

THE FACTOR OF TWITTER IN THE INFORMATION WAR AROUND NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT

R. Elamiryan

SUMMARY

The Ceasefire Agreement in Bishkek, 1994, signed by the Republic of Armenia, Azerbaijani Republic and Nagorno-Karabakh temporarily put the end to active phase of the bloody Nagorno-Karabakh war in the South Caucasus. However the sides did not manage to resolve the still continuing conflict, specifically in the information field. A full-scale information-war as part of a hybrid war takes place on both information-psychological and information-technical levels. With the development of social networks and rise in their importance, these tools of public communication have been included in information warfare around the war in Nagorno-Karabakh Republic to shape public opinion all over the world. From this perspective the author chooses one of the main social platforms, Twitter, and observes it.

The aim of the article is to reveal the vectors and content of confrontation in Twitter between Armenia, NKR on the one hand and Azerbaijan on the other hand, and to make an attempt to understand the logic of information operations in Twitter in this framework, as well the ways of influence on human mind.

Keywords: information warfare, hate speech, social networks, information-technical operations, information-psychological operations.

Twitter is a social networking and microblogging service, enabling registered users to read and post short messages, so-called tweets. Twitter messages are limited to 140 characters and users are also able to upload photos or short videos. Tweets are posted to a publicly available profile or can be sent as direct messages to other users. Twitter is one of the most popular social networks worldwide. Part of the appeal is the ability of users to follow any other user with a public profile, enabling users to interact with celebrities who regularly post on the social media site. Currently, the most-followed person on Twitter is singer Katy Perry with more than 51 million followers.

Brands have also discovered Twitter's appeal in the area of social media marketing. The most-followed retailer in 2013 was Starbucks with over 4 million followers. During that year, 89 percent of the company's revenues originated from advertising services, up from 73 percent in 2011 [1].

Thus we see that Twitter is a very important tool to shape public opinion worldwide. And the number of its monthly active users worldwide in 3rd quarter of 2015 is more than 300 million [2].

However, these figures are not applicable for the South Caucasus, specifically for the Azerbaijani Republic (AR), Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR) and Republic of Armenia (RA). There is no official statistics reflecting the exact number of twitter users in these three countries, but there are a few expert sources containing the information we need.

Armenian expert in social media S. Martirosyan writes that the number of Armenian Facebook users is about 560.000, however the number of Armenian users on Twitter "does not surpass a few thousand" [3]. And here is one more his statement: "Twitter still remains passive network for Armenia; the site population does not exceed several thousand people" [4].

It is even more difficult to identify the number of Twitter users in the NKR. Yet the field research by the author shows that the quantity is less than one thousand, and the quantity of active users is up to several dozens or even fewer.

There is no official or unofficial figures on the quantity of Twitter users in Azerbaijan. For this reason we will put together two articles on this issue [5]. We need the following information from this articles: Twitter's share in Azerbaijani social media space is 10.28%, Facebook is the most popular social network in Azerbaijan with 68.63% share. The quantity of Facebook users in Azerbaijan is 1 360 thousand people.

Simple calculation provides the following approximate quantity: 1971 thousand people is the whole Azerbaijani social network population. So for Twitter it's approximately 200 thousand users both active and passive.

What is more interesting Twitter keeps the tendency to develop as a tool of IW in Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (NKC), e.g. the account of the president of the AR, which is developing at a high speed. There are two reasons: 1. the growing Twitter audience in AR, NKR and RA, 2. huge Twitter population in the world. The first reason is not much relevant because the tendency of growing of domestic Twitter audience is rather low. Meanwhile the second reason is very important as it allows to shape public opinion worldwide. For this reason it is considered consequential to observe the role of Twitter as a significant tool of IW of the second generation.

Our main quantitative analysis we will make through such an instrument as the website <http://www.socialbakers.com> which allows to find out different activities in several social media platforms, specifically, the one the author is interested in.

THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA

There are 15 accounts in socialbakers.com with more than 2000 followers and registered in Armenia. Five of them we already know. Also, we can exclude numbers - 2, 3, 5, 6, 14 (pop-singers, foreign representations in the RA, entertainment, etc.), and even a shallow analysis shows that these accounts are not related to IW.

In this context the following should be outlined which rather comprehensively presents the whole picture with the Armenian segment of Tweeter.

@Kornelij (Samvel Martirosyan) – Social Media and Information Security analyst, 3933 followers, and 12622 tweets (20.11.2014). As we discovered, his account is one of the fastest growing ones during this month and week. Field research shows that he is one of the leading social media, information security specialists in the RA.

Most of his posts during the observed period are either in English or Russian. What is more, most of the posts referred to the NKC and were written during escalation periods. This shows there is no general information warfare strategy in Armenia

and it has mostly a **reaction nature**. The same picture is with the helicopter (retweeted). He also has many own tweets with clarifications and revelations concerning, for instance, the “helicopter case”. So he rather actively creates his own content, deeply analyzes the situation and makes suggestions. For example, there is a link to his own observation on why Azerbaijan had hit down the NKR helicopter. Or he proves that Azerbaijan actively uses a video from the Sirian conflict, saying it is in the NKC area [6]. What is interesting there is no hate speech at all, only analytical materials with facts and proofs. Also, he has about ten posts on human right violations in Azerbaijan. These posts can be considered as negative propaganda, but the point is the whole international community and representatives of Azerbaijani civil society speak about these problems, and he shows only facts. For this reason we will not consider these posts as hate speech or negative propaganda.

There are also posts on the Sargsyan-Aliyev meeting in Sochi. But the most tweets we see during July-August escalation: there are many posts on the Armenian hostage, killed in Azerbaijan, on I. Aliyev’s tweet, threatening a war to the NKR and RA. Notably, all the posts have peaceful nature and mainly accentuate on facts (See the screenshot on the next page). **Another point is that this user is the first among the observed who so deeply accentuates on human rights violations in Azerbaijan.**

The same tendencies (most of the posts on NKC are made during the escalation periods, language specificity) we see on @NarineDaneghyan profile (Narine Daneghyan, a journalist at Mediamax news agency, Communication officer at European Youth Parliament Armenia) and @ditord (Artur Papyan, a journalist, blogger, IT and Media consultant).

The only Armenian media representative in this list is @Arajinratvakan (**lin.am**) with 3463 followers and 266642 tweets.

Thus monitoring of all these accounts shows that top accounts from the RA are active generally in escalation periods (July-August escalation, November escalation in connection with the NKR helicopter) and they provide mostly neutral posts without black propaganda. At the same time we do not see any Armenian officials in this list.

However, the obstacle in researching Twitter through socialbakers.com is that it is necessary to be logged in this website to be shown in statistics. As we can see, there are many active profiles, which are not shown in socialbakers.com statistics. The search by hash tags will help us fill this gap. We will come back to this after having observed the Azerbaijani segment of socialbakers.com, as well as the NKR users.

THE NAGORNO-KARABAKH REPUBLIC

In this context the author would like to draw the attention to the following users who according to different observations are the most active users in Tweeter from NKR.

1. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic
2. Press-Secretary of the Prime Minister of the NKR Artak Beglaryan
3. Head of Press Service of NKR National Assembly Anoush Ghavalyan

In respect to all three accounts, there is no hate speech, direct negative propaganda towards the AR. No threats to start a war or wipe out any nation. Most of the posts contain clarifications and proofs of this or that position. Meanwhile, they highlight the general life of the MFA and NKR, cover different events and development of cooperation of NKR with the entire world. Only once A. Beglaryan uses the word “fascist” to describe the Azerbaijani authorities who refuse to allow to take the corpses of the helicopter crew members to NKR. On the other hand, Azerbaijan twice violated not only international law (by hitting down unarmed helicopter), but also moral and human principles, not allowing to take the bodies.

In opposite to the accounts observed before, A. Beglaryan covers everything connected with conflict not only in escalation periods, although the quantity of tweets in the peak period rises.

