem and increase interaction efficiency between governments and citizens.

Personalization is a blog's main power. An online diary makes the writer and reader closer and provides a consistent picture of a person's actions and reactions for a longer period of time. Consequently, we believe the government's online identity should be based on traditional websites, but then enhanced by 'personal' blogs written by its employees.

Such an approach raises several questions: What is the degree of personal exposure? Should the blog only address professional issues or personal ones? Who should write it? Should only high ranking officials (such as a prime minister, members of the cabinet, ambassadors, heads of departments) have a blog? Or can any governmental official who wants to blog be allowed to? Should official blogs be controlled and censored? This last question is even more sensitive when dealing with military and security forces-related blogs. Should soldiers and officers be able to have their voices heard on such platforms? And, if so, how could this be controlled?

Many personal blogs written by officials are examples of failed attempts to personalize or create interaction. For instance, a high-ranking US general wrote in his blog about the importance of US soldiers' education and high level training. Similarly, an Israeli politician used his blog to send political messages, such as declare threats toward Iran. The language used in both blogs was very close to the language of official interviews and press releases, so, in these cases, the blogs were being used as another platform for a government's official content. It is unlikely a US general would post something on his blog when he was in a bad mood; or that an Israeli politician would make colourful threats late after work on a Friday. However, this is what blog readers expect. Marc Lynch, a US expert for public diplomacy and new media, says the new media by definition has a tone not quite appropriate for government officials, who have great responsibility for every word they say and various restrictions on how they say it.<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless, there are some examples of successful blogs operated by government officials. Colleen P Gaffy, a former US State Department senior officer, explained in her 2008 *Washington Post* article 'A Tweet in Foggy Bottom', the value of Twitter for diplomats' work. She cited personalization as one of the main factors:

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<sup>17</sup> Group blogs might be around a particular organization, topic or concept as a common denominator for online platform.

<sup>18</sup> Gekker, A., Asmolov, G. & Asmolov A. 'From We-Media to I-Media: Identity Transformations in the Virtual World', *Psychology in Russia: State of the Art*, 2009.

<sup>19</sup> Lynch, M. *Face-off to Facebook: From the Nixon-Khrushchev Kitchen Debate to Public Diplomacy in the 21st Century*. Conference at the George Washington University, July 23, 2009, Panel 3.



Communicating in this peppy, informal medium helped to personalize my visit and enhance my impact as a US official. When I met with students at the University of Bucharest, and later with Moldovan bloggers, we were connected before I even arrived. One young Romanian student said: "We feel like we already know you, you are not some intimidating government official. We feel comfortable talking with you."<sup>20</sup>

Another example comes from David Cameron, the leader of Britain's Conservative Party. He started a series of 'Webcameron' videos containing content from both his political and also personal life. The responses to his endeavor have so far been mixed.

At this point it is difficult to say if these kinds of stories characterize a shift in the self-representation of government officials. Moreover, sometimes sharing personal information is a public relations strategy and not real disclosure. However, there is no magic answer to the question of where officials should place the boundaries for personal information published on their blogs. Blogs cannot work without personalization, but overexposure can erode an official's image. Successful identity management for states should be based on people who work for the state and can find the right balance between reflecting their personalities and their jobs. It also should be clear that starting blogs for a government has risks which should be considered and prepared for in advance. For example, deciding to stop blogging after a first negative incident would not only cease an important practice but also send the wrong message to the public.

## INTERACTION

People are always influenced by others in their daily life and the recent emergence of social networks has increased the number of individuals influencing someone. The importance of social networks is also increasing due to the development of the Google social search. Google's official blog notes: "Google finds relevant public content from your friends and contacts and highlights it for you at the bottom of your search results."<sup>21</sup> Google cannot currently search in Facebook or other closed platforms, but the trend is clear – private social networks are gradually becoming a primary source of information for the ordinary citizen.

The nature of social networks is to build relationships between people. Consequently, attempts by official or commercial actors to use social media platforms as a tool for official information distribution might be ineffective or even create antagonism. Individuals who use their identities to distribute political or commercial messages might also create problems. The personal effect can also backlash when the sentiment behind it is revealed as not being genuine, as in the case of Obama's pre-election tweets, later discovered as being sent by his assistants.<sup>22</sup>

Another example of how social networking strategy can create antagonism is when state-affiliated teams go to various forums to explain the state policy that corresponds with its actions<sup>23</sup>. For instance, during the time of the second Bush administration, the US State Department sent officials to Russian forums and chats to explain US policy towards Russia. This was received by the Russians as an act of propaganda, information warfare and the penetration of Russian private space by hostile agents<sup>24</sup>.

So how can a government maintain solid, non-intrusive interaction on social media? **First**, the more personalized a social network account is the more probable it will be approached as a legitimate friend in the network. As a consequence, the information that comes from it might then be considered more valuable. **Second**, social networks also provide a platform for organizations. Facebook's fan pages provide a unique opportunity to manage online presence in social networks without personalization. Third, the increasing role of social networks as a source of information means the use of networks for distribution of non-personal information is becoming more legitimate, though this can depend on context. For instance, people tend to add profiles or fan pages of political candidates who they support to their own profiles before elections.

