

Disinformation in news reporting in the current crisis of Syria

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Abstract:

This paper deals with factual and analytical evolution of the Syrian media over the past five years by describing the relationship between media coverage and the reporting of news in the digital and social media era and new media. The transfer of reality and events between professional versus citizen journalism is discussed. The confusion happening in contradiction between media titles for the same the event is also discussed.

On the other hand, the paper discusses the vast amount of information during the Syrian crisis, and the extent of the digital Arabic content cognitive evolution and how users take advantage of the digital newspapers and magazines groups as cultural heritage in the Syrian libraries now, especially after the devastation and destruction of a number of libraries, museums, mosques and monasteries containing treasures of manuscripts, books and newspapers.

Keywords: Syria, Disinformation in news, crisis of Syria, social media, citizen journalists, news media, digital Arabic content.

Introduction

The information revolution experienced by the world in the current age constitutes an information war by disseminating information via electronic news where information is considered as a major supplier in the management of crises and wars.

Among the most important results of this information revolution are the major changes that have taken place in the media industry and partnership in the industry and the use of this information. This led to the emergence of new media, which is based on the flow of information via the Internet and mobile phone.

There is no country in the world that does not attempt to have influence in the information, and the media objectivity can be seen as dream that remains elusive. Therefore, the manipulation of news and views is not just in the political matters.

Hence the effect of disinformation, which is the result of daily monitoring all the time, appears in the Arab and western media, public and private, and follow covering the crises of the world in general and in the events of Syria in specific. Then the coverage of the news is assessed by the public, and they reach a conclusion that some of the media is a tool serves the interests and goals of the owners of those media institutions and whoever who is behind them.

The Syrian crisis is illustrated by the absence of accurate and documented information and throwing accusations between all the local, regional and international parties, in an atmosphere of tension like a war between multiple world powers available on the Syrian land. It is not only humanitarian and economic crisis, that affect the daily life of the Syrian citizen. Despite the panic and fear that faces the Syrians every day, and the high risk to lose a son or a brother or a father, or a friend as a result of bomb or rocket, we still find Syrian people are trying to overcome the new reality that they face and try to live daily life as normal. The Syrian citizen keeps praying to God to protect him and his family and keep whatever left of Syria from destruction.

The start of the Syrian crisis

In February the 5th 2011, A call for «A Syrian Day of Rage» has been distributed on the social networking site Facebook, as a solidarity with the January 25 revolution in Egypt. The request was to go out in Alhariqah area in Damascus for a demonstration, but the number of participants did not exceed the number of fingers in one hand.

Unknown Syrian activists Called for a "Syrian anger day" on Facebook, constituting the first spark of the events of the Syrian crisis, which actually began in the middle of March of 2011. A limited number of demonstrations in several regions of Syria were done, and they were calling for freedom and releasing political prisoners from jails and removing the state of emergency from the country. The ceiling of demands raised up gradually to the request of overthrowing the Syrian regime.

In 31st of the same month, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad gave his first speech, which included the reform package promised to implement in an attempt to control the limited demonstration. Then, a presidential decree was issued to release all detainees arrested during the protests, except for the perpetrators of crimes against the country and the citizens of Syria. There was also a decision for lifting the state of emergency in the 21st of April 2011. A day after its removal and to the implementation of the Syrian leadership to the demands of the protesters, the Syrian opposition began to speak through the media for dozens of deaths in the so-called great Friday, to begin a series of video films of the two sides the government and the opposition, and also photographs to prove the presence of armed or fabricating events. The Syria citizen could not know what is the truth. Since that date, the use conflict information began in various means of social communication with the innovation of different terms to express status and transfer of news ...

The new media (social media and individuals) documented most peaceful demonstrations and actions, and documented also the delegations visits of residents who was welcomed by an

official authority. Then, the movement turned into an armed confrontation to challenge the authority's attitude toward the demonstrations. This coincided with the great international support who was available in abundance in the media. This caused to turn the situation into an opened armed conflict.

