THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA DURING THE CLASHES BETWEEN ARMENIA AND AZERBAIJAN IN 2020

by

Vahan Khachatryan

Department of English & Communications

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**Abstract**

The clashes between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2020 had a significant influence on the social and economic lives of the Armenian population. Media played a considerable role in controlling people’s emotions by presenting the same information from various perspectives. Social media was a popular medium to receive instant information from all over the globe. This paper focuses on the discussing the role of social media during the clashes between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The study of the paper utilized surveys and interviews, aiming to assess respondent’s attitude towards social media posts. It enabled examination of social media use based on a number of variables, such as age, social media platform type, hashtags, etc. In addition, the paper examined the emotional impact of the announcements of the officials on public. The findings of the study are summarized in the final section.

Keywords: social media, Armenian Azerbaijani conflict, attitude of public.

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# **Introduction**

Social Media is one of the most developed and widely used internet platforms in the 21st century. Through social media, various communication methods are being established. Friends can connect with each other, talk using a video call, and share photos; also, people can share and find different information, which could be hard to find elsewhere. In the recent years, the overall engagement in social media platforms reached a level where, even the official news is being spread via those platforms. Nowadays, the most popular social medias are Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, which various age groups use, whether a child or a grown-up person has access to the platforms.

With the enormous increase of social media users, the news agencies are concentrated on information delivery via social media's virtual platform. It is more comfortable and more convenient to use and it is one of the reasons, to create social media accounts for providing news. Following these developments of the events, the government officials also made personal or collective pages to show the country's accomplishments and inform the public with the latest news. Previously people were waiting for days to get a piece of information or were spending the whole day listening to the radio to catch any news on an ongoing event.

In the recent war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, which started in September 2020 and lasted for 44 days, social media was a primary source of news in Armenia. Even though the news was covered on TV, in newspapers, and in any possible way, social media was the simplest and the quickest way for finding the most up-to-date information. With a heartbeat, people were expecting to receive news, visiting social media continuously, and following officials on the platform.

The rapidly developing world of today allows to spread news much quicker than before. One of such powerful tools is the social media and during the 44-day war it had an immense importance in the news spreading. There were few social media platforms which were used during the war, out of which Facebook and Twitter had a primary advantage over the others. Both the official news providers and individuals were concentrating their audience in the mentioned social medias. The Facebook played a huge role in informing the local audience on the ongoing events, whereas Twitter mainly concentrated on the abroad, informing the foreign audience.

The campaigns in the social media were mostly well organized, and the message delivery was effective. However, there was one problem connected with the Facebook social platform. During the war days, you could perceive various fake information and misleading topics. Whether it was the tricks of the Azerbaijani hackers, or the unacceptable behavior of some local news providers of sharing fake news and initiating chaos. Thus, it was extremely important to follow only the official’s news provider or the ones that earned long-lasting trust of the audience. Through the war times, the government was repeatedly warning people to avoid perceiving fake news, and only trust the officials’ statements.

During the war, the most updated information was available on the Armed Forces of Armenia's official pages. Most importantly, the central information sources were the official pages of the Armed Forces representative, Artsrun Hovhannisyan, and the spokesperson Shushan Stepanyan. Both of them were spreading only official news, which was double-checked and reconsidered several times before publishing.

The choice of the particular topic of discussion is based on the relevance and its importance in current days. My project will be a small contribution to the literature of the war in Artsakh and the exploration of social media's role in combat. My personal preference in choosing this consists of the following: Firstly, during the war, my primary source of gaining information was social media. It is especially intriguing to explore what strategies have been used in delivering the message. Second of all, what impact did the published news had on people, and what context were used in the social media publishing is a very thought-provoking idea to investigate.

My capstone project main component is consisted of the interviews. Conducting the interview within the public and with experts, I would like to draw analysis on people’s behavior on the social media’s effectiveness during the war. It is very intriguing to hear the responses of the public, as there were the main recipients of the messages and discovering the answers it will be possible to give an evaluation on social media’s effectiveness during the 44-day war.

# **Literature Review**

During the searches for compatible literature, I have separated several major articles which will help construct my paper. While searching, I have mainly concentrated on the impacts of social media and social media's overall usage in a crisis, like war. I have also included several articles on the importance of the platform in a particular war case, according to which I gained a possibility to draw comparison with the 44-day war. The articles that I found will allow me to have more organized paper and deliver a professional project.

A fundamentally important article, that tackles the topic of mine is "Mediating War and Peace" by Teresa Joseph. (2014) The chapter brings up a sufficient amount of crucial ideas regarding the role of media in war and how it constructs communication methods. The author highlights the continually rising media usage by bringing up several essential concepts and supporting them with examples. One of the strong foundations for my paper that I found in this chapter is based on the following- "News frames determine what is selected, what is excluded and what is emphasized" (Joseph, 2014). This article is mainly concentrating on the media itself, on the delivered news in a broader sense. However, by drawing parallels with social media, I found several shared similarities and connected the concepts from the book to my chosen topic.

First of all, the article suggests a theory about Selective Reporting. According to the author, selective reporting is the process of being biased while choosing what news to report and what leave uncovered. Due to several reasons, the official news sources try to avoid covering several different news stories. The reasons can be extremely various, as different news reporters have their goals in providing the information. According to the concept of selective reporting I will like to add and describe the responses of the people during the interviews emphasizing the concept of selective reporting according to the respondents. One of the reasons is raising people's morale with the help of the news. In a broader sense, the officials try to report only the achievements on the battlefield and report negative information very rarely, or in a way that does not initiate additional concerns of the citizens. In this way, the public continuously feels that the hope of winning is still alive; in other words, the people do not give up and continue fighting for their rights.