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<sup>20</sup> Colleen P. Graffy, 'A Tweet in Foggy Bottom', *The Washington Post*, Wednesday, December 24, 2008. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/story/2008/12/24/ST2008122400049.html>

<sup>21</sup> Introducing Google Social Search: I finally found my friend's New York blog!, October 26, 2009. <http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2009/10/introducing-google-social-search-i.html>

<sup>22</sup> 'President Barack Obama admits to never using Twitter during his trip to China', *New York Daily News*, November 16, 2009. [http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/2009/11/16/2009-11-16\\_president\\_barack\\_obama\\_admits\\_to\\_never\\_using\\_twitter\\_during\\_his\\_trip\\_to\\_china.html](http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/2009/11/16/2009-11-16_president_barack_obama_admits_to_never_using_twitter_during_his_trip_to_china.html)

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.jameskglassman.com/?p=108>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.rian.ru/society/20081031/154191325.html>

To conclude, state actors should recognize that social networks are primarily a space for personal interaction and avoid attempts to use it as just another channel for political messaging. Moreover, interaction and engagement in social networks is both the main element and the goal of a modern outreach strategy. State actors should use the appropriate platforms and also engage networks by providing friendly distribution of content and the management of their online identity. The interaction through social networks can be summarized by four goals:

1. distribution of content;
2. development of lasting relationship with a wide audience;
3. creating a community of citizens that express their commitment to the state through being a part of the state's network;
4. receiving real-time crucial feedback on the state's standing within cyberspace.

We have discussed the role of the 'content-identity-interaction' triangle in the outreach strategies and maintaining of the state's smart power. However, to some extent the differentiation between platforms is artificial. Convergence makes the platforms more complex. The symbiosis between various platforms is sometimes very natural and it is more appropriate to approach them as one system than view them as separate. For example, the Facebook fan page of the Israeli embassy in Washington offers the chance to submit questions to the ambassador through Twitter. The answers to the questions from Twitter are recorded on video, uploaded to YouTube, and then promoted on Facebook, Twitter and the official embassy's website (blog). This exemplifies an efficient strategy for content promotion as well as for constructing a model for meaningful interaction that uses various platforms as one fluid system. To some extent, the fact an ambassador answers questions from Twitter users also contributes to the personalization of both his embassy and the state of Israel.

## The audience

Crucial to a state's capability to set an agenda and contribute to the framing of a particular event is having the right approach for content sharing, the ability to manage an identity affiliated with such content making, and the full engagement of social networks. The equation of smart power, however, has another crucial element - the audience. The question is how to reach this audience, who to address and if there should be different strategies for addressing different audiences.

The question is not how to build a more persuasive message; rather it is "what kind of reality has this particular system [that we are trying to influence] constructed for itself?" writes Steven Corman.<sup>25</sup> Corman criticizes the old simplistic view that the main goal is to ensure a message reaches the targeted audience. He says: "Even if a message is clearly sent, correctly decoded and received, it might still not create the desired interpretations and attributions." He elaborates:

The problem is that *a meaning cannot simply be transferred*, like a letter mailed from point A to point B. Instead, listeners create meanings from messages based on factors like autobiography, history, local context, culture, language/symbol systems, power relations, and immediate personal needs. We should assume that meanings listeners create in their minds will probably not be identical to those intended by the receiver. As several decades of communication research has shown, the message *received* is the one that really counts.<sup>26</sup>

According to Corman, the only way to make outreach successful and to manifest a state's smart power is to "persuade the receiver to think in a particular way". He adds: "This is especially true in conflict situations, where there are standard 'recipes', 'scripts', and 'templates' for understanding the other party." We believe that the more the source of information is personalized, credible and significant, the more it both transfers the message and also influences its way of interpretation. The relationship

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<sup>25</sup> Corman S. R. Trethewey A. & Bud Goodall, *A 21st Century Model for Communication in the Global War of Ideas: From Simplistic Influence to Pragmatic Complexity*. Consortium for Strategic Communication, Arizona State University, April 3, 2007.

<sup>26</sup> Corman S. R. Trethewey A. & Bud Goodall, *A 21st Century Model for Communication in the Global War of Ideas: From Simplistic Influence to Pragmatic Complexity*. Consortium for Strategic Communication, Arizona State University, April 3, 2007, p.16.

with the audience itself, rather than its precise targeting, should be the communicator's strategic goal. Despite the state's ability to personalize its online presence, it can seldom become an influencing factor that compares with a real online 'friend' or replaces person-to-person communication. Instead, the duty of a state is to provide the necessary tools for audiences engaged in developing relationships with other audiences, as well as to support frameworks for dialogue and to facilitate other online interactions.

**The audience is not only an address for messages, but a medium by itself.** It is a group that should be enrolled in a relationship and also be used as the main tool for further enrollment of others. This is the nature of working with new media as a smart power tool. For this reason we need a clear understanding of the various audience groups and their respective roles in the outreach process.