The Syrian crisis is considered as one of the major international crises that has several parties and holding events, and Syria turned into a field of interventions of many countries. This was demonstrated in two directions, the first representing the Western and regional interventions including intervention of Arabic countries, which stood on the side of the so-called in the media as folk mobility, while The second direction represented the intervention of Russia and China, in addition to Iran and other limited number of countries, with Hezbollah from Lebanon.

In spite of the general homogeneity in the attitudes of the two parties and their contradiction with the attitude of the Syrian regime and the crisis, there was a clear variation in the attitude of each of the countries of the two parties.

Some argue that the geopolitical location of Syria necessitates internal crisis turning into a regional and international crisis to become between the two camps. The first includes the change camp, which seeks to overthrow the Syrian regime and is supported regionally by Turkey, Gulf Arab states and Jordan, and stand with them the European Union and the United States and (Israel). The other camp is to maintain the status quo camp is represented locally by Syrian regime, which is supported regionally by both Iran and Iraq and Lebanon's Hezbollah. Internationally, both Russia and China stand also with the Syrian regime and to a lesser extent BRICS countries (Brazil, India and South Africa).

It is known that the crises are of interest of the media, which play an important role in guiding the local and international public opinion, as the media is considered as a weapon active in covering crises and we should not forget the relationship between the official media with the political power and its various organs. The Syrian media is known to be weak in its capacity and it does not generally allow for complete freedom in Journalistic work.

Differing in Titles

Since the start of the crisis, there was different titles given through the development of the conflict:

Is it a war of crisis, or is it a conspiracy, or terrorism, or a revolution, or a conflict.

The Regime in Syria: The legitimate government, the Syrian Arab Army, sovereignty, security grip, lost legitimacy regime, parties, the two conflict parties.

The Opposition: The armed opposition, the armed opposition, the free army, rebels, the armed terrorists, mercenaries, terrorist, opposition parties, Treason, the silent people, the supporting people, the opposition people.

Strong relations with Russia, the distinguished relations with Iran, recruiting media, regional instigation, foreign intervention, occupation, conspiracy, colonization, war on terrorism, Islamic terrorism.

Difference in the numbers of martyrs and the dead, from the army or from the civilians, the numbers of the injured and the number of the refugees according to the government or the UN or the opposition.

Difference in the estimates of the cost of the Syrian war, the economical losses, the difference in the number of martyrs, difference in the number of refugees and the number of missing.

Difference in the news according to media source: The Government: Turkey fund terrorism, Media Consultant Dr. Bouthaina Shaaban: The Syrian Arab Army frees cities seized by terrorists. The opposition says: the army is bombarding civilians Dr. Shaaban accuses Turkey by funding terrorism and passes the terrorism to Syria, and accuses Turkey of attacking Syria ... while Turkish President Erdogan says we will not remain silent in front of half a million civilians were killed in Syria. There is special relationship between Iran and Syria, while this is seen by the opposition as the bombing of the Russian, and shooting of Iran on the opposition areas.

Disinformation and incitement of Media

The regime's media sites say that there are lies, campaign media to incite against Syria and the conspiracy targeting Syria's security through inflaming public opinion, hatred and strife between people of one country. This hate is created through some of the media and the Arab world that work to raise all sorts of problems down to trying to show the outside intervention as humanitarian mission. Fake movies that have been filmed from mobile phones and processed then broadcast on YouTube the biggest proof. There are many cases where pictures are taken from the gatherings in Hamidiyah market in Damascus, then combined with images of the Palestinian uprising or from the events in Libya, Egypt and Yemen, to make a film that form the protests in Syria.

Opposition websites consider that the opposition activists movies (example: Rami Aljarah, one of the founders of an organization's site, "Ana Press" and director of the radio station "Voice of Damascus", who played a prominent role in shedding light on the ISIS and exposed its practices).

One of the most famous activities of Aljarah is filming inside Syria, in which he tried to show the situation in Syria, and many of the Arab and Western media focused spotlight on him and on those videos that he made as testimony of history. Among those videos is the filming of people of Aleppo, as the first activity of this type he made in Aleppo. Aljarah made reports to show the Syrian situation after the airstrikes made by the Russian. He emphasized on the air strikes made on the Free Syrian Army and the other opposition armed groups. This reports made by Aljarah was in a response to the claims made by the Russian as they say that these air strikes are directed to ISIS only.

