

SOCIOTECHNICAL MINING OF ISRAELI AND LEBANESE MEDIA WAR BLOGS

Muhammad Abdul-Mageed
Department of Linguistics and
School of Library & Information Science,
Indiana University,
Bloomington,
USA

Abstract

Blogging is playing an increasingly significant role in media coverage of war. This reflects long-term trends in Internet use that are profoundly affecting the way news is reported and consumed (Ward 2007). Traditional media has evolved from transferring content online to experimenting with ways of embracing the Internet. The 2006 Lebanon war is part of this new phase, with global media outlets profiling prominent Israeli and Lebanese bloggers who were covering the war, featuring stories run by them, and reporting their communications.

The special significance of war blogging arises from the fact that it answers the exceptional communication demands created by war (e.g., the need to investigate the scope and degree of military action, the impacts and risks on the future, and the safety of family and loved ones (Thewall & Stuart, 2007)). More importantly, war blogging often sets the agenda for mainstream media (Berenger, 2006), due to bloggers' privileged access to war zones, the highly localized stories they report, and the immediacy speed with which they communicate war information.

Research into traditional news media (Fowler, 1991; Trew, 1979), and more recently of online media (e.g., Abdul-Mageed & Herring, 2008) has shown how these construct different social realities. The extent to which this is true of media warblogs, either in terms of the ideologies these bloggers embrace or the rhetorical strategies they employ, remains an unanswered question.

The goal of this paper is thus to first identify the characteristic features of popular (i.e., reported at least once in global media) Israeli and Lebanese war blogs as represented in their blogging activities during the 2006 Lebanon war, and, second, to identify the parameters of media selectivity as represented by the blogs sampled. More specifically, I seek to answer the following two research questions:

RQ1: To what extent, if any, do English language Israeli and Lebanese media war blogs differ in terms of (1) blogger characteristics (i.e., age, gender, etc.); (2) structural features (i.e., existence of images, videos, number of body text words, etc.); (3) interactivity (as measured by e.g., frequencies of posts and responses to these posts) and multimodality features (as measured by e.g., frequencies of images, videos, cartoons in posts); (4) thematic coverage (i.e., what aspects of the war are covered); (5) regional coverage (i.e., what countries, cities, etc. are covered); and (6) political allegiance and ideology.

RQ2: What are the parameters of media selectivity as represented by the characterizing features of Israeli and Lebanese war blogs?

To this end, I employ what I label a ‘sociotechnical’ approach (i.e., a triangulation of content analysis [Bauer 2000; Herring 2009] with computational linguistics techniques i.e., corpus-based critical discourse analysis [e.g., Stubbs 1996; 1997] and computational linguistics tools e.g. a named entity recognizer to mine a sample of 40 popular English-language Israeli and Lebanese media blogs. More precisely, I analyzed all posts and responses to these posts in 20 Israeli and 20 Lebanese media blogs over the period of the 34 consecutive days of the 2006 Israeli-Lebanese war. Results show that differences did exist to varying degrees between Israeli and Lebanese media war blogs in most of the axes investigated in this study. In addition, it was found that media war blogs tend to have relatively fast update rates, high interactivity levels, multimodal posts, and intricate patterns of thematic and regional coverage.

References

- Abdul-Mageed, M. M. & Herring, S. C. (2008). Arabic and English news coverage on aljazeera.net. In *Proceedings of Cultural Attitudes Towards Technology and Communication 2008 (CATaC'08)*, Nimes, France, June 24-27, ed. F. Sudweeks, H. Hrachovec, and C. Ess. <http://ella.slis.indiana.edu/~herring/catac08.aljazeera.pdf>.
- Bauer, M. (2000). Classical content analysis: A review. In *Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound*. M. Bauer & G. Gaskell (Eds). Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA, pp. 131-151.
- Berenger, R. D. (2006). Introduction: War in cyberspace. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*. 12(1), article 9. <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol12/issue1/berenger.html>.
- Fowler, R. (1991). *Language in the News. Discourse and Ideology in the Press*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Herring, S. C. (In press, 2009). Web content analysis: Expanding the paradigm. In J. Hunsinger, M. Allen, & L. Klastrup (Eds.). *The International Handbook of Internet Research*. Springer Verlag. Preprint: <http://ella.slis.indiana.edu/~herring/webca.2008.pdf>.
- Stubbs, M. (1996) *Text and Corpus Analysis*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Stubbs, M. (1997). Whorf’s Children: Critical comments on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). In A. Ryan & A. Wray (Eds.). *Evolving models of language* (pp. 110–116). Clevedon: BAAL in association with Multilingual Matters.
- Thelwall, M., and Stuart, D. (2007). RUOK? Blogging communication technologies during crises. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*. 12(2), article 9. <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol12/issue2/thelwall.html>.

Trew, T. (1979). "What the newspapers say": Linguistic variation and ideological difference. In R. Fowler, R. Hodge, G. Kress, & T. Trew (Eds.). *Language and control* (pp. 117-156). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Ward, W. (2007). Uneasy Bedfellows: Bloggers and Mainstream Media Report the Conflict in Lebanon. *Arab Media & Society*. Feature article 1
http://arabmediasociety.com/topics/index.php?t_article=53.