### *Audience categorization*

Three major groups of audience can be identified.

1. The **'blue team'** audience is those who support the state and/or its values. This group shares a common **system of message interpretation with the state**. The state's main aim here is not to convince the group of the rightfulness of the state's policy, but to encourage it to develop relationships with other audiences and distribute pro-state information. The main challenge with this group is to overcome its passivity and lack of coordination. It must also constantly be motivated to promote friendly agendas and ensure positive framing. This audience is not necessarily the state's population, nor must it share a formal organization or affiliation. It can be a worldwide network that shares the same political, national, cultural or religious identity. A worldwide blue team network has a crucial role in changing interpretive systems in their respective countries of influence. Their lasting relationship with the local population and understanding of the local political, cultural and social environment can enhance local impact in the interpretation of blue messages.
2. The **'red team'** audience shares the rival's system of interpretation and tries to impact the global audience accordingly. In a way, it is a mirror image of the blue team and the two constantly follow each other, copying techniques and employing counter measures. At times, there are segments on both sides that are more interested in dialogue and during conflict situations it might even trigger them to try and understand the opponent/enemy. While the red and blue teams should not be seen as polar opposites, a significant impact on the red team is unlikely. Work with the red audience should be based more on techniques from psychological warfare than on marketing and strategic communications. Therefore, this issue is mostly out of the scope of this paper.
3. The **'grey team'** audience is the global audience which does not belong to any side of the discussion. To some extent it has the ability to change its respective systems of interpretation through the development of lasting relationships. Various segments of this audience tend to be closer to one of the rival sides. The main goal of the blue and red teams is to reach the grey team audience. State actors from both sides, as well as blue and red audiences, work to distribute their messages among the grey team audience.

With regards to the above classifications, other concepts should be mentioned:

- **Hubs (critical network's nodes):** Research shows that a social network structure reflects the power law or the so-called Pareto principle<sup>27</sup>. According to this law, 20 percent of a particular population is responsible for 80 percent of the effect. When applied to social networks, approximately 20 percent of nodes in a given network are responsible for the production of almost 80 percent of the content. The same logic might be applied to distribution and promotion activity. In the networked world, those 20 percents are the hubs that connect to big numbers of nodes. Hubs are the major portals, the influential bloggers and the people who live and breathe communications through various web platforms.

Hubs not only mediate between nodes in their network, but also act as connectors between various networks. Hubs are very

<sup>27</sup> Shirky, C. *Here comes everybody* and Barabasi A. Z. 2003. *Linked: How Everything Is Connected to Everything Else and 1*



important because they have the ability to multiply any effect and to engage a big network. Any network (blogosphere, local social network and so on) has its own particular structure, so approaching any networks (whether blue or grey) should also include the identification of its hubs and the development of separate strategies for approaching them as part of audience analysis. Hubs in blue networks will greatly accelerate content distribution, while grey networked hubs, if conquered, can be great value in further influencing various audiences.

- **Reaching traditional media through new media:** The traditional media plays a huge role in public outreach. The best example of this is the emergence of global satellite channels such as Al Jazeera. Some researchers argue that Al Jazeera competes with state actors and its audience could be approached as a "virtual state"<sup>28</sup>. Traditional media generally continue to be a major source of information and convergence has made it difficult to differentiate traditional and social media as they are now bound in a symbiotic system. The message from social media reaches traditional media and then traditional media promote it, therefore increasing its distribution in the social media. Not only do media outlets increasingly provide special channels for attaching social media to their regular content, but journalists are increasingly using blogs, as well as Twitter and social network accounts. Some of these are more private in nature, while others serve as full journalistic platforms. **Journalists should be approached as network hubs** as they are connected to many others due to their work, tend to be popular in social networks and the blogosphere, and also have the power to distribute their message to a big audience through traditional media. The content might also be promoted and distributed in such ways that it will reach both global media and also local channels. The engagement of blue audiences might also be a strategy for criticising hostile media coverage. Networks can send emails to editors of specific websites or distribute concerns about content that violates the principles of media objectivity and neutrality.
- **Decision-makers:** Reaching decision-makers through new media is problematic. Although some have blogs or accounts on social networks, using them for unmediated communication is not likely to be helpful, since most of these accounts are only used for self promotion. However, engaging decision-makers through social networks can be used for either protesting or supporting specific decisions. The use of blue and grey networks to express their opinions on the subject directly to the decision-maker's web page is likely to create a visibility of public opinion, which is likely to sway their opinion.

## Conflicts, new information reality and a state's transformational strategy

When discussing strategies for approaching different groups through new media, there is a special situation that makes fast adaptation crucial. Such are the situations of emergency, primarily those of conflict.