The Syrian journalist Zaina Erhaim is considered one of the top hundred arab influencing women for the year 2016 recognizing her courage in reporting from inside Syria throughout the conflict. Zaina favored working and reporting stories from inside Syria over having a safe job in the UK. Zaina has been awarded The Peter Mackler award for courageous and ethical journalism in the year 2015 and the Journalists without borders award as well for her focus on the humanitarian side of the Syrian war.

Social networks

The new concept of media is linked to evolution that has occurred in the social networks where users of the web can easily amend and add to the contents of the material or films published, and republish them using tools available on the net but in a different ways. Thus, the evolution of the Web has additional dimensions of social and cognitive as well as the technical dimension, which led to this development. The new media depends on the individual's ability to produce digital media content and to publish ideas he has, information and opinions, documents, photos and video ... etc.

From all forms of media content, millions of web users through social media applications share the information and redistribute it with wide variety of people.

At the same moment of an event information and photos and video films are published live via social networks and other applications and tools of the new media. In the new media you cannot limit the source of information, and you cannot hide the reality or ignore it.

Social media applications contributed clearly to gather people in each side of the conflict, and help in its isolation from the other side. You cannot be absolutely neutral because no one can isolate himself from the phenomenon that he covers. One does not see the whole picture, but he captures what his personal views and directions push him to see. Then he presents the event and transfer it to people through social media channels with the support of his personal views, and that make the audience see the real picture but with the views of the person who transfer it.

Therefore, we find that the event is shown in the modern social networks and other new media tools with visions of different views, which contributes often to create confusion and give more ambiguity on the attitude of the crisis.

The cases of violent clashes that occur on the areas of social communication between the groups, which adopts its members streams of thought and opposing convictions illustrate this contrast in ideologies.

The adoption of the traditional media of the press and TV on what is produced by individuals is increasing, especially in light of attempts to crack down on reporters of media, and the difficulty of access to some security settings or because of the fighting battles.

The new media, is recording evidence of the facts and events provided by the public opinion voice and image at the same moment of the event.

When Israel launched a rocket attack on a scientific research center in Jamraya in the countryside of the capital Damascus on May 5, 2013, and immediately after the fall of the first missile, the BBC and based on scenes taken from a video clip broadcast by activists on the Internet immediately after a series of powerful explosions, one of which illuminated the sky of Damascus and led to a plume of fire and other explosions.

The new media presents the event in a more than one document, and this presentation may be identical or it may be contradictory. For example, a video depicting the events of demonstrations and repression of the violence of the protests and the bombing

Published statistics of the number of wounded and the dead by civilians or insurgents have been largely overlooked and the number of victims (martyrs) by the Syrian army is ignored by many medias.

The absence of accurate and documented information

Statistics on the size of the human and physical destruction differ after five years of the Syrian crisis, but they intersect on that half of the Syrians's 23 million people are now displaced at home or abroad. Estimates suggest that as the war continued another four years will raise the cost of the loss to \$ 1.3 trillion.

The United Nations estimates the number of victims of the war in the past five years about 250 thousand, while the «Syrian Center for Policy Research» estimated the number of victims by 470 thousand. In addition to them about a million people have had direct disabilities and tens of thousands of detainees are captured.

Syria's neighboring countries host 4.8 million refugees and Syrians form 29 percent of the 1.2 million people sought asylum in Europe last year, including 158 thousand registered in Germany. In addition to them hundreds of thousands of unregistered refugees and 6.5 million internally displaced inside Syria. Witnesses said they observed in the recent period the presence of newborn infants left in the streets of Damascus.

Libraries and digital local Arabic content (media blogging) to save the cultural heritage

Website for Assad National Library: The library collects the creative Syrian Arab national heritage in order to document, scan and save it in Microfilms or DVDs (Newspapers and manuscripts). Through the website of the Library, one can search the library catalog for the required materials. The library can be used for browsing the Internet and on a wide range of magazines, newspapers and specialist periodicals. They can get hard and digital copies of library information.

