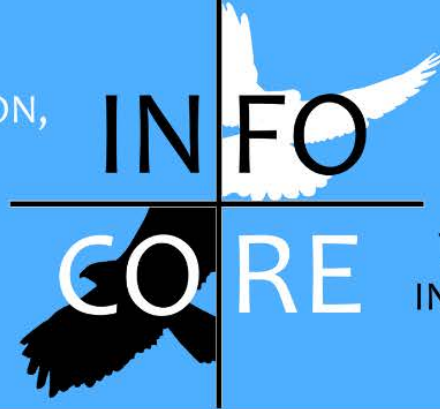


(IN)FORMING CONFLICT PREVENTION,
RESPONSE AND RESOLUTION:



THE ROLE OF MEDIA
IN VIOLENT CONFLICT

INFOCORE Working paper (03/2014) Mission Statement WP7 “Journalistic Transformation”

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Mission statement: WP7 “Journalistic Transformation”

WP7 focuses on conflict news content – in particular evidential claims, interpretive frames and agendas for action – as it is selected and transformed by the professional news media, and as it evolves over time. There is a plethora of research on conflict news coverage (for notable, more recent examples, see Kampf & Liebes, 2013; Lynch, 2013), presumably more than on any of the other areas addressed by INFOCORE. However, two crucial dynamics for understanding the roles played by the news media in violent conflicts have remained underdeveloped in this literature: a) the temporal evolution of conflict news in its association with the evolution of conflicts¹; and b) the discursive-interactive dynamics underlying the selection and molding of available input into news. Using the innovative INFOCORE design and methods, WP7 addresses these two dynamics – both of which contributing primarily to objective A3 – as well as their interrelationships (below are more details on the questions we intend to examine in relation to each). While the evolution of news discourse over time is generally examined using WP7's data (at least at the first stages, before examining the full dissemination cycle), transformation processes are examined primarily, though not solely, in relation to other WPs. With regard to both temporal evolution and transformation, we are aiming to include news discourse on all six conflicts in all twelve studied media spheres (Syria, Israel, Palestine, Macedonia, Kosovo, DRC, Burundi, Germany, UK, France, EU, transnational media). However, some dimensions of the analysis (particularly those associated with qualitative analysis) may be more focused on the Middle Eastern conflicts, where our WP has better in-house capabilities. In addition, the ability to examine some of the questions in relation to the African cases is yet to be evaluated (due to the scarcity of digital archives required for the automated content analysis).

Evolution of conflict news discourse over time. In examining the dynamics of conflict coverage over time, WP7 focuses on the evolution of interpretive frames and agendas for action in news discourse throughout the studied time frame in each conflict. We are particularly interested in identifying patterns of three interrelated processes:

- Polarization and depolarization processes of mediated debates within and between conflict parties (internal and external polarization), in their relation to escalation and de-escalation processes in the conflict itself.
- Processes of radicalization in news discourse, in association with escalation and de-escalation processes in the conflict itself.
- Consolidation of emergent frames and agendas – either constructive or destructive in

¹ For useful perspectives on this issue, see Wolfsfeld (2001) and Zandberg & Neiger (2005).

relation to conflict resolution – during different stages of conflicts.

We are interested in the bi-directional relationship between the evolution of news discourse and the evolution of conflicts: we seek to examine, on the one hand, how interpretive frames and agendas for action in news discourse are changing in reaction to developments in the conflict, and how, on the other hand, news discourse contributes to- or forebodes these developments (informing objective B3).

Transformation of information. To understand the unique, multifaceted and interactive roles played by the news media in shaping conflict discourse, WP7 focuses on the discursive process of transformation, referring the molding of available input into news using a range of discursive devices. We will examine the ways in which journalists transform conflict information coming from different types of actors, in particular strategic actors (WP6), social media (WP5), and the news media itself (WP7). In the category of input coming from within the domain of our WP, we are particularly interested in the ways in which the news media in conflict countries transform and appropriate specific contents published by the media of the other conflict party (e.g., how the Israeli media transforms reports from the Palestinian media).

In all of these cases, we will explore the ways in which different types of journalistic transformations, applied for different aims, are shaping together (in different constellations) conflict news coverage. A tentative initial list of transformations we are planning to look at includes the following types:

- Cultural transformation – (re)constructing interpretive frames in the news in ways that correspond to a culture's myths, values, symbols and collective memories (Bird & Dardenne, 1988; van Gorp, 2007).
- Instrumental/ideological transformation – (re)structuring information in ways that advance a particular agenda or ideological perspective (Entman, 2007; Fowler, 1991).
- Professional-normative transformation – (re)arranging information and claims based on professional standards and norms (such as the balance norm or the provision of context).
- Structural transformation – adjusting to the structural conventions and constraints of news stories (Bell, 1991), or the semantic structure of frames (Baden, 2010).
- Epistemic/evaluative transformation – additions or amendments that establish the authority and credibility of the information (e.g., the use of epistemic modalities), or its importance (by emphasizing the news value of the story).
- Hyping/emotive transformation – tuning the level of sensationalism and emotionalism in texts (see Wolfsfeld, Frosh & Awabdy, 2008, for the centrality of this practice in the coverage of violent conflicts).

We aim to develop a framework that brings together, in the context of conflict coverage, these various types of transformation that have been addressed in divergent research traditions (though usually not under the title of transformation). We also aim to tie the different types of transformations to the different types of influences on news production (addressed by WP1), thereby further linking the processes of news production and news dissemination.

For both the temporal evolution of conflict news and the transformation of information, WP7 examines the contextual conditions that contribute to the identified journalistic practices, as revealed through a systematic comparative analysis across conflicts, conflict stages, types of

news media, and media systems/journalistic cultures.

Beyond the focus on journalistic practices, WP7 also interacts with the content analytic WPs and WP4 to investigate the full, recursive news-dissemination process, in which the claims, frames and agendas identified in news discourse are received and reconstructed by political actors and lay publics, and later re-transformed into news. WP7 is responsible for bringing together the findings on the news dissemination process.

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