A conflict situation is the best opportunity to witness the ambivalent nature of networks. It provides a state with new tools for mobilizing people to improve outreach, including setting an international agenda and representing the state's interpretation of the events. However, social networks destabilise the situation. In *The Semi-Sovereign People*, Elmer Schattschneider argues the nature of conflict depends on the degree of audience involvement. He writes:

The outcome of all conflict is determined by the scope of its contagion. The number of people involved in any conflict determines what happens; every change in the number of participants, every increase or reduction in the number of participants, affects the result.<sup>29</sup>

The Internet allows for a very easy transformation from being a conflict's spectator to being a participant as it provides information and engagement options based on networked activity. Internet-based conflict proliferation has an 'engaging nature'. Due to the nature of the Web 2.0 environment and the distribution culture, the dynamics of the range of a conflict's expansion

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<sup>28</sup> Seib, P. 2008. *The Al Jazeera Effect: How the New Global Media Are Reshaping World Politics*. Potomac books.

<sup>29</sup> Schattschneider E. E. 1975. *The Semi-Sovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America*. Harcourt Brace College Publishers, p.2.

has a tendency to increase itself exponentially in the manner of a snowball rolling down a mountain. Due to globalization and immigration flows, in many countries there are a lot of groups that might belong to different networks within the same country or even a rival country in a conflict situation. Their commitment to a particular network might be more significant than their commitment to the state.

Both US and other countries' officials have recognized the concepts of networked war: a situation when a state or non-state entity use and manage non-combatants for the conflict's needs.

In order to mitigate the threats caused by the new information environment, a state's actors have to use the abilities of the state. This does not imply that a state actor should turn the entire population of its citizens into 'virtual soldiers', but it is necessary to cooperate with the blue networks.

Consequently, a strong mechanism of coordination is required in times of emergency to maximize the effect and to balance the net activities by the other side. Hence, a state has to be able to demonstrate networked leadership and to know how to approach networks. Finally, in order to be effective, this activity must be carried out over time.

The 2006 Lebanon War was the first major conflict in Israeli history in which new media technologies, social networks and other UGC played significant roles in painting the image of the war. Yet, despite their proliferation, online pro- and anti-Israeli activities were rather chaotic and unmanaged by state actors. After two weeks of war, the head of the Knesset science and technology committee, Zvulun Orlev, conducted a special discussion on the issue of the Internet and the struggle of the Israeli image online. He asked Israeli Internet users and private corporations to join the online action against anti-Israeli PR, and called it "the virtual call-up paper"<sup>30</sup>.

Among the participants in the discussion was Eran Reshef, the chief executive officer of Collective, a company which develops social media management platforms. During the conflict, Reshef released a *giyus* (recruitment in Hebrew) Megaphone desktop tool, a special application to manage a community of users interested in contributing to an Israeli advocacy effort<sup>31</sup>. It provided an option for the organization of collective coordinated one-time action by sending an 'action alert' to all members of the *giyus* network (those who downloaded the application). Since content visibility on some major international news sites and social media platforms depends on the rate of consumption of a particular item (usually during a certain time-frame), this one-time collective visit contributed to the visibility of pro-Israel content and optimized its place in search engines. The tool also suggested simplification options for different pro-Israeli actions (such as sending protests against anti-Israel policy to UN officials). The activity of the *giyus* community was successful and by the end of the war the *giyus* social network had nearly 30,000 members.

*Giyus* was a very effective first tool to approach the networks. However, to maximize the impact of cooperation the state needed a more comprehensive approach that addressed the larger scope of problems arising through, and because of, the new information environment. These included: information overload and monitoring difficulties; an emphasis not only on content production but also on distribution; speed of information proliferation; and the need to develop effective cooperation with networks.

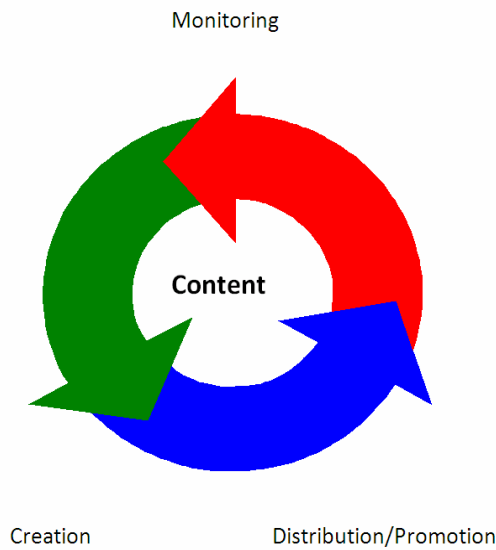
The outreach strategy had to be based on a multi-platform, multi-language and multi-media approach. This kind of approach demanded a strong center, a hub with the ability to become a major influence in a network and a policy implementation. A center was also needed to coordinate worldwide blue audience collaboration (including the local Israeli population and the Jewish diaspora). Furthermore, the new information environment also impacted on decision-making, so a center that would reinforce the role of social networks and new information technologies in the conflict was required.

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<sup>30</sup> Fridman, Dan "A virtual call-up for the surfers", *Ynet* [Hebrew] <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/1,7340,L-3281689,00.html>

<sup>31</sup> [www.giyus.org](http://www.giyus.org)

### Networks Orchestration



Online and Offline  
institutionalisation  
of Network  
Leadership

Multiplatform,  
Multilanguage,  
Multicontent  
action

Emerging role of  
technology skills

### *The New Media Operation Center*

It became clear there was an emerging need for an institutional function to allow a state actor to maximize its network cooperation and maintain its smart power. In 2008 an example of a **New Media Operation Center** (NMOC) was developed by the Asper institute for New Media Diplomacy at the IDC Herzliya<sup>32</sup>. The NMOC was to be a first step by the state actors to adapt on an institutional level to the new

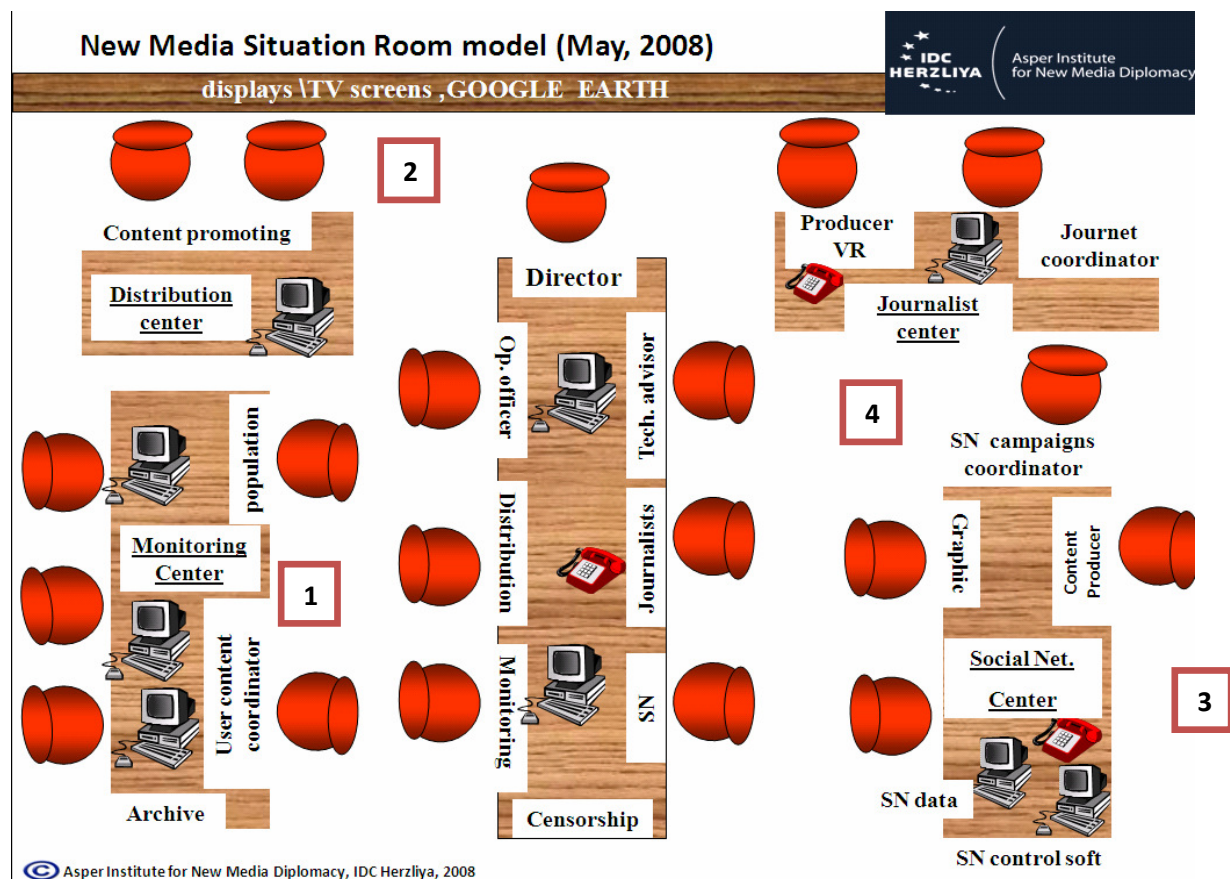
information reality. It was based on the influence of new media technologies on modern conflicts. The organizational structure of a NMOC was a model that would fulfill the following objectives:

- establish a system for information monitoring and distribution;
- identify and promote UGC in real time;
- implement a new approach toward crisis management by using new media technologies;
- develop cooperation with social networks;
- develop new online tools for approaching foreign journalists;
- present a system that allows for effective interaction and cooperation between various platforms and dimensions of informational reality.

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<sup>32</sup> The concept was developed by Gregory Asmolov, a research fellow at the Asper Institute.





The NMOC has four units, one central desk and a separate multi-language department to replicate and distribute the center's work in various languages.