AZERBAIJAN

What we see is more active users from Azerbaijan are registered in socialbakers.com. If we compare the numbers with the RA, Azerbaijan has 2–3 times more followers than its Armenian counterparts. When it comes to top accounts, we see that 40 profiles have more than 2 thousand followers (in the Armenian segment it was only 15), and top ten profiles have more than 10 thousand followers each.

The first position with 101249 (22 Nov. 2014) followers is held by “**YAP Gənclər Birliyi (@NAPYouthUnion)**”, the official account of Youth Union of New Azerbaijan Party. The posts are either in Azerbaijani or English. Most of them highlight domestic life in Azerbaijan. There are no posts on July-August escalation, on Sargsyan-Aliyev meetings. At the same time there is one indirect post on the “helicopter case”, which, in our opinion, is very emotional and inhumane.

The second position with 96791 followers is held by Azerbaijani President **Ilham Aliyev - @presidentaz**, the fastest growing profile this month. There are 2061 tweets, and for the observed period all the posts are written in English. No wonder that NKR is called “occupied Azerbaijani territories”, many posts praise Azerbaijan and its development. He was especially active during July-August 2014 escalation. And his post to start war against NKR and Armenia received wide international resonance (Pic.1, Pic.2).



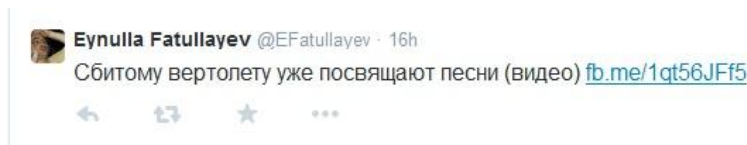
Pic. 1



Pic. 2

Remarkably, I. Aliyev used Twitter to make this announcement. The rate of growth of I. Aliyev's twitter auditorium shows the importance of this instrument in IW in the 21st century.

Most of other profiles contain only some news on NKR, mostly with an emotional content. They are rather similar in their negative and propagandistic approaches. However, one post deserves special attention. It says, "Songs are devoted to downed helicopter" (the NKR unarmed helicopter shot down by Azerbaijani side). The incident ended with 3 dead helicopter crew members. And the proud military song on this occasion shows the attitude of one nation towards the other full of hate (Pic. 3).



Pic. 3

However we understand that socialbakers.com cannot reflect all the active profiles in Twitter. For this reason the author also searches information by keywords.

Monitoring shows that most common hash tags for Armenian and NKR segments of Twitter are: #NKpeace #StopAlyev #Armenia #IlhamAliyev #Karabakh #AzeSaboteurs #Azerbaijan #ArtsakhStrong #Xenophobia #nazi #Армения #Карабах #Азербайджан.

Most common for Azerbaijan are: #Azerbaijan #GoAliyev #antiarmenia #stoparmenianagression #vurkomandirvur #armenianhelicopterERROR #AzerbaijanArmy #Армения #Карабах #Азербайджан #ArmenianHelicopter #ArmenianHelicopter.

So we have the following keywords for the search: #Armenia #Karabakh #Azerbaijan #NKpeace #StopAlyev #IlhamAliyev #AzeSaboteurs #ArtsakhStrong #Xenophobia #nazi #GoAliyev #antiarmenia #stoparmenianagression #vurkomandirvur #armenianhelicopterERROR #AzerbaijanArmy #ArmenianHelicopter #Армения #Карабах #Азербайджан

Observation shows that Armenian and NKR accounts mostly use common approaches, giving general information, making analytics with proofs. Meantime Azerbaijani side uses more emotional methods:

The indirect power of this photo latently inserts in the viewer's mind the idea that NKR is part of Azerbaijan.

One more notable tweet: S. Martirosyan reposted I. Aliyev`s post, and RA MFA spokesman T.Balayan`s comment on this occasion:

These posts reveal ridiculous nature of I. Aliyev`s tweet, which says that Azerbaijani political system is a model of the European political system. It is really ridiculous taking into account mass repressions against civil society and wide human rights violations in Azerbaijan, especially taking into account large quantity of the tweets from Azerbaijani users concerning political prisoners and oppression on civil society in Azerbaijan.