Another reason for adding selective reporting in the news reporting repertoire is to eliminate chaos and misunderstanding during the war. The news is covered with an understandable language, avoiding using professional words or expressions. This way, an average person can perceive the information correctly, without misconceptions. On the other hand, if the message is captured in the wrong context, it will most possibly initiate chaos. As a result, the news reporter might not include the professional level of information in the post.

Overall the chapter from the book Mediating War and Peace will help me construct a general theme of my paper. Even though the author does not directly refer to social media, the concepts are applicable in social media, particularly to my topic of research. With the chapter's help, I will approach to analyze the responses of the interviewees more professionally.

Besides the primary source (Mediating War and Peace) of the methodology selective reporting, I have also found a couple of articles that directly connected with that concept. The reports support the ideas around the methods and add new information about it, too. A chapter from the book "Politics of the Interface" has supportive components on selective reporting theory. In the chapter, it is more specifically emphasized that the message delivered to the public can be altered in several ways for reaching a particular outcome. (Selfe, 1994) Both chapters from the "Mediating War and Peace" and the "Politics of the Interface" will help conduct an in-depth analysis of the social media message delivery.

A fundamental concept that I found while doing the research is crisis communication. Crisis communication is the process of managing and maintaining effective communication during difficult times, conflict times. Such conflicts include the global economic crisis, international competition. War can also be categorized as a part of the problem; thus, I can find a correlation between my topic and situation communication in my capstone project. It is vital to effectively use communication techniques to maximize the positive outcome in such difficult times. In the case of war, it is to transmit power and hope to the public and avoid chaos.

During a situation like war maintaining the communication methods is extremely important. Management during a crisis communication is the advanced description of the situation and through it the maintenance of the ways becomes clearer. The officials of the Armenian government tried to follow the guidelines of the crisis communication. Through the research it will be clear on how effective was the process in Armenia, as the interviewed people might have the best description for the situation. Moreover, the evaluation of the public is the real depiction of the quality of the work done.

Another useful source by Admir Čavalić, with the title of "Crisis Communication, and the internet" (2015) is giving an detailed knowledge on the crisis communication. This source is an up-to-date article that explains crisis communication basics by bringing examples and supporting the ideas. The author describes the importance of keeping the communication system in difficult times and how it affects its future resolution. The article also presents in-depth steps for reaching success while maintaining regular contact with the audience at such times. According to the author the connectedness of the people through internet allows better organization of a crisis communication. ( Čavalić, 2015) This way all people are receiving the same information and not much efforts are being used during the process. Another intriguing concept that author presents is that through internet it is possible to be prepared for the crisis beforehand. The preparedness can be in the form of organization and in already structured, detailed steps for delivering a message during a crisis.

“Using social media in the news reportage of War & Conflict” is another special article that tackles the issue of war reportage via a social media. The author, Vittoria Sacco introduces her findings on the topic highlighting that social media is an effective tool during a war period, however it is extremely complicated and complex. The rapid development of the internet allowed a widespread use of it in situations like war, and the process has become a more than serious challenge for the journalists. Managing a social media platform professionally during a war is crucially important, as any flow can affect the situation terribly.

"Countering Reactance in Crisis Communication: Incorporating Positive Emotions via Social Media" by Xu and Wu (2020) is an article that refers to the importance of crisis communication, especially in social media. Moreover, the author includes information about Twitter. Consequently, in my project, I will mainly have Twitter as a social media platform. Thus, this article will help me construct my thesis based on. "Strategic communicators recognize Twitter's potential ability to reach a large number of stakeholders" is one of the article's cores, which provides knowledge on what importance does Twitter have in the situation. (Xu et al, 2020) The research section in this project includes several core questions regarding the Twitter. Thus, the article by Xu and Wu provide an interesting background on the usage of Twitter during a crisis, and allows to connect dots with the received responses. The authors several times highlight that Twitter is able to reach mass audiences and have a possibility of rapid spreading of the news. Consequently, they state that if Twitter is managed professionally the results can be extremely beneficial for the news spread. One of the problems of Twitter usage in Armenia was that there are no many educated Twitter experts. As the platform does not have a widespread usage among the people, the development of branches is not common. Especially in situation like war, when the actions were evolving rapidly it was hard to keep each social media updated and manage without flows.

**Methodology**

For understanding the media’s role during the 44-day war, I found surveys and interviews the best information source. Conducting surveys, I targeted to get responses to several essential questions regarding the media. The first stage of the survey was to collect data from people non-regarded from the age and the place of living. Such a technique of gathering information allows one to receive unique answers to the posed questions. The survey can be considered non-biased while collecting the information; I did not concentrate on a particular group. For avoiding so, my study conducted includes opinions of people from various backgrounds and educational levels. Considering the Covid-19 situation, the online survey questionnaire was the most compatible option for collecting data from the public.

The second subcomponent of my data collection process is the face-to-face, or in other words, in-person interviews. Through in-person interviews, I aimed to receive more detailed and precise (different demographics) answers from the public. Besides being accurate in the posed questions, I received thorough and well-explained responses during the in-person interviews. I prepared and included similar questions for the online survey and face-to-face interview. In conducting the face-to-face research, I tried to collect data from varying age groups. Primarily for understanding the behavior towards the social media usage and for getting different perspectives on the issue.

The third major part of my data collection consists of expert interviews. In the expert interviews, I would contact experts of the field, Public Relations, Communications, Media. The experts would give a professional opinion on the situation and make a detailed explanation for each point.

To construct a theme for my capstone project, I created several core parts for the survey. Even though for each component of data gathering, I formulated a compatible format for the questions, the overall purpose for the research was the same. For an online survey, I brought up brief and precisely constructed questions. That way, people would have definite apprehension of the posed question and provide a clear answer. Moreover, the time of the people’s is precious, and I neither wanted the respondent to get bored nor get tired of answering. For the in-person interviews, the questions posed are more explanatory, or in other words, explain the details of the question and seek a detailed reciprocal answer. The last component, the questions in the expert interviews, are more comprehensive and aim for a professional response. In the expert interview, I include questions that seek a personal or a professional opinion of the expert. As they are masters of their field and have better knowledge and perception of the media during the war, the questions were different from the in-person and online surveys.

The online and face-to-face surveys are majorly constructed of the same questions, aiming to discover people’s ideas towards the social media role during the 44-day war. The surveys concentrate on several aspects of the media, and the following statements are the core components of the study conducted. The first component of the survey includes a demographic type of questions. More particularly, age, gender, and the place of living. To better understand the participants’ background, the survey also included information collection of the participants’ educational level. Through understanding the demographic and the education level of the survey participants, I received a better picture while analyzing the data.

Moreover, the online surveys I created in two languages, English and Armenian. The reason is that some participants were Armenians but were living outside and were not familiar with the Armenian language. Overall, in the English language survey, 56 people were participated, among which 35 compared to 21 male respondents. Sixty-three people filled in the Armenian language survey with more females (33) and male (29) participants.

The first questions asked was*, “What Was the most used platform for obtaining news?”.* The questions aims to develop a perspective on the people’s usage of a specific news provider. The responses collected from the participants allow understanding whether people are following the news via social media or else. As my capstone is targeting social media usage, it is crucial to obtain knowledge on which social media is used more by the participants.

To have a more fair and unbiased survey, I have also included options not related to social media. Some people might not use any social media; thus, I found it worthwhile to add TV, Radio, Online News, Magazines. A mentionable aspect of the question is the format. The question format that I found compelling for this specific question is marking the options on a scale of one to five. The participant needs to highlight in each box his/her usage of the particular platform. One represents the “least used” option, whereas five corresponds to the “most used”. Organizing the question in the followed format allows constructing a better understanding of the issue.

The options for the abovementioned questions included: TV, Radio, Newspapers, Facebook, Twitter, Online news Providers, and Other social media platforms. The primary purpose for giving the question is to understand people’s participation in social media, and consequently, their method of getting the news. For making the question more entertaining and at the same time informative, I asked the participants to mark their usage of the platform on a scale of 1 to 5. 1 represented as the least used, while the answer 5 corresponded to the highest used option.

One of the core components of my capstone project is examining the official’s participant in news delivery, especially on social media. Consequently, I included a statement of an official and asked the participants to write a short answer for their feelings. The second question asked was, *“What emotions arose while reading the posts of official?”*. The participants need to fulfill their emotions that arose while reading the post. I chose to include Artrsrun Hovhannisyan’s, the Defense Ministry representative’s statement on Twitter. To obtain a sincerer response from the participants, I did not choose an ordinary social media post. My choice of the post is about Shushi, which in later stages was the most discussed topic during the war. The post translated from Armenian means “Shushi is ours, and that is it!”. I included a “short answer text” type of question for the participants to express their ideas freely. Even though the title suggests that people should bring short statements, the kind of question is beneficial in obtaining a more expanded opinion from a participant.

Several factors influenced my choice of the post about Shushi. Shushi has always been crucially important in both for its favorable geographic position. Shushi is located on the high hills and was in the epicenter of military operations. Moreover, Shushi is the second major city of the Republic of Artsakh, both economically and socially. During the 44-day war, the town was taken forcibly by the Azerbaijani army. The ancient Armenian heritage was destroyed after the Azerbaijani occupation, and all of the people left the city.

Nowadays, for an Armenian, Shushi has become emotional and, at the same time, grievous topic. Whether it’s the nature of the city's history, people In Armenia had unique connections with Shushi. Considering the points mentioned above, I choose to include a post about Shushi in the online survey. By adding the question in the online poll and expecting an open-ended answer, people could provide their honest thoughts on the issue. As a result, the post about Shushi consisted of understanding the participants' behavior towards such an emotional topic.

The third survey question was*, “What were the main purposes for the usage of hashtags?”.* During the 44-day war, hashtags played an essential role for the Armenians in the social media platform. Thus, to understand the perspectives of the public about the usage and effectiveness of the hashtags, I supplied two questions on hashtags in the survey. One aims to discover people's attitudes towards hashtags and their purposes of using them in social media.

The first question is a check the box type of question and specializes in understanding the participants' viewpoint on the hashtag's purpose. The question is primarily divided into two answer categories. The first category is the emotional aspect of the hashtags, such as raising spirit. In contrast, the other concentrates on rationality/reality, highlighting the usage of a hashtag to spread information.

According to the participant, the second subcomponent of the research on hashtags includes gathering knowledge on the most effective hashtag. Creating a short text answer question, I found the most compatible for that specific component. Short text answer permits the participant to express his/her idea freely. Multiple choice questions would limit the interviewee in choosing the most compatible solution.

The first reason for making an open-ended type of answer is that there were many hashtags used in media during the war. Even though several core hashtags were used more often, such as *#WeWillWin* or *#ArtsakhisArmenia*, there were also unique and infamous hashtags. Thus, a participant might have seen a more efficient and powerful hashtag that is not as popular as the others. Therefore, my question allows the participant to compose his/her response freely.

To understand people's opinions on the effectiveness of the hashtags, the question seeks to find the reason for their choice, too. The question is as follows: "Which hashtag you believe was the most effective and why?". Considering the subcomponent of the question "why?" arises the second reason I choose an open-ended format of answer gathering. By doing so, participants have the chance to explain their answers further if necessary. The request information allows me to formulate an overview of the most potent hashtag and examine the most popular and frequently used one.

The abovementioned components construct the overall survey data, and based on which I analyzed people's behaviors towards social media and its effectiveness.

To better understand the topic, besides collecting data from the Armenian public, I also conducted expert interviews. The expert interviews aim to develop a professional viewpoint on the media during the war days. For this part of the research, three professionals in the media field were interviewed. Public relations field professional, Mass media industry representative, and communication expert, are the titles of the experts who participated in the interview. The media expert who agreed to participate in the conducted interview is Maria Titizian, who is in media for a long time. Also, Mrs. Titizian is the chief editor of the EVN Report, an online news provider that covers Armenia's ongoing events in both Armenian and English languages. The communication expert is Lucyann Kerry, Ph.D. Besides being an expert communicator, she is also a professional in several fields such as geology and filmography. My last interviewee, who preferred to remain unknown, is a Public Relations professional and was an active participant in the media field during the 44-day war.

The participants in the expert interview have several shared core similarities. First of all, they are all well-prepared in their field, and they are considered masters in their spheres. Secondly, the experts are/were teaching subsequent courses at a university level. Maria Titizian is providing lectures in courses of journalism, media. Whereas Lucyann Kerry and PR expert instruct communications and public relations, respectively.

The questions posed to the experts aimed to discover formal and more professional aspects of the media in war. The main subparts of the interview did not vary too much from the public interview, however, I constructed rather in-depth questions and, through the interview, developed unique and professional perspectives on the issue.

The preparation of the interviews started during January, and the upcoming two months were solely provided for the completion of the research. The first step of the data collection was the creation of the online survey. From the earliest stages of planning my capstone project, I concentrated on the online poll, as it allows me to obtain data on the overall perspective of the public. After organizing the structure of the study and finalizing what questions should be included in mid-February, I posted the surveys online. (Expand about the post-war situation- conclusion) limitations of the research and option for future research)

Finalizing the responses received on the online survey, I started the data analysis process. For getting a better perspective and having more productive work, I created an excel spreadsheet where all of the data was added. During the analysis process, I discovered several impressive statistics and the aspects of the answers that are worthwhile including in the project. For implementing the analysis of the contrasting questions, I created cross-tabulation data sets and found the possible correlations between them. Finally, to introduce a complete analysis of the data, I visualized the statistics by creating charts and graphs.

The idea of conducting face-to-face interviews arose while I was reading the responses for the online survey. At the beginning of March, I had already collected some data from random individuals from the public. I thought that in-person interviews would provide insightful data on some of the questions. During the online survey, people did not explain their choice and rarely gave a detailed answer for the posed statements. Consequently, while interviewing people directly allowed the participants to expand on their thoughts. As a result, I received some critical notes and constructed meaningful and more detailed research through in-person interviews.

The last segment of the methodology, which I finalized at the end of March, was the expert interviews. Similarly, to the online survey, I planned the expert interview. One aspect that became clear during the interview process was the interview format. Considering the Covid-19 situation, I preferred to conduct the expert interviews online, through the Zoom platform. For running the expert interviews, I create a plan for each one, and at the end of March, I have already completed the expert interviews.

The last segment of my methodology was analyzing the gathered data. Providing about one week for each research section, mid-April, I already analyzed the needed data and creating corresponding conclusions.

# **Research and Analysis**

## *Online Survey*

The online survey was designed by including two sections: demographic data and main data. For providing a depth picture of the demographic of the participants, I would like to bring few impressive statistics of the combined survey (both Armenian and English). As mentioned earlier, I would like to highlight the number of female and male participants. The female respondents consisted the 57% of the total, or 68 people. At the same time, the survey received 51 responses from male participants (43%).

The demographic research included gathering the age of the people, asking the respondent to note their age by marking in the corresponding age range. In total, 50 participants (42%) out of 119 were between the ages of 20-29. The second most popular age range of the participants was 10-19, which received a combined number of 30 responses. Highlighting the least occurrent age of an interviewee, only eight people or 9.5% of overall participants were in the period between 40-49.

The question about the participant’s highest educational level, the “Bachelor’s Degree” option, received the most significant number of responses. Overall, 53 participants, or the 45 percent of the interviewees, had a bachelor’s degree as their highest educational level completed. “High School” as the highest completed educational institute is the participants’ second most occurring academic level. Expressed with numbers, 33 people have “High school” as their highest degree of education. On the other side of the same question, “Primary or Secondary” was the least marked option with only four responses. Surprisingly, no one who participated marked the mentioned option, and all 4 of them were from the Armenian Language survey.

In the context of living, even though the survey was participated by people from various regions, most of them were from Yerevan, Armenia. More than half of the interviewees were from Yerevan, with roughly 53 percent of the total participants or 64 people. Interestingly, only Yerevan had such a significant number of responses. Even though the survey participants are from various places, there is no second option with a substantial number of responses. After Yerevan, the most chosen option as a place of living is the regions of Armenia, especially Shirak. As an international participant of the survey, California (USA) and Moscow (Russia) are the most frequently occurring options.

To provide my survey analysis, I would like to consider each subcomponent separately and introduce possible findings and correlations. Consequently, I combined the demographic and primary research to highlight thought-provoking points and draw interesting and informative comparisons. Graphs and charts are added to deliver the audience a better understanding of the issue and have a visual perspective on the data. The data is vast, and highlighting the findings only with numbers might not be as effective; that is another reason for visualizing the statistics.

To understand the effectiveness of social media during the war, an essential question is included in the survey aiming to understand what platforms were used by the people to obtain information. The question is the following.

*“Please rate the use of each media during the war in Artsakh”.*

When asked to rate the most used platform during the war for obtaining news, the participants were asked to mark on a scale for each of the offered options. Through the survey, it became clear that previously the most prominent methods of gaining news, TV, radio, and magazines, served as the least used information sources for the participants during the 44-day war. Interestingly enough, 71 people voted radio as their most minor used platform, and only six people responded that it is their most used one. On the same note, “magazines” as a response received the second most numbers as the least used media.

The results after analyzing the data were relatively surprising. During the 44-day-war, the government suggested many times to hear and obtain only official news to avoid fake or provocative ones. Even though it was possible to receive “real” reports on social media, often people encountered unchecked information. On the same note, TV as a platform has more control, and most data are reliable. Even though several channels introduce fake and chaos-causing news to the public, people could receive the most realistic news if they followed the right TV channel. For example, the Armenian First Channel is the official TV channel of the government, and it always announced official and approved news. Thus, the data showing that TV is on the list of least used platforms was somewhat unexpected.

Concentrating on the other aspect of the question, social media and online news providers are the most frequently used platform for getting the news. Particularly Facebook and Twitter are in the epicenter of gaining information for my survey’s respondents. I chose to examine Twitter because officials were using it as the primary method of delivering news to both local and global audiences. Even though Facebook as a social media was the most widely used platform for the local market, Twitter, on the other hand, concentrated on both lightly on local and primarily on global. An interesting finding that I discovered during the analysis is the correlation between the age of the participant and his/her usage of Twitter. Below is attached the chart for the age/usage of Twitter relation for the English language survey.

From the abovementioned chart, it becomes clear that the young age group representatives widely use Twitter.

The findings were slightly different in the Armenian language survey and had a slight deviation in terms of responses. Through the research, it became clear that people who participated in the Armenian language survey were not using Twitter as frequently as those in English. Surprisingly enough, only 11 out of 63 respondents found Twitter their most-used platform during the war. On the same note, 16 participants from the Armenian Language survey noted Twitter their never used platform, as they left a blank space in the place of response. Overall, almost half of the 49% of the respondents from the Armenia survey either listed Twitter as their least used media or never used it during the war. In comparison with the English language survey, only 18% or ten people found Twitter the most minor used news provider, and no one left a blank space as an answer.

An interesting conclusion can be followed from the results of Twitter usage among the public during the war. To construct a solid base for the research summary, I would like to mention that during the spread of the surveys, in a single file, I included both Armenia and English language surveys, giving the participant a choice. The conducted research allowed to claim that people were less involved in Twitter in the Armenian language survey, and they found other platforms more viable. Thus, the people who choose to fill in the Armenian language survey were better in Armenian. On the same note, Twitter often offered non-Armenian language publications and almost always targeted the abroad with English posts. From the mentioned aspects, it can be concluded that people who had fewer skills in English avoided using Twitter during the war.

The usage of Twitter is a rather exciting finding throughout the research. However, Twitter as a news source did not receive the most significant numbers as a “most used” platform. Through the study, it is now clear that the favorite method for obtaining information for the participants was Online News Providers and the option “Other Social Networks.” Combined data of the Armenian and English language surveys portray the highest responses of “most used” for the online news providers. Overall, 51 people from both surveys found online news providers their primary source of information during the war. In other numbers, 42% of all survey participants marked “5” for the abovementioned option.

Highlighting the most used platforms by the participants, it is worth mentioning that the second most used is the “other social media” option. Through the research, it becomes clear that many people used other social media pages besides Facebook and Twitter. Even though the first-mentioned two social media platforms are the most famous, people still preferred others, too. I want to highlight that one of such platforms is Telegram, where during the war, various news spreading accounts/pages were created.

The social platform Telegram was widely used during the 44-day war in Armenia. The reason for its widespread usage was its convenience and capability of getting breaking news rapidly. In the recent years Telegram gained immense popularity in the world, and Armenia was not an exception. Thus, the local news agencies started to develop telegram news feeds and by creating short but detailed texts, deliver the message to the public. During the 2020 war, the numbers of users of Telegram for obtaining information among the Armenians was raised significantly.

*“The most effective hashtag according to the participant, and the purposes for the use of hashtags”.*

Understanding the people's behavior towards the hashtags for analyzing people's overall perceptions, I included "hashtags" as a second principal component for the survey. The first question on hashtags concentrates on the people's opinion on hashtags, whereas the second one seeks to find the most effective hashtags according to the participants.

Throughout the research, it becomes clear that there is a slight difference in people's attitudes, as both the emotional and rational aspects of the question received a close number of votes. It is worth highlighting that 67 people out of 119 found the purpose of hashtags in spreading the news outside of Armenia. On the same note, 62 people marked the purpose of using it to raise the spirit of the public.

According to the findings, it is possible to claim that hashtags aim to both aspects, emotional and rational. To construct an exciting correlation between both factors, I would like to draw parallels with the gender of the people. Doing so will allow us to discover which gender's representatives are more emotional or more rational.

To provide a perspective on the responses, I would like to emphasize the overall findings while doing the cross-tabulation. The 88% or 31 people from the female participants in the English language survey found the purpose of hashtags in making people aware of the war outside Armenia. On the other hand, only 31% or 11 females from the same survey noted the purpose of using hashtags as raising the people's spirit.

Analyzing the same English language survey data, the male participants are found to be more emotional. More than 71% of the male participants in the English survey highlighted the option of raising the people's spirit by using hashtags. The analysis of the data brings up a somewhat surprising conclusion. It becomes clear that male respondents see the issue in a more emotional aspect compared to women. Even though through the survey it is not entirely possible to give a perspective on all males and females, such massive difference between the responses draws a decent picture of people's overall behavior.

Looking at the same aspect of the cross-tabulation, it is worth stating the results of the Armenian language survey too. In this survey, the number of female and male participants is close to equal; thus, the comparison is more accurate. Consequently, 18 of the 29 male respondents marked the option "Raising People's Spirit," compared to 15 females. The female respondents consist of 33 people, or 53% of the overall Armenian language survey. Again, the statistics allow us to assume that men are concentrating on emotions more than women. They find the purpose of the hashtags as a fulfillment of the people's emotional well-being.

For the second component of the data collection on the hashtags, interviewees are asked to emphasize the most effective hashtags. After the research, it is now clear to us that there were a couple of very famous hashtags during the war. One of them is #WeWillWin and #ArtsakhisArmenia, which are the most frequently noted hashtags by the participants. Another hashtag that gained immense popularity during the second half of the war is "#StopAzerbaijaniAgression." This hashtag was widely used on Twitter, and people through it were informing the world about the problem.

Besides the above-mentioned popular hashtags, the interviewees marked several unique and not very famous ones. One of such unique ones was the hashtag #lavklini, which translated from Armenian means "It will be good." The mentioned hashtag is an infrequent one, and it was probably the least used hashtag during the war. #StopTurkey is another hashtag that the participant noted as an effective one; however, it was not a very common hashtag during the war times.

From the overall gathered data, it is possible to declare a couple of hashtags that the public found as effective one. Some of them were noted as a local hashtag or a hashtag that raises the spirit of the Armenian people. Whereas others, mainly English language hashtags, were designed to inform and maintain a rapid spread of the news for the foreign audience.

*“The emotional impact of the announcements of the officials on public”.*

This specific part of my research concentrates on gathering knowledge on people's attitudes towards the message delivery of the officials. Similar to the sub-question of hashtags, a survey on the officials include two questions. As mentioned earlier in this paper, both questions target understanding people's emotions when following an official's announcement or a social media post.

The results for the first question, which concentrated on the rise of the spirit through reading the posts of officials, are pretty intriguing. Analyzing the data, it becomes clear that most people believe that the posts were affecting their emotions and raising their spirits. Portraying with numbers, 50 people from both surveys found that their morale was fully boosted while reading the announcements. Overall, 42 % of the participants engaged in the study noted "5," which corresponds to the "highly raised spirit" response.

Following the most responded answer, there is a slight deviation in numbers for the second and third most popular responses. Overall, 29 people of the participants believe that the effectiveness of the officials' efforts in raising the spirit was neutral. They neither find it effective nor state that the impact of the process was irrelevant. The third most popular response has received 22% or 27 participant's attention. Only five people out of 119 insist that the posts could not maintain a powerful emotional aura among people.

Discovering the data, the findings allow us to construct a solid hypothesis that keeping the spirit high was one of the practical tools used by the officials. During the war, the primary mission for the government and the official media was to maintain people's hope and belief throughout the war period. Even though there were notable flaws during the message delivery, it is intriguing to find that the public has a solid viewpoint on the effectiveness of raising the spirit. The survey has only 119 participants; however, it is valid that overall, the officials' effectiveness in media was on high standards. To back up the end, it is worth restating that 77 people or 64% of the interviewees highlighted that their spirit was arisen either "high" or "very high" while reading the posts.

The next question for gathering data on people's attitude towards the government official messages suggests the participants read the Twitter post and fill in their feeling while reading it. The received responses allow making a strong assumption on the general emotional feelings. Interestingly, most of the respondents felt exact while reading; thus, there are several more mentioned emotions than the others. Among those are, "hope." "belief," "pride" options. The highlighted ones are the most common answers provided by the participants.

Through the responses, it becomes vivid that people during the war had hope in the army's success. The Twitter post that I included had a special meaning, as it was dedicated to Shushi. As mentioned in the introduction and methodology sections, Shushi was a key city during the war's later stages. Consequently, the people who had a feeling of hope were mainly hoping that Shushi would stand firm. One of the goals of the official media was to provide hope and belief to the public and encourage them mentally. Some participants were having negativity while reading the post. One of such rare responses is that the message of an official was making her to feeling lied. Overall only two people found that they feel no emotions while reading the post. The participants did not explain their answer; however, it is assumable that those people were unemotional and looked at the situation with absolute cold-heartedness.

The overall results and analysis of the survey allow us to conclude that the message delivery was primarily effective. The number of People who felt pride is not few, as many responses included satisfaction and proudness. Keeping people in a high emotional state is of crucial importance during the war. Feeling pride is a component of such emotions, and being proud is one of the keys to avoiding chaos among the public and boosting the spirit of the army and the country.

## *In-person Interviews*

The second component of the research is the face-to-face interviews in public. Surveying strangers allowed me to have a more general view of the posed questions. Moreover, the in-person inquires received more detailed and constructive answers from the public. The questions did not vary too much from the online survey. Consequently, focusing on three aspects; Information source, Hashtags, Opinions on the news delivery of officials.

Starting to analyzing the data on the most relevant news source for the participants, it is now clear that people mostly followed official news. “To avoid fake or misleading information, I was only following the officials” is the core idea of one of the participants. According to him, official news was sometimes picked, and some information might have been missing; he still found following officials the right choice. According to another person, he chose to listen to only officials, as he could figure out when the situation was worrying. He stated that Artsrun Hovhanissyan repeatedly gave secret hints about the problematic status on board during the press conferences.

Official news providers are among the most popular choices of an information source by the participants in face-to-face interviews; however, it is worth mentioning the media platforms used during the war. According to the analysis, social media is the favorite choice of the majority of the respondents. Among the social media platforms, the most indicated ones are, non-surprisingly, Facebook and Twitter. It becomes clear that people tend to use social media more compared to other media. While giving a detailed answer, one of the participants pointed out that social media is the quickest way of getting the needed information. According to her, whenever there is important news, Facebook automatically suggests at the top of the newsfeed. Highlighting Twitter, a woman mentioned that she followed information on Twitter mainly to receive assumptions and evaluations of the foreign media; however, she strictly ignored incoming news from Azerbaijani newsagents.

On social media, there are few other types of news providers from where the respondents practiced during the war. I want to note the usage of Television and Radio amongst the people. The numbers of radio users are not equal to the TV users; however, as seen before, these two are of much less use than the contemporary mediums. An interesting finding that I would like to include in this paper is random participants’ statements on the radio. The man around 35 years old brings up a valid point on why radio is an effective tool in obtaining information. As the person is a driver, he highlights that he is driving most of the time, and the most convenient news source is radio. It is impossible to use a smartphone during the ride. Thus, he chosen to listen to the Public Radio of Armenia (the radio of TV channel H1), he adds. Besides that, it is a convenient method; according to him, radio also provided brief but relevant and truthful news on the war situation. The example of the driver is a rare one, and while analyzing the data, it is assumable that radio is just an old-fashioned medium of news. However, it is an effective one even nowadays.

The following sub-question inquired to the interviewees is on the topic of hashtags, aiming to understand people’s behavior towards the use of hashtags. The results during the in-person interview were similar to the online survey. One of the most prominent responses of the people is that the reason lying behind the use of hashtags is raising the spirit of the public. According to the participants, the process of maintaining the spirit of people was successful. One of them responding that the hashtags created for the local audience were mainly chosen to transfer emotions of strength and power to the public. One of them was the #WeWillWin hashtag. According to interviewed women, the hashtag #WeWillWin transmitted firm hopes of winning to the public, as the hashtag was straightly referring to the final income of the war.

People involved in the face-to-face survey also concentrated on the rational aspect of hashtags used. The majority of the people found the reason behind raising the spirit and as an effective tool for informing the foreign audience. Various hashtags were created during the war, which aimed to caution the abroad about the ongoing situation, noted by the participant. Overall, similarly to the online survey, actual life participants of the questionnaire reported two main categories for using hashtags; Raise of the spirit, Informing abroad.

## *Expert Interviews*

The third component of the project is connected with interviewing experts in the field. As mentioned earlier, I interviewed three professionals, Public Relations expert who preferred to be anonymous, Lucyann Kerry and Maria Titizian, communications and journalism professionals, respectively. The results of the interviews are pretty intriguing, and the interviewees have a professional approach to the posed questions.

The first inquiry given to the professionals was about the personal choice of news sources during the 44-day war period. Public Relations expert admits that she preferred to follow both Armenian news and news from international sources during the war. Interestingly, she highlights that her preferred global news providers were the Israeli and Al Jazeera. According to her, those were giving detailed information on the ongoing situation, and it was interesting to hear the ideas of the abroad people. Adding to the international media, PR professional points out several Armenian official news spreaders, such as Armenian Unified Information Center or the Ministry of Defense.

Maria Titizian, as a response to the same question, states that she was primarily following Armenian official’s news. The media agencies include Azatutyun TV, Civilnet, Hetq. These were the primary information sources, according to the expert. However, Maria notes that she was following independent journalists too during those times. Maria Titizian makes a solid point on the right and bad news. She emphasizes that she was only following the official’s statement to avoid fake and misleading information during the war; the media was often filled with clickbait and fake news.

The final interviewee, the communications expert, notes that she was primarily following international news, as the Armenian ones often did not have an English broadcasting. In Armenia, very few news agencies actively spread the word in English; one of them is EVN Reports, the only mentioned Armenian news source by Lucyann Kerry. The lack of English language in Armenia media made the expert majorly follow international ones, such as the famous BBC.

During the combined research of the three interviews, I discovered an exciting similarity between them. None of the participants mentioned that they followed the news of the enemy. For instance, the PR expert affirmed that she purposely ignored the incoming information from the Azerbaijani media. Sometimes, it is informative to hear the enemy’s representation during the war; however, in the 44-day war, the Azerbaijani news was broadcasting final misleading reports.

The second component of the expert interview targeting the professional viewpoint of the participants for the question of the effectiveness of the message delivery during the war.

The public relations expert provides a detailed and professional level of response to the question. According to her, during such a crisis, the solution that the Armenian government found was compelling. The solution consists of the concept of “one person from one platform,” or in other words, a person who is allowed to deliver the message. That challenging position was trusted to Artsrun Hovhannisyan, and according to the expert, the method was primarily effective. Moreover, the PR professional states that the situation on the borders was inordinately varying, as in some places, the problem might have been calm, whereas in the other, massive clashes. Thus, the expert believes that the general message from the “one person from one platform” was tough to construct.

The journalism expert’s viewpoint on the issue was rather interesting. Maria Titizian highlights that the media failed before the war. She believes that we should have been prepared beforehand for us to have effective press during the war. The situation of Artsakh was always on the line, and you couldn’t know when it will burst, she states, adding that the people should have asked targeting and straight questions to the government before the war. This way, we could have been more informed and prepared. Thus the effectiveness of the media during the war could have been significantly better.

Lucyann Kerry referred to the educational level of the officers in the media field. She pinpoints that even though many well-educated and prepared individuals in the area, most of the officers were not doing very productive work during the war times. However, one of her arguments to support her viewpoint is that the government lacked the ability to inform international readers. They were few who had proper news coverage in English.

Like the online survey and face-to-face survey, I added hashtags to receive professional interpretation from the experts. It was fascinating to realize that the PR expert’s response to the question was similar to the answers of the other type of researches. She states that the hashtags were used for two primary reasons. Firstly, to raise the public’s spirit, motivate the people, and secondly for sharing the news. An interesting finding during the research with PR experts was that Facebook was mainly used for the local community, whereas Twitter for the international. One of the most successful hashtags, according to her, for the Armenian public was “WeWillWin” hashtags or #HaghteluEnq. It was a very motivational one, she adds. For the international audience, many hashtags were used, which at some point were too much to monitor. Thus, she suggests that the control over the growth of the number of hashtags should have been more organized.

The approach of Lucyann Kerry to the question was a unique but at the same time a thought-provoking one. She does not find the purpose of the hashtags in motivating the people or raising the spirit. Instead, the communications professional believes that the sole purpose of using hashtags is to deliver a non-biased truth. She believes that attaching a hashtag to a social media publication would benefit its spread, thus engaging the people.

Overall all of the researches that I conducted brought invaluable knowledge on people’s attitudes towards social media in the 44-day war. The online questionnaire allowed me to construct an overall understanding of people’s behaviors. Moreover, through the research, I discovered the data by making comparisons and drawing cross-tabulation analysis.

Overall all of the researches that I conducted brought invaluable knowledge on people’s attitudes towards the social media in the 44-day war. The online questionnaire allowed me to construct an overall understanding on the people’s behaviors. Moreover, through the research I was able to discover the data by making comparisons and drawing cross-tabulation analysis.

On the other hand, the in-person interview targeted random individuals on the street, gathering more detailed and well-explained answers. Through the face-to-face interviews, I anticipated the participants to explain their answers and bring reasons for their choice. Eventually, the data collection met my predictions, and I was able to complete the results.

The expert interviews were a huge part of my capstone paper. It constructed the professional viewpoint on the issue. The experts provided some invaluable thoughts on social media during the war. However, they noted similar aspects as the public did, highlighted the details of them, and also presented further professional description for the inquires.

# **Conclusion**

The comprehensive data that I gathered through the research allowed me to construct several pictures of people’s attitudes towards using social media during the 44-day war. During the data analysis, it becomes clear that most people have similar viewpoints and express similar ideas.

Firstly, I would like to state that most people used social media platforms to obtain news during the war. Even though Facebook was used more by the participants, Twitter and other social media had many votes. The most intriguing aspect of the question’s research is that social media, especially Facebook, was widely used by the experts. Through clever skimming of the news and avoiding misinterpretations, the experts found using social media as a common source of information.

Hashtags are the second component of my research, created to understand people’s attitudes towards the effectiveness of the use of hashtags. Again, the answers provided by all of the three research participants do not vary too much. The purpose of the hashtags the participants find is to raise the spirit of the people and spread the news quicker and abroad. Some people were more emotional, bringing up the boost of people’s spirit, whereas others found the purpose more rationally. The unique hashtag that the majority of the participants brought up is the #WeWillWin hashtag. The #ArtsakhisArmenia hashtag is another common hashtag that people consider as an effective one. The experts provided a more professional viewpoint on the use of hashtags. The Journalism expert found it as an effective tool. At the same time, the PR expert highlighted that the number of hashtags was excessive, which reduced their effectiveness.

The last component included in the research for the project intended to receive responses on the potency of the messages delivered by the officials. The online survey, which included a screenshot of an Armenian Ministry of Defense representative Twitter post, aimed to examine the people’s feelings on it. Through the process, most people were either proud or had immense hope while reading the announcement. Thus it possible to claim that the work of the officials was mostly effective, as it highly motivated the public and kept their spirit high. On the other hand, the in-person interview and expert interview relied on the respondent’s oral description of the issue.

All of the research was highly beneficial to the project and in understanding people’s mindset on several issues. Each response was thought-provoking to read and had a significant impact on the development of the paper. On the other hand, the face-to-face interview concentrated on getting detailed feedback on the response, thus allowing to construct a better analysis. Lastly, through the expert interviews, I received some invaluable professional knowledge on the posed questions. Each expert provided a unique and well-constructed response for each subcomponent of questions.

# **Limitations and Avenues for Further Research**

My capstone paper met several limitations, which made the process a bit challenging; however, through clever planning, I could make up some of the problems and deliver the project. There is one major limitation that affected not only the world but my project too, and it is the global pandemic of COVID-19. Moreover, there is some point, which is more generalized. Thus, it must be taken as a rough picture of the issue. The pandemic disallowed me to have better functioning in some of the components of paper, more particularly the research process.

The COVID-19 affected the component of interviews. Even though the online survey did not suffer from the pandemic, the in-person and expert interviews did. During the face-to-face interviews, I could not approach more citizens, as some were either rejecting or were avoiding interaction with a stranger. Secondly, because of the COVID-19, the expert interviews were conducted online, through a Zoom webinar platform. The discussions were productive and highly contributed to my research. I am sure that conducting an in-person interview with an expert could have had a more prominent and positive impact.

Another limitation that is worth noting is connected with the number of participants in the online and in-person researches. The interviewed people in the survey are not few, a total of 119; however, it is impossible to give a fuller image of the posed questions. Even though the general picture was clear, and some questions had to outweigh several responses, we could notice a different result if more people participated. The results might not necessarily impact the majority as some questions had 50% or more similarity. On the other hand, the participation of more individuals could affect the minority formulation. For instance, during the survey, the only person noted that officials' messages were giving her a sense of a lie. If the more people participated, the number could have been slightly more. Again, the number of participants is a limitation for the paper; thus, I believe that the general picture would not deviate significantly.

My paper has the possibility for future development. One of such includes the further conduction of researches. The research that I have done was during the period when people were still under the influence of the war. Not much time was passed after the battle at the point I posted the survey online. Conducting a similar research six months after the war or one year after the war, I believe that the results will be different. On the same note, I can collect more data, add another section based on the new findings. This will allow me to create a comparison between the research and analyze the behavior of the public.

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