Many Syrian websites worked in transferring news, political, social and formal events, civil societies and the private pro-opposition. There is a glossary of these websites at the end of this research.

Among the most famous websites that have contributed before and during the Syrian conflict in the field of digital local Arabic content, the blog homeland eSyria. This is one of the Syrian Computer Society projects that adopt the method of media blogging, and which establishes the digital content, Arabic cybernetic, by exploring the elements of the local community and all human, natural and historical elements and geography, also the dissemination of the positive culture of knowledge and encourage in the cases of innovation and excellence, despite the war imposed on "Syria". eSyria website founded in 2008, has published over 90.000 articles about Syrian community, these articles have become important source of knowledge. The project of blog homeland eSyria has an important role in recording the local life apart from politics. The project transferred and disseminated a number of activities and aspects that represent a mosaic of social and cultural situation in the province of conditions "Hasaka", for example. The blog homeland eSyria has a significant role in keeping the Syrian social inheritance and transmit it to future generations.

The importance of the blog homeland appears also in keeping the material and immaterial heritage, through the codification to survive in these difficult circumstances of the current history of Syria. It is also characterized by its role in the Special documenting and recording musical movement in "Syria".

But we must develop a content management system and website development services in line with the readers of the information and technology age.

It is necessary to verify the accuracy of the information and its sources, the permanent information documentary, the importance of the information sought by the researcher.

The importance of the blog is especially seen after the devastation and destruction of a number of libraries, museums, mosques and monasteries containing treasures of manuscripts, books and newspapers.

IFLA (The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions) encourage institutions, organisations and individuals holding unique documentary heritage collections to register their collections with the IFLA Risk Register project. IFLA encourages submissions to the Risk Register project from all countries/regions.

One of the main IFLA topic is the Cultural Heritage and Disaster Reconstruction Programme.

IFLA has developed an online webform to enable libraries and holders of documentary heritage collections to easily and effectively register their collection.

The destruction hit sites registered in the United Nations tables as World Heritage Sites, among them the old market in Aleppo, the second largest Syrian city, and in old Homs, and devastated Tel Mardikh (Ebla) and Mosaic Museum. Destruction reach also the dead cities in Idlib province and the historical suspension bridge in Deir al-Zour which is controlled by ISIS. historic Palmyra was damaged due to ISIS deliberate acts of demolition. ISIS controlled the historical city of Palmyra in middle of year 2015. In the recent time President al-Assad urges the UN to help in Palmyra restoration and the fight against terrorism.

President al-Assad said that Economic damage related to the Syrian infrastructure is estimated to be over 200 billion dollars. Economic damage can be repaired immediately after things settle down in Syria. But the infrastructure may take a long time.

The Syria Trust for Development called upon different international organizations and bodies, mainly the UNESCO, to take their full responsibilities, exert all possible efforts and take all required measures to protect historic Palmyra and the Syrian cultural heritage. with just the denunciation or condemnation only can not protect historical places in Syria.

Glossary of Syrian news websites

- List of newspapers in Syria:
 - www.syriatimes.sy
 - www.tishreen.news.sy/
 - www.tishreenonline.sy
 - www.thawra.sy/
 - www.thawraonline.sy
 - www.albaath.news.sy/
 - www.alwatan.sy/
- List of Satellite channels:
 - Organization of Syrian Arab Radio and TV www.rtv.gov.sy
 - www.talaqie.net
 - <https://facebook.com/Alikhbaria.Sy>
 - Addounia TV www.facebook.com/addounia.channel/
 - Sama TV www.sama-tv.net
- Websites and Social Media:
 - the official Facebook page for the Presidency of the Syrian Arab Republic, offering updates on Presidential news and events. www.facebook.com/SyrianPresidency/
 - The Syria Trust for Development www.facebook.com/SyriaTrust www.syriatrust.sy/
 - Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA): is the national official news agency in Syria www.sana.sy sana.sy/en/ www.facebook.com/SanaNews
 - National Media Council www.nmc.sy/
 - <https://sy.aliqtisadi.com/>
 - <https://ae.aliqtisadi.com/>
 - Ministry of Information www.moi.gov.sy/
 - Shamra is the first Syrian search engine www.shamra.sy/
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