Besides the topic of human rights, Azerbaijani tweets are largely directed to create the image of welfare and development in Azerbaijan.

Keyword #karabakh is completely directly or indirectly concerns the NKC.

Although the author speaks about double standards, in our opinion, undoubtedly, international community understands that these people are saboteurs, that is why it keeps silence. The fact again shows that these people are saboteurs, and not hostages, as Azerbaijan tries to show. In this framework it is more inhumane to use children in this conflict. If they care about this child and other children too (in Azerbaijan, NKR and Armenia), it is better to keep the ceasefire regime instead of publishing such photos.

The other notable remark is posted by an Azerbaijani journalist Eynulla Fatullayev (Pic. 4):



Pic. 4

The tweet says, “Today we use the “Needle” to hit the helicopter, and tomorrow we will use the “Smerch” to destroy towns and villages!” [7] **where he meant to use multiple rocket launchers against civilian towns and villages.**

Thus Twitter observation demonstrates deep conflict and active IW among the AR, NKR and RA. Each side does its best to defend and promote their position and uses both general and specific tools of IW. However, there are rather large qualitative difference in approaches the sides use.

The AR acts in the following way: its operations are militaristic, offensive, aggressive, and very emotional, they **try to stir up hatred, anger, compassion, negative attitude towards NKR, RA and to all the Armenians in the audience.**

Armenian sides are more peaceful and defensive. And we can see in this example that social media reflects general political lines of the sides. The Armenian sides use more sarcasm and fun to show the wrong points of the opponent; instead of hate speech they show more creative approaches.

Monitoring shows that top accounts from the RA are active generally on escalation periods (July-August escalation, November escalation in connection with the

NKR helicopter) and they provide mostly neutral posts without black propaganda. At the same time we do not see any Armenian official in this list. What we see here is that more active users from Azerbaijan are registered in socialbakers.com. And if we compare with the RA, they have 2–3 times more followers than their Armenian counterparts. However, strangely enough, among Twitter users from Azerbaijan there is a large auditorium of followers, but without any tweet. The author could not find any logical explanation for this paradox. Meanwhile we can conclude that most of the tweets are directed towards foreign auditorium (based on the language of the tweets and popularity of Twitter in the conflict zone) and international community. Reputably, most of the posts referring the NKC are made during escalation periods.

One more thing to accentuate is that there is no any Armenian politician and governmental official in top Twitter user`s list. The comparison shows that most influential twitter users in Armenia are the representatives of civil society and media. On the contrary, the first positions in Azerbaijan are held by President and the leading political party. Thus we see that all the sides relatively actively use the potential of Twitter in IW, which takes place in the framework of NKC, threatening human security in the region.

REFERENCES

1. Number of monthly active Twitter users worldwide from 1st quarter 2010 to 3rd quarter 2014 (in millions), (16.11.2014), <http://www.statista.com/statistics/282087/number-of-monthly-active-twitter-users/>
2. Number of monthly active Twitter users worldwide from 1st quarter 2010 to 3rd quarter 2015 (in millions), <http://www.statista.com/statistics/282087/number-of-monthly-active-twitter-users/>
3. Why Facebook is more popular in Armenia than Twitter, 26 April 2014, <https://prezi.com/vul4jzq5aqcm/why-facebook-is-more-popular-in-armenia-than-twitter/>
4. SOCIAL NETWORKS IN ARMENIA, 24.12.2012, http://www.noravank.am/eng/issues/detail.php?ELEMENT_ID=6820
5. В Азербайджане зафиксирован существенный рост числа пользователей Facebook, 4 июня 2014, <http://www.trend.az/azerbaijan/business/2281375.html> <http://novosti.az/obsh/20140505/300322530.html>
6. <https://twitter.com/Kornelij>, Nov. 12, 2014.
7. Сегодня – «Иглоу» по вертолёту, а завтра – «Смерчем» по городам и сёлам! – Naqqin, <https://www.evernote.com/shard/s8/sh/46675326-8708-4ff4-844d-d1f82e90de28/dfb8908179dd33ad80d299213ff9a6e4>