1. The **content monitoring unit's** main goal is to develop the best way to follow information in an information overload reality through data mining techniques. This unit focuses on different Web 2.0 and other media platforms while identifying state-supporting content (to promote) or negative content (which should be identified and balanced with the appropriate response). It aims to monitor content produced and promoted by blue, grey and red team audiences, as well as traditional and user generated content online. Following bloggers is important as they serve as another mechanism for media monitoring, fulfilling the function of watchdog for traditional media. The unit produces frequent reports and updates on content that demands action or response. The reports include the following categories: traditional and social media; division of content into blue team, grey team and red team; analysis of content in various languages; and the framing of various media (pictures, video, and text) analysis. It is also responsible for developing techniques to validate content credibility, based on cooperation with other units.
2. The **distribution unit** promotes content and creates a multi-platform policy to ensure content reaches as many platforms as possible. It receives content from government, various other organizations and the monitoring unit, and finds the best way to promote that content. It distributes content on the Internet and also works with other units such as the social networks unit (viral marketing) and the journalistic unit (traditional media that might be approached through the Web). It is also responsible for developing a distribution system and improving distribution tools based on technology (for example, creating widgets, banners and using applications to help promote content).

**Widgets** – a piece of content (usually interactive) that can be copied onto a user's website, without prior knowledge in coding or programming languages.

**Banners** – simple digital billboards to display limited text and pictures, such as adverts, on different websites.

3. The **social networks unit** develops lasting relationships with social networks. This includes getting information from networks (crowd sourcing), distributing information through networks (viral marketing), and developing the capabilities for network activation (such as locating specific content, approaching specific audiences, organizing online action or promoting content). Relationship development might be focused on both the blue and grey teams. The unit should focus on mapping the blue team networks' members according to location, language and professional expertise. One of the unit's tasks is to identify hubs related to many nodes and develop relationships with the nodes it sees as network leaders. Working with blue team audiences should create an atmosphere of trust and include the proliferation of content, messages, advocacy trainings (including technological issues) and so on. This unit works with both social networking platforms and blogosphere members. Special effort should be concentrated on bloggers and the members of social networks from the conflict area. They can make a big contribution by supplying content from their region and sharing their experiences through online representation. The unit should develop the capabilities for approaching networks (especially blue teams) through mobile platforms such as SMS, tweets and smart phones. It should also promote cooperation within the networks, increasing people's attention and desire to be engaged in pro-state activity while empowering blue team network members with content, guidelines and technological assistance.
4. The **journalistic unit** interacts online with professional journalists' social networks. The unit should use the Internet to approach journalists across the world who could not be reached by other means. The duties of this unit include: mapping the journalists (developing the network) that might be approached online and creating a secure database of those details; developing relationships with a network of journalists based on this mapping; distributing information among these journalists including promoting UGC and information supplied by government; initiating media-targeted online events (such as press conferences on 3D platforms).

Most of the units' activities described so far are conducted in English, but should also be managed in as many languages as possible. For this purpose, a special **language cell** should be established as a part of the **language center** at the NMOC. This center would have to include all the major languages (such as Arabic, French, Spanish, German, Chinese, and Russian) for the most effective outreach.

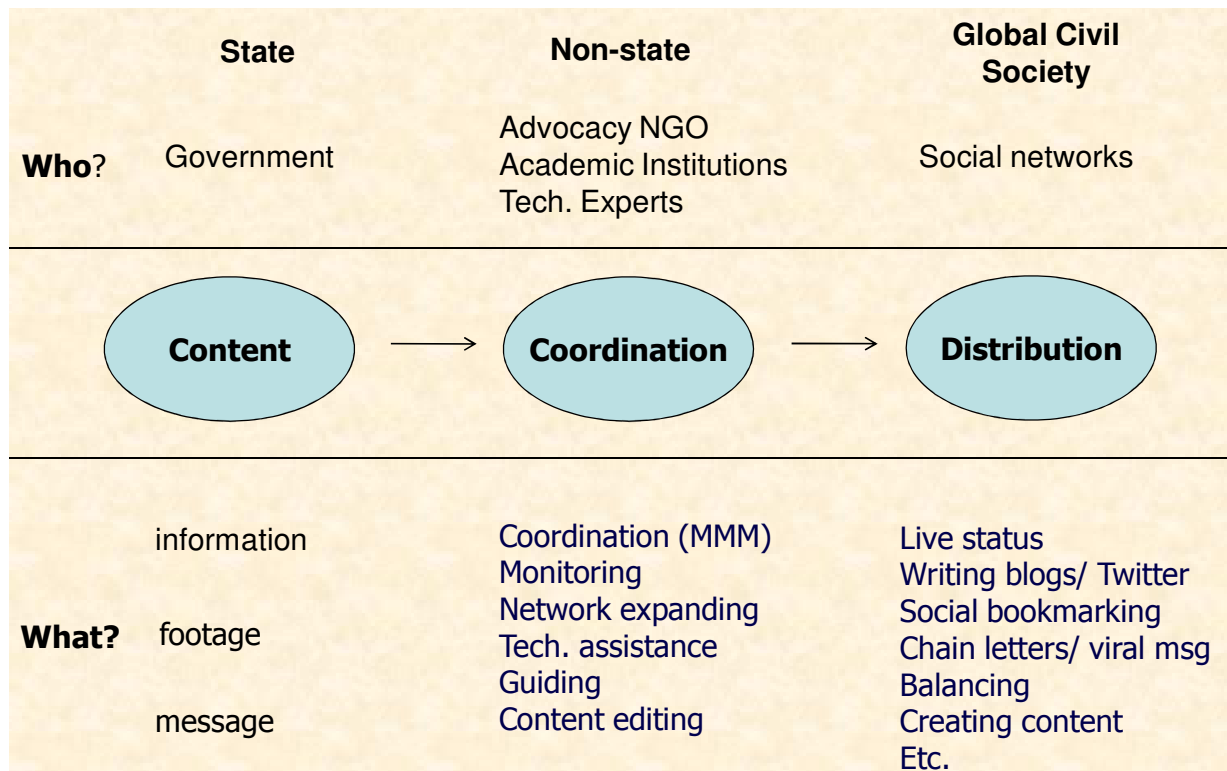
The **central desk** is responsible for coordination between the units. For example, if the **monitoring unit** identifies an article with very negative coverage of Israel, the **social network unit** should engage social networks to react to the article and to promote information with a different perspective. The **distribution unit** would then spread content presenting an alternative version of the event and the **journalist unit** promotes the Israeli version among journalists who can be reached online. In another case, if the Israeli Defense Force's (IDF) film unit provides new positive content, the **distribution center** can give it a multi-platform online presence, the **social networks unit** can distribute it through viral marketing, the **journalist unit** can send it to journalists, while the **monitoring unit** evaluates it and the reactions to it.

The **social networks unit's** work is very important as network activation might be used for other purposes in addition to viral marketing. These could include monitoring, real-time information reception from the front line, making contact between journalists and those networks' members who have witnessed specific events with news value, and organizing offline actions (demonstrations, petitions).

The **central desk** should also include two other important functions. The first is as a **technology advisor** - this could be expanded into a technology unit. Many problems related to online monitoring, information distribution and online cooperation with social networks and journalists might need a technological solution. Moreover, when working with social networks, attention should be focused on giving technological solutions to network members to simplify how they engage with technology. These solutions might be in the form of an application to help distribute information, a dynamic widget with last-minute updates or a piece of software that assists in flagging a picture. The second function would be to conduct permanent analysis of new media usage, suggest strategic directions for further activities, and provide decision-makers with information on the role and consequences of information technologies.

An NMOC must not only work during times of crisis. Its functions should be institutionalized within an organization's public diplomacy and also in its maintenance of the state's various smart power elements in daily life. Government officials also need to consider the use of new information technologies and their possible consequences when analysing a situation and the decision-making that follows on from this.





The state should employ a NGO or a research institute to mediate between itself and the network as it can problematic (from organizational and PR points of view) to activate such structures within governmental organs. The **state-NGO cooperation model** (see graphic, previous page) allows maximization of outreach through new media technologies. It also provides a channel for interaction between a government and its blue team' audience.

The next chapter will present a case study of how this model worked from December 2008 to January 2009 during Operation Cast Lead. The Asper Institute for New Media Diplomacy and the media advocacy NGO 'Stand with Us' mediated between the Israeli government and its networks during a time when the state had limited capabilities to promote network cooperation, thereby taking the mission of network leadership on themselves. The idea of a NMOC was translated to several physical coordination centers, as well as building a website which turned into a platform for online coordination and a hub for networked leadership. It also allowed for maximization of the network effect through multi-content, multi-medium and multi-language coordination efforts, as well as approaching blue team and grey team audiences. In summary, the activities of the Asper Institute for New Media Diplomacy and its partners during Operation Cast Lead allow us to examine and evaluate some of the strategies and policies discussed in this report.

### Case study: Asper Institute and Operation Cast Lead

On December 27, 2008, Israel launched a military campaign codenamed Operation Cast Lead in the Gaza Strip. The first days of the Israeli air strikes caused a significant number of Palestinian casualties, including civilians. This created a significant image problem for Israel and it was faced with a wave of international protests demanding a ceasefire. At the beginning of the conflict, the US-based pro-Israel advocacy organization Stand With Us and the Sammy Ofer Communications School at the Interdisciplinary Center, Herzliya (IDC), established a situation room for coordinating online networked activities. The website Helpuswin.org was created during this time. Both initiatives used online and offline platforms for a stronger network coordination policy, thus creating institutionalized platforms for network leadership, and making possible mediation between the Israeli government and its networks.

The most interesting component of this strategy was the model of cooperation and division of responsibilities between state and non-state actors. It was one of the first times the government uploaded its content (primarily video footage) to the Web 2.0 platform (such as by opening a special Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and IDF channel on YouTube and creating blogs). It also made the content more promotion friendly.

Justifying a position demands information and footage. If the footage is available, it allows blue team networks to focus on content promotion and distribution. However, if the content is not available it can create frustration, such as what occurred during the Russian-Georgian conflict of August 2009. During this conflict, while the Georgian side provided full access to the international media there was almost no information and video footage provided from the Russian perspective. As a result, the narrative of international coverage primarily presented the Georgian perspective of events. Pro-Russian networks became frustrated by this pro-Georgian narrative and found it difficult to express their support through content promotion. As a result of this they instead began to attack Georgian content. The lack of content for promotion also triggered hackers' activities, which was not helpful for Russia's image.

It should be noted that hackers' activity was also a phenomenon in our Israeli case study, though it was minor compared to the promotion efforts and success, as measured by the overall balance of pro- and anti- Israeli presence online.

With regards to Operation Cast Lead, the mediation role was taken by a non-governmental advocacy organization (Stand With Us) and an academic institution (the IDC). Both have young, motivated activists and students available and qualified for these kinds of tasks. In addition to the various situation rooms created, the IDC organized several offline briefings to instruct potential network leaders (primarily the student body) on how to build cooperation through and on the Web. The center coordinated its work with the Israeli MFA and provided promotion-friendly content. The government supplied guidelines for online activities (such as sharing talking points). Members of social networks and nodes of the networked sphere helped promote and distribute pro-Israeli content under the center's guidance.

The main missions of the center included:

- The full chain of content-related activities:
  - **Monitoring.** The situation room focused on content monitoring (discovering pro-Israeli items to promote and anti-Israeli items to react to);
  - **Creation** (identifying or receiving content from partners). The team operated on several levels for the creation (editing) and co-creation (with other organizations) of different media messages such as pictures and video. For example, several 3G phones were distributed by the IDC throughout areas targeted by Palestinian missile fire in order to receive authentic photos from the area;
  - **Distribution and promotion.** Pro-Israeli content was spread and promoted on different platforms and in several languages through social networks, search optimization and social bookmarking on Web 2.0 sites and on traditional media online platforms.
- Studying the red team and the engagement of blue team audience in Israel and worldwide. The team created several online collaboration platforms (such as a list where volunteers could write their names and skills for future content, or through the creation of Facebook groups where users could receive content and coordinate activity). This was also done through the development of relationships with online diaspora networks;
- The state-network cooperation model implementation ensured a division of responsibility between the state, the mediator (in this case the Asper Institute and its affiliates) and the networks. During Operation Cast Lead the institute acted as a non-affiliated actor, sending pro-Israeli Internet users to respond to pro-Palestinian content and commenting on traditional media comments, forums and polls;
- Online (the helpuswin.com website) and offline (situation room) network leadership development and engagement;
- Implementation of multi-platform, multi-language, multi-medium public outreach strategies;

- Technological assistance. Networks' empowerment through various technical means such as the Qassam Count application (see below) - a Facebook application that automatically updated Facebook users' status with the number of exploded Qassam rockets. At its peak, QassamCount had reached 73,000 users with an estimated audience of between five and 10 million users from 187 countries.

Jan 18



**David QassamCount: 2 rockets hit Israel on Sunday after Hamas announced an immediate ceasefire. Donate your status: <http://qassamcount.com/fb>.** via QassamCount - 6:01pm - Comment

The situation room coordinated the activities' timing and goals, expanded their range for different platforms and different language segments of the Web, simplified participation and provided technical assistance with content promotion.

It should be mentioned that the Palestinian side also tried to use social network management strategies during Operation Cast Lead. This included: the creation of special platforms; sending instructions for content promotion; organized commenting; and the creation of special advocacy applications (such as an automatic Facebook status update 'How many Palestinians were killed today' in a response to the 'Qassam Count' application discussed above).

### Summary

This case study concludes our paper by supporting our main thesis that the state faces challenges that threaten its' classic power for message monopoly. The state can prevail only by adapting itself to the new reality of networked collaboration, by finding those who are willing to commit themselves to its' cause willingly and providing them with the tools to do so. This is especially crucial for Israel, since its reliance on old communication techniques and its lack of understanding of modern methods slowly but surely erodes its' public image at home and abroad.

# About the authors

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**Noam Lemelshtrich Latar** is the Founding Dean of the Sammy Ofer School of Communications at IDC Herzliya (the first private academic institution in Israel), and serves since 2009 as the Chairperson of the Israel Communications Association, which groups all media researchers in the Israeli Universities and Colleges. Lemelshtrich Latar received a Ph.D. in communications from MIT in 1974 and an M.Sc. in engineering systems at Stanford in 1971. He was among the founders of the Community Dialog Project at MIT, experimenting with interactive TV programs involving communities through electronic means. From 1975 to 2005 Lemelshtrich Latar pioneered the teaching and research of new media at the Hebrew and Tel Aviv Universities. From 1999 to 2005 he was involved in the Israeli high-tech industry as a venture-capital chairman, helping to establish several communications start ups in cognitive enhancement, data mining of consumer choices and home networking. In 2005 he joined IDC Herzliya Israel as founding Dean of a new school of communications, emphasizing new media. His current research interest is in digital identities and AI decision-making in e-government.

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**Alex Gekker** is the COO at the Sammy Ofer School of Communications Asper institute for New Media Diplomacy. He is a B.A graduate (communications) in the Interactive specialization with experience in both content production and PR / marketing techniques. He is involved in several projects in the fields of location-based applications and gaming, as well as filming, editing and hosting two radio shows. He has been active in the Asper institute for New Media Diplomacy as a student for the entire duration of his undergraduate studies, and continued as fellow in the institute after graduation. He has also taken part in several public and governmental projects, advising them on New Media training.