ФАКТОР TWITTER В ИНФОРМАЦИОННОЙ ВОЙНЕ ВОКРУГ НАГОРНО-КАРАБАХСКОГО КОНФЛИКТА

Р.Г. Эламирян

АННОТАЦИЯ

Перемирие в нагорно-карабахском конфликте, заключенное в 1994г. в Бишкеке, в относительной степени временно положило конец кровавой войне в Закавказье. Однако сторонам не удается до сих пор разрешить конфликт, который продолжается, в частности, в инфор-

мационном поле. Полномасштабная информационная война, как часть гибридной войны, проходит как на информационно-психологическом, так и информационно-техническом уровнях. С развитием социальных сетей и увеличением их важности, данные инструменты публичной коммуникации активно были включены в информационную войну вокруг Нагорно-Карабахской Республики с целью формирования общественного мнения по всему миру. С этой точки зрения автор выбрал одну из наиболее важных социальных платформ – Twitter – с целью его изучения.

Основная цель статьи – выявить векторы и содержание конфронтации между Арменией и НКР с одной стороны и Азербайджаном с другой, попытаться понять логику информационных операций в Twitter, а также пути воздействия на человека.

Ключевые слова: информационная война, социальные сети, информационно-психологические операции, информационно-технические операции, Twitter.

TWITTER-Ի ԳՈՐԾՈՆԸ ՂԱՐԱԲԱՂՅԱՆ ՀԱԿԱՄԱՐՏՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՇՈՒՐՋ ԾԱՎԱԼՎՈՂ ՏԵՂԵԿԱՏՎԱԿԱՆ ՊԱՏԵՐԱԶՄՈՒՄ

Ռ. Գ. Էլամիրյան

ԱՄՓՈՓՈՒՄ

1994թ. Բիշկեկում Ադրբեջանի, Լեռնային Ղարաբաղի և Հայաստանի միջև կնքած հրադադարի պայմանագիրը ժամանակավոր վերջ դրեց դարաբաղյան պատերազմի ակտիվ փուլին: Սակայն մինչ օրս կողմերին չի հաջողվել լուծել հակամարտությունը: Այն առկա է մինչ այսօր, հատկապես տեղեկատվական ոլորտում: Լայնածավալ տեղեկատվական պատերազմը՝ որպես հիբրիդային պատերազմի մաս, ընթանում է և՛ տեղեկատվական-հոգեբանական, և՛ տեղեկատվական-տեխնիկական մակարդակներում: Սոցիալական ցանցերի զարգացման և դրանց նշանակության աճով պայմանավորված՝ հանրային հաղորդակցության այս գործիքները ընդգրկվել են ԼՂՀ շուրջ ծավալվող տեղեկատվական պատերազմում՝ աշխարհում հանրային կարծիք ձևավորելու նպատակով: Հեղինակը, այս տեսանկյունից, ընտրել է սոցիալական հիմնական պլատֆորմներից մեկը՝ Twitter-ը, և ուսումնասիրել այն:

Հոդվածի հիմնական նպատակն է բացահայտել մի կողմից Հայաստանի և ԼՂՀ և մյուս կողմից Ադրբեջանի միջև ծավալվող հակամարտության ուղղությունները և բովանդակությունը Twitter-ում, փորձել հասկանալ Twitter-ում տեղեկատվական օպերացիաների տրամաբանությունը, ինչպես նաև մարդու վրա դրանց ազդեցության եղանակները:

Հիմնաբառեր՝ Տեղեկատվական պատերազմ, սոցիալական ցանցեր, տեղեկատվական-հոգեբանական օպերացիաներ, տեղեկատվական-տեխնիկական օպերացիաներ, Twitter: