

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## Activist Journalism: Using Digital Technologies and Undermining Structures

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*This article explores how human interactions with networked technologies enable and constrain the emergence of social structures that nourish public knowledge and experience. By adapting Anthony Giddens' (1984) Structuration Theory and extending its perspective to technology (W. J. Orlikowski, 2000), the study endeavors to examine the manner in which engagement with networked technologies by people outside mainstream news organizations reproduces structures that neutralize the power of media institutions to construct social reality, as well as the manner in which their actions simultaneously produce new social structures (N. Couldry, 2000). The study is grounded in analysis of the online activities of members of Machsom Watch—a women's organization that monitors the human rights of Palestinians at checkpoints set up by the Israeli army.*

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As technology and the journalistic environment undergo dramatic changes in form, function, and artifacts, researchers have displayed increasing interest in technological innovations and their impact on the journalistic arena and the content it produces and disseminates (Domingo et al., 2011; Fenton, 2009; Stuart, 2006).

This article examines the contemporary journalism environment, exploring how human interactions with digital communication technologies both enable and constrain the emergence of new social structures that nourish public knowledge and experience. I suggest that the emerging new structures facilitate public visibility of a marginalized social reality, in particular that of suffering and pain. I also maintain that while such representations help establish an environment for moral engagement of the relevant suffering, they also reinforce the structures that hinder this practice (Boltanski, 1999).

The study will be predicated on Anthony Giddens' (1984) Structuration Theory, devised to resolve a fundamental division within the social sciences concerning the

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classic agent/structure dichotomy. It will also draw on works in the fields of information systems and organizational studies that extended the structuration perspective and explored the complex ways in which new technologies (notably information communication technologies) were implemented in organizations. Building on such works, particularly Wanda Orlikowski's Duality of Technology model (Orlikowski, 1992, 2000), the study considers the manner in which journalists (operating outside media organizations) and the digital networked technologies they employ combine in unpredictable ways to construct public visibility of social reality (Couldry, 2000).

In adopting the structuration perspective, the study also aims at addressing traditional differentiation among media studies, which tend to prioritize either structure (mostly from within the political economy) or agency (normally situated in cultural studies). This integrative approach will permit—as well as depart from—the customary distinction in communication studies between so-called “audience research” (that stresses the independence of individual agents) and its ostensible opposite, “production studies,” that tend to highlight the power of media institutions and the structures built into them and maintained by them. Moving beyond production settings, texts, and audience interpretation and focusing instead on “media-oriented practice” (Couldry, 2004), I explore how individuals that operate outside media organizations interact with media institutions in unpredictable ways.

Research will be grounded in analysis of the online activities of members of one organization known as Machsom [Hebrew: Checkpoint] Watch—a women's organization whose members monitor the human rights of Palestinians at checkpoints set up by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Members of the group are present at the checkpoints on a daily basis, recording events and then publishing their reports on their website, designed expressly for this purpose. Examining members' activities on the organization's website, I demonstrate that by enacting<sup>1</sup> digital platforms, the group challenges the mainstream news organizations' power to construct public visibility of social reality but simultaneously supports the structures that hinder such activities by legitimizing the news organizations' conventional practices and naturalizing their representations.

### **Media and public visibility of reality**

In his book *Media and Modernity* (1995), John Thompson argued that with the proliferation of modern media (e.g., the printing press and broadcast media), a “publicness” of a new sort was created, made up of all that was visible to the public—the activities and events that the public was able to see or hear about. According to Thompson (1995), “mediated publicness”—the visibility of events occurring outside the temporal and geographic sphere of the consumer public—was made possible in the early modern era primarily by agents, who testified in public space about events that they witnessed and thereby rendered the events visible, that is, public.

Toward the beginning of the 19th century, a division of labor emerged and these witnessing agents were transformed into salaried workers. Appointed either directly or indirectly by private and/or public employers, such professional witnesses were in charge of defining, allocating, and displacing “slices of reality” for the public in the public space.

Journalists were perceived as crucial players among the various agents responsible for creating public visibility of “slices of reality” (Schudson, 1978, 2001; Thompson, 1995). In this context, it has been shown that the modern-day news journalist functions as a “witness” to events that s/he sees: The journalist is present at the event, observes it, and then testifies about it in public arenas before an audience that was not there itself (Fenton, 2009).

Many scholars note, however, that although news journalists do enhance public visibility of “slices of reality,” they are employed by media owners as a means of generating profits and thus usually function as gatekeepers of symbolic content who tend to favor public visibility of the hegemonic/official position on issues (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Ryan, 2004; Schudson, 1978).

In recent years, numerous researchers have shown that this one-to-many, top-down journalism environment is undergoing a fundamental transformation. They note social and economic upheavals among the factors responsible, but the key reason cited is the changing nature of technology, which is purported to impact directly on the practice of journalism and access thereunto (Beckett & Mansell, 2008; Fenton, 2009). It has been suggested that the unique role journalists play in the construction of “mediated publicness” is being challenged by different news sources (at times nonprofessional agents) using various media, who penetrate the journalistic arena and change the nature of deliberation and action in the public sphere (Jarvis, 2007; Thurman, 2008).

One of the central issues in this discourse was a critical assessment of the model of the “objective journalist.” Research showed that, alongside conventional journalism that idealizes objectivity, a new kind of journalism was and still is developing with a different aim: to make a marginalized reality visible and thereby change this reality (Downing, 2003). Scholars emphasized that journalists operating in this new environment are retreating from the “objective” model, in which the journalist obscures or even fully conceals personal views, and adopting instead the “advocacy” model, based on presenting a personal and value-laden judgment of the reported event. They argued that, like the objective journalist, the advocate journalist testifies in the public space about events witnessed firsthand, but unlike the objective journalist, the goal of the advocate journalist is to change the reality by making it public.

The online performance of such social/political activists was examined in this context (Dahlberg, 2007; Domingo et al., 2011; Downey & Fenton, 2003; Kahn & Kellner, 2005). It has been argued that the Internet provides platforms that promote and nourish social activism (Atton, 2003, 2004; Bennett, 2003; Downing, 2003; Platon & Deuze, 2003). One prominent example involves the websites of Indymedia, a network of independent online media centers that originated during

the anti-WTO protests in Seattle in 1999 and was used to spread the social and political agenda of the protesters, providing coverage of their campaign. Reports of the demonstrations in the streets of Seattle were sent out live over the Internet to audiences worldwide. The reporters, who were the activists themselves, functioned as *de facto* journalists, using video and still photography to record their experiences. While the traditional mainstream media portrayed the protesters in a negative light (as a band of law-breaking anarchists), the activist-journalists framed their own reporting of events online in a manner that showcased their viewpoint and agenda. This campaign, organized, coordinated and reported online by activists, became a model for activists worldwide, who similarly adopted the Internet as their principal medium for reporting on events (Bennett, 2003). Below, I elucidate the technological developments considered particularly conducive to this upheaval.

Unlike journalists working in traditional media, people who report news primarily via digital networked platforms require no professional training; online content distribution demands only minimal skills (Atton, 2003; Klein, 1999). As such, individuals may distribute news content directly, bearing witness to personal knowledge and experiences, with no professional mediation or dependence on an organizational hierarchy. These features have facilitated the emergence of spaces for alternative discourse that are normally ignored by established media operating within the consensus (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Ryan, 2004).

Studies indicate, moreover, that start-up costs for news media now approach zero, and nationwide 24-hour television stations can be set up for a few hundred thousand dollars (Beckett & Mansell, 2008; Gordon, 2007). Running costs are generally much lower than for traditional news production, as everything from licenses to camera technology is becoming cheaper. In earlier times, there was only one platform for news, while today individual journalists and news organizations have access to multiple outlets. Consequently, news organizations, which once enjoyed exclusivity in certain markets, now must cope with competition from nonprofessional sources. As such, the traditional news media are beginning to see their profit margins squeezed somewhat (Beckett & Mansell, 2008).

Critics also noted that these developments intensified recently as a result of a combination of digital compression advances, market liberalization, and deregulation policies—macroprocesses that shift the news media in the direction of consumer-led industries. Instead of waiting for the news to be delivered at specific times, consumers may now access it at any time from any location via broadcast channels and/or websites (Jarvis, 2007). Because consumers benefit from so much choice, editors, producers, and journalists are more inclined to respond to their perceived needs and demands. To survive, they must adjust to the rise of new news resources and introduce the attendant major transformations in their work environments.

These environmental changes attracted considerable academic attention, with scholars investigating news production processes in an attempt to identify the nature and characteristics of newsmaking in the digital era and to determine how the new

production processes manifest themselves in the construction of public visibility of social reality.

Two principal approaches typify the existing body of literature. The first scholarly trend focuses on the ways in which human agents use new technologies and the impact of the relevant media on editorial actions and decisions (Boczkowski, 2004; Pavlik, 2001). Concentrating on the manner in which people's adaptations of new networked technologies impact news contents, one critic suggested that "mobile phone usage is contributing to the public sphere and in some instances is circumventing official repression or inadequate information" (Gordon, 2007, p. 307). In another study on mobile phone use, Anna Reading (2011) discussed the ways in which Iranian activists affected public knowledge of events by capturing images of a young Iranian woman, Neda Agha-Soltan, who was shot dead during the Iranian elections in 2009.

These observations on transformation of the journalism environment by human agents who utilize new technology were critically scrutinized by scholars, who underscored the structural aspects of news production. Proponents of this view pointed to structural forms such as norms, habits, economic constraints, and the like, that hinder adoption of new technologies by human agents and—by implication—new news content. As Becket and Mansell (2008, p. 94) noted:

Although the traditional news media have provided platforms or spaces for public debate historically, they continue to be limited in the sense that there is relatively little incentive for openness and innovation.

Such hypotheses were reinforced in empirical works, with critics concluding that the adaptation of new media in traditional media organizations—and of new news sources—is slow, and the structures embedded in the technology and in the organizations are being reproduced (Reich, 2008; Wardle & Williams, 2010).

In this study, I aim to challenge this scholarly divide, which tends to prioritize (explicitly or nonexplicitly) structure or agency by bridging the two perspectives dominating the literature on this issue. Instead of inquiring whether and how new technologies facilitate transformations in the journalistic environment, I ask which social structures emerge when newsmakers (professional and nonprofessional journalists<sup>2</sup>) interact recurrently with whatever properties of the new technologies are at hand. I believe that this integrative approach can better explain emergence and change in media technologies, their use, and the nature of media texts.

### **Bridging agency/structure approaches**

The approach presented below is predicated on Anthony Giddens' (1984) duality of structure concept that attempts to resolve a fundamental division within the social sciences concerning the classic agency/structure dichotomy. While the so-called structuralists consider social phenomena to be determined by "objective," exogenous social structures, adherents of the phenomenological and hermeneutic traditions view them as the product of actions by "subjective" human agents.

Giddens endeavors to place a square peg in a round hole by proposing that structure and agency should not be viewed as independent and conflicting elements, but as a mutually interactive duality whereby social structures are viewed as both the medium and result of human activities. Expressed differently, when human agents carry out their actions, they draw on the existing social structure; human action, however, also simultaneously produces (and reproduces) social structures. Hence the structure, according to Giddens, is both enabling and disabling.

In recent years, Giddens' Structuration Theory has been enhanced by many scholars involved in the study of both micro and macrosocial phenomena. This theory has also helped critics comprehend the manner in which technologies (notably ICTs) are implemented in institutions. Accordingly, the proposed study will draw on some of the leading works in this field, particularly on Wanda Orlikowski's Duality of Technology model (Orlikowski, 1992, 2000).

Orlikowski framed the role of technology in terms of mutual interaction between human agents and technology, thus declaring it to be structurally and socially constructed. The practice lens model she proposed enables examination of how people interacting with a technology in their ongoing practices build structures that shape their emergent and situated use of that technology. Orlikowski argues that when human agents carry out actions, they draw on existing social structures, but their actions also simultaneously produce (and reproduce) social structures. Therefore, social structures do not merely restrain the actions of human beings but constitute a resource developed by them that becomes manifest in their actions.

Orlikowski's insights may be divided into the following constituents: (a) technology is affected only by creative human action; hence, the process of human engagement with a given technology begins in human actions; (b) human agents *enact*<sup>3</sup> the technology and do not merely use and/or appropriate it; (c) structures are not embedded in the technology, but rather emerge as a result of human enactment with it.

Examining the three-sided interplay among technologies, human agents, and organizational settings, Orlikowski demonstrated that when acting on technology, human agents are influenced by the institutional properties of their settings, relying on existing reservoirs of knowledge, resources, rules, norms, and interpretative schemes to perform their work. She also showed that when agents enact the technology, their actions impact the institutional properties of their organizations by either reinforcing or transforming them.

This study seeks to extend the scope of Orlikowski's model by addressing aspects omitted from her useful work. First, Orlikowski considers human enactment with technology in organizations, but overlooks the activities of agents operating outside the organizations investigated. In the case of media technologies, this approach is particularly problematic, as it ignores many instances in which "nonmedia people" (Couldry, 2000) interact with media institutions. The political aspect of human actions is another significant element absent from Orlikowski's study, which overlooks the manner in which power structures are produced and reproduced by

human activity. This issue, too, is of special importance for media research, as the media maintain a unique symbolic power rendering them capable of constructing social reality (Couldry, 2000; Thompson, 1995). Third, in all cases studied, Orlikowski indicated how agents' enactment with technology produced new structures but did not examine occurrences in which human activities challenge existing structures, namely those that alter the status quo instead of preserving it.

Taking these neglected elements into account, my objective is to investigate the manner in which journalists (operating outside media organizations) and the digital networked technologies they enact combine with one another in unpredictable ways to construct public visibility of social reality. The study thus endeavors to shed new light on how engagements with networked technologies by people outside media institutions reproduce structures that neutralize the power of mainstream news organizations to construct social reality and how their actions simultaneously produce new social structures that challenge existing ones.

To achieve this objective, I rely on studies in which several dimensions regarding the media's power of constructing social reality were highlighted, drawing in particular on Nick Couldry's *The Place of Media Power* (2000).

### Analyzing media power

Couldry (2000) analyzed the power of media organizations in construction of social reality, focusing on the manner in which individuals operating outside media organizations interact with media institutions and pointing to several distinct but interrelated dimensions of media power: framing, ordering, naming, and allocating.

In Couldry's conceptualization, *framing* refers to the media's role in sustaining the frame in which experiences of the social occur. Echoing several scholars (Silverstone, 1981), he perceived the media as a defining frame through which whatever is shared by the public is delineated as separate from what is private and particular. As mentioned earlier, this observation becomes particularly significant in modern times, as contemporary communication technologies (especially print and broadcast media) allow carefully selected individuals and organizations to access the "media field" (Ashuri & Pinchevski, 2010) and affect the nature and contents of the frames created by and in them.

*Ordering* concerns the hierarchical implications of the framing function. Couldry noted the hierarchy between two spheres that are continuously reproduced both symbolically and in practice—the media world at one end of the spectrum and the ordinary world at the other. Building on empirical work such as Livingstone and Lunt's study (1994), he argues that the media constantly create a symbolic boundary between the media world (studios, producers, people who appear in the media)—that is constructed as unique and remarkable—and the world of "real people" that is perceived as pale and gloomy.

*Naming* addresses the media's authority as a principal source of social facts, especially as a provider of an essential flow of information and meanings that enable



generation of new discursive resources at the societal level through both factual information and media fictions.

The fourth dimension, *allocating*, assumes that media organizations maintain the symbolic boundary between places of media artifact production and consumption, respectively, wherein practitioners operating in media organizations create symbolic contents in and by various media (television, the press, radio, etc.) that are then consumed by the audiences in their own environments. This is particularly important for news production: Journalists gather “social facts,” as it were, from the specific locations in which they occurred. They are then disseminated by the media they use to audiences absent from those locations. This spatial patterning reinforces the above-noted symbolic boundary between the world of the media and that of ordinary people. Thus, a hierarchy is continuously constructed (and maintained) between the media people who were on location (those who hold the information and hence the power to represent it) and the audiences that were absent from the locations at which the events took place and therefore lack firsthand knowledge regarding them.

To this I add a fifth dimension, *timing*, which is associated with the role of media practitioners (notably journalists) in defining the relevance of specific “social facts” by locating them on a timeline. The term “news” embodies this notion. New events (or events considered to be new) that appear in media frames are those that either recently took place or that were considered new by the professional mediators responsible for disseminating them. These definitions of “news” support the hierarchy by which media institutions delineate the “newness” of a particular reality and facilitate its public visibility accordingly.

As mentioned earlier, by building on such categories,<sup>4</sup> I explore the manner in which the media’s unique symbolic power to construct social reality is simultaneously reproduced and challenged by the actions of individual agents. In contrast to the studies examined, which underscore the ways in which human agents (notably people operating outside mainstream media institutions) maintain and even reinforce media power, the present study suggests that media technologies in general and digital networked platforms in particular constitute spheres in which human agents conduct various actions that alter the structures limiting their activities. Furthermore, it posits that in challenging existing structures and creating new ones, the individual agent operating outside mainstream media institutions facilitates public visibility of marginalized social reality, specifically realities of suffering and pain.

My arguments, as indicated, will be grounded in analysis of a website designed and maintained by members of an organization known as Machsom Watch [Checkpoint Watch], which comprises nonprofessional journalists deployed to report occurrences in the Occupied Territories via digital networked technologies.

### **Technology in practice enacted by Machsom Watch members**

Machsom Watch (henceforth MW) was established in 2001. Its members, all women, call for an end to the Israeli occupation and monitor the human rights of Palestinians at



checkpoints set up by the IDF. Members are present at the checkpoints on a daily basis, recording events and then publishing reports on their website, designed expressly for this purpose [<http://www.machsomwatch.org/>].<sup>5</sup> Their aim, as stipulated on their website in the section entitled *About Us*, is to “disclose the nature of everyday reality for Palestinians”—an act that other organizations, in particular mainstream media institutions, do not perform.

### Rules and resources

Anthony Giddens (1984) suggests that humans create *rules* (principles governing social action) and use *resources* (raw materials, power) that are only rendered usable by human action.

In their enactment with their preferred digital platform, that is, the organization’s website, MW activists drew on the sets of these rules and resources available to them: First, all members are women and define themselves as such. Gender is considered a crucial resource and only women can post reports to the MW website, as emphasized therein (in a section entitled *The Beginning*): “We decided from the outset that men would not be active observers, for the reasons so often explained: their difficulty in remaining neutral in relation to military personnel and situations. Also, we were aware of the disempowerment faced by women in mixed organizations.” As the activists see it, establishing an organization for women only and operating therein constitute a source of empowerment, enabling these women/witnesses to present events in public that mixed organizations dominated by men (in particular Israel’s mainstream media institutions) usually conceal.

Another resource relates to the rules determined by the Israeli parliament, according to which only Israelis are granted (nearly) free access to military checkpoints. As Israeli citizens, MW members can travel freely in the Occupied Territories, observe realities at the checkpoints, and later bear witness to these observed events via their website. They note in *About Us*:

Legal advice assured us (and it’s worth remembering) that the army has no right to prevent *citizens* from being present in the area of the checkpoint (*italics mine*).

Women of MW possess yet another significant resource by virtue of their Israeli citizenship: Their reports are not censored and may thus be disseminated in the public domain, in this case at the website designed for this task. This crucial resource is buttressed by their writing skills—another important resource they manifest. Most MW members are highly educated and can write eloquent, articulate, and seemingly persuasive reports in both English and Hebrew.

Building on Giddens (1984) and on Orlikowski’s (2000) model, I proceed to examine the facilities inherent in the Internet that render this digital platform suitable for promoting and nourishing the goals of the group’s members. In *About Us*, MW activists summarize their objectives:

Machsom Watch is a movement of Israeli women, peace activists from all sectors of Israeli society, who oppose the Israeli occupation and the denial of

Palestinians' rights to move freely in their land. Since 2001, we have conducted daily observations of IDF checkpoints in the West Bank, along the separation fence and in the seamline zone, on the main roads and on out-of-the-way dirt roads [. . .]. We regularly document what we see and hear. The reports of these observations are published on the Machsom Watch site [. . .].

This statement renders it apparent that the group's aim is to gather information about incidents of wrongdoing and distress that its members themselves witnessed and to disseminate information about the suffering caused to Palestinians—through and at their website—to the public responsible (directly or indirectly) for it. By taking this act of witnessing upon themselves, the women of MW serve a dual function: Protecting the rights of the Palestinians and intensifying awareness among the Israeli public. Their website describes their core activities as follows:

We find ourselves living in a time when alienation, blindness, silencing, racism and militarism spread like an epidemic. Israel's political leadership blows up existential fears to consolidate its rule using constant intimidation. This is how delegitimizing the other becomes a norm, as law and justice are trampled underfoot and democracy suffers [. . .]. We are *eyewitnesses* to more victims of the Occupation—Israeli soldiers, our sons and daughters who are forced to act in inhuman situations and might pay a steep price of psychological damage. All of these have a destructive influence upon Israeli society at large, which is becoming increasingly violent. We have taken it upon ourselves to illuminate these dark places with our civil eye and inscribe the writing on the wall (*italics mine*).

And indeed, in their website members of MW reported on clashes at the checkpoints that were ignored (in many cases) by journalists operating in mainstream media institutions such as the press and television. For example, in 2 days selected at random (a detailed discussion is provided in the following pages) 11 reports were posted on MW's website but no reports of such incidents were found in Israel's four main newspapers (*Israel Hayum*, *Ma'Ariv*, *Yediot A'charonot*, and *Ha'aretz*). Nor were they found in the news bulletins broadcast in the country's most-watched television networks (Channel One, Channel Two, and Channel Ten).

The Internet's unique features facilitate this task. First, unlike professional journalists, the agents who use the Internet to store and disseminate reports of events they experienced firsthand are not required to have any professional training; distribution of content online requires only minimal skills and the market entry cost is low compared to that of other media. The upshot is that individuals can distribute content directly to their audiences, with no professional mediation, while avoiding any dependence on an organizational hierarchy or the financial interests of official organizations and media moguls (Dahlberg, 2007; Downey & Fenton, 2003; Kahn & Kellner, 2005). In this case, the Internet allows MW members to voice controversial opinions publicly that challenge conformist ideologies and to advocate their views despite their marginalization.

Furthermore, as a low-cost, nonbounded media device, the Internet enables each member to post her unique testimony regarding the reality she observed at the checkpoints, using her own style and language. This facility is crucial because in the act of bearing witness to wrongdoing and suffering, MW members are not out to expose an objective truth (i.e., to embrace the journalism ethos of objectivity) but rather to present a personal experience publicly, that is, to expose a personal truth about the harsh realities in which each of them partakes (Ashuri & Wiesslit, 2011). In *About Us*, the activists underscore this feature by flagging the members' presence in time and space in the occurrences reported:

Each checkpoint team visits a number of checkpoints, remaining at each one as long as necessary to understand and report on what is happening—usually a couple of hours or longer.

The reports they post indeed reflect these objectives, as in the following example:

Qalandiya Checkpoint, Wednesday, May 4, 2011 Afternoon

Observers: Ruthi B., Hanna T. (reporting):

And finally, as always, a small test case proves everything. A group of secular students, boys and girls together, passes through. We are right behind them, and while in the check lane having our documents inspected thoroughly, it becomes clear that one of the young women has been delayed 15 minutes in the internal room. She is “released” and emerges with us. Almost in tears. The delay, the fear, the humiliation.

In the above citation, the checkpoint's location and time of observation are listed in the headline, at least one photograph is included, and the observer's first name and initial of surname are provided. But most importantly, the text is written in first-person mode, with emphasis on the witness's own deeds and experience. These choices made by MW members are significant, as they emphasize the personal and intimate element inherent in the online activity these agents took upon themselves, as in the following example:

Date: 20 March, 2011, Morning

Observers: Ruthie T., Hasidah S. (reporting)

Jalama Checkpoint 08:30–09:00

At Jalama, the curfew is in effect. No one can enter Israel. We came to get Aya and her mother but we weren't allowed to cross. It turned out they had a permit that expired yesterday, and the new permit is valid starting tomorrow (!). Aya, who's four years old, goes to Rambam hospital 4–5 times a week for dialysis, and they know her at the checkpoint. But the computer says she doesn't have a permit. We got angry. Yuval Roth (director of the organization Baderekh LeHakhlama, which transports Palestinian patients to Israeli hospitals) called the

DCO, Ruthie called the DCO—they'll look into it. Nissim, in charge of the checkpoint's operation, also called the DCO. Aya and her mother received a temporary, one-time permit on the spot, and we took them to Rambam hospital.

The Internet, unlike a television program or newspaper article, is a nonbounded space, rendering it a natural environment for individual stories regarding personal deeds of varying style, language, length, etc. It welcomes detailed and extended representations of personal accounts, impressions, and analyses, as well as brief and concise ones—the sort of representations that underlie the journalistic activity of the group under investigation.

The Internet facilitates the advancement of yet another significant requirement. It enables MW members to control (and by implication to limit) the reciprocal characteristics of the digital platform they use. Thus, while each member can store her reports on the website and disseminate them among mass audiences, members of the public who are ineligible for membership (men or women soldiers, for example) are disinclined to respond regarding the events presented. This creates a situation in which eyewitnesses to events at the checkpoints who cannot join the organization pose no opposition to the views MW members voice in the (virtual) domain they established.

Significantly, the MW website enables Internet users to access reports in three ways—by subject, timeline, and/or location (checkpoint), thereby employing a crucial component of the Internet, namely, its asynchronous character. Unlike mainstream media (such as television and newspapers) that provide linear (and therefore sequential) reports, websites constitute nonlinear, timeless archives. As such, users may be exposed to both new and older reports at any given moment. In other words, the archival (nonlinear) nature of the Internet facilitates representation of a routine experience of suffering. This element is important because, unlike journalists operating in mainstream news organizations that tend to favor new and exceptional events, MW members seek to highlight the repetitious and mundane nature of suffering at the checkpoints, as *Spotlight* notes:

Through the documentation which discloses the nature of *everyday* reality, we are attempting to influence public opinion in the country and in the world, and thus to bring to an end the destructive occupation, which causes damage to Israeli society as well as to Palestinian society (*italics mine*).

Finally, unlike traditional media, typified by linear representation of symbolic content, the Internet allows for nonlinear content consumption. This unique feature fosters a more active consumption experience in which the consumer of information also functions as its editor and as such, as its distributor (users may navigate among the different witnessing texts, download them, compile them, and disseminate them to others). This results in a sort of partnership in the creation of online content and promotes MW's goal of having its audience share in the experience of and responsibility for the wrongdoing and suffering described in the information its

members have gathered and posted. MW members are motivated to publicize a marginalized reality of suffering and pain, hoping that the public they address will assume responsibility, leading to a broader public response that will bring about palpable change (Ullman, 2006), as the *Spotlight* section of their website emphasizes:

Machsom Watch, a movement of women volunteers, has raised a voice in Israeli discourse, a voice protesting against Occupation and opposing it in a struggle for human rights.

This hope that a community will someday emerge, hear the testimony, react to the reality, and even change it guides MW members and lies at the core of their online activity.

### Norms and interpretative scheme

In her practice lens model for studying technology in organizations, Wanda Orlikowski refers to the following elements, derived from Giddens' categorizations:

[H]uman agents built into technology certain *interpretive schemes* (rules reflecting knowledge of the work being automated), certain *facilities* (resources to accomplish that work) and certain *norms* (rules that define the organizationally sanctioned way of executing that work) (Orlikowski, 1992, p. 410, italics mine).

Building on Orlikowski's model, I show that in their enactment with the relevant technology, MW members draw on a set of norms concerning the technological means at hand that are manifested in their online activity and reflected in the interpretative scheme (Orlikowski, 2000) they generate. The following analysis addresses the above-outlined dimensions in assessing the media's power to construct social reality: Framing, ordering, naming allocating, and timing (Ashuri, 2011; Couldry, 2000).

The elementary norm on which MW members draw is *framing*. They consider it a moral duty to render an immoral reality visible in the media frame. The organization's website declares:

There's an occupation out there, it is vicious and immoral and we need to be clearly on the side of opposition with no holds barred.

Indeed, MW members commit themselves to what they perceive as a moral act by publishing information on the suffering that Israeli soldiers inflict on Palestinians at the checkpoints, thereby exposing the Palestinians' private experiences that cry out, in their view, for public awareness.

MW members apply the *ordering* norm as well, perceiving their website as a space that enables individuals who—like them—are situated outside established news organizations to enter the journalistic arena, as it were, by disseminating knowledge in the public domain about events they observe firsthand, as explained in *About Us*:

Each team summarizes observations made during the shift [at the checkpoint] into a report which is sent to the website forthwith, in both Hebrew and English.

The website on which their reports on observed realities are posted allows MW members to challenge the prevailing division of labor, according to which journalists in established news organizations report on events they observed while the absent audiences merely consume the disseminated texts. MW's online activities thus help destabilize the boundaries between the media people (in this case professional journalists) present at the scene of a given event and the "ordinary" people who are absent from it.

Ordering is linked directly with *naming*. MW members consider their website an empowering tool because it facilitates dissemination of their reports to mass audiences, thereby undermining the existing state of affairs in which professional journalists benefit from exclusive access to social facts (Couldry, 2000), either by presence at the place they occur or by contacting official sources (the IDF spokesperson's office, for example). By being present on location, observing social realities and reporting on them in and through digital networked technologies, MW activists undermine the authority of established news organizations as a principal source of social facts.

The last element, *timing*, is based on a perceived norm stipulating that news organizations define the relevancy of a specific social fact by locating it on a timeline. New events represented in established newspapers and broadcast news bulletins are those that either took place recently or were considered new by the journalists/editors reporting them.

In their enactments with the online platform, MW members challenge this norm by posting information regarding new and old events simultaneously on their website. Their ability to provide constant reports of harsh events and the public's ability to consume the accumulated reports at all times enable both sides to challenge the power of professional journalists to define the temporal relevancy of occurrences presented in the public domain.

### **Sustaining/challenging social structures**

Below, I reveal that while undermining the exclusive role that mainstream news organizations play in constructing public visibility of social reality, MW members simultaneously sustain structures that limit their mediation of marginalized experiences of suffering.

By posting their own reports on events they witnessed firsthand at their website, MW activists challenge the structures associated with the modern era, according to which only a select few professionals in mainstream news organizations construct and sustain the *frames* in which experiences of the social occur. Nevertheless, by dedicating their online activity to the publication of journalistic reports, they reinforce the fundamental boundary between public and private realities, wherein the latter, defined by those operating in the media, are placed outside media frames and hence achieve no visibility and remain as if they had never occurred. This phenomenon becomes even more prominent in the group's decision to post news

reports produced solely by mainstream media organizations—notably press and television bulletins—at their website, alongside their own testimony.

Furthermore, although they expose marginalized realities of evil and suffering, MW members do not challenge the basic conception of *naming*, according to which media organizations function as a principal source of social facts. In spite of their attempts to contest the exclusivity of professional journalists by facilitating public visibility of neglected social reality, in effect they sustain the symbolic hierarchy between media personnel (themselves included) who mediate social facts and “ordinary people” who do not: At their website, they insist on presenting facts, thereby maintaining structures associated with modern journalism, according to which the journalist’s principal professional function is to disseminate evidence rather than personal experiences (Schudson, 1978, 2001), as stated in *About Us*: “We regularly document what we see and hear.” MW activists embrace this journalistic ethos even though they act within a digital nonbounded platform that tolerates and even demands presentation of a personal story that comprises private experiences and sentiments (Pickerill, 2004).

By constructing a media frame in which a marginalized reality of suffering is presented, the activists also obscure the boundaries between professional journalists operating in the seemingly glamorous media world and ordinary people located outside this world. By posting their reports on the harsh realities they observed, however, the activists maintain this structural rift by excluding the Palestinians (the victims) from the media world they establish. Like professional journalists, they too maintain boundaries between themselves and individuals whom the media represent but deny self-representation in the media frame. Significantly, the MW website emphasizes that the activists, like professional journalists, disseminate reports based on firsthand knowledge. Nevertheless, they exclude the testimonies of the Palestinians who endure the mental and physical pain reported from the frame they create. The activists thus accept the customary assumption that the experiences of the represented victims will gain credibility and authority only if mediated by journalists who have not undergone those experiences—in this case, the activists themselves.

As discussed above, MW members maintain daily presence at military checkpoints at which the reported immoral acts occur. By grounding their online journalistic activity in firsthand observation, they undermine the traditional power structure of *allocation*, according to which professional witnessing agents are present at the place where a certain event occurs and consequently act as the sole mediators of knowledge regarding it. In opting for on-location observation, the activists also undermine the exclusive position of official sources in attaining access to the locations in which events occurred and reporting them to professional journalists. By their actions, however, MW members sustain the traditional conception of the allocation dimension by preserving the symbolic boundary that they and the mainstream media create between the place from which evidence is collected and the places in which it is consumed. Like professional journalists, MW activists produce symbolic content at a website perused in the environments of their audiences, thus preserving the



symbolic border between the exciting “media world”—in which events that matter occur—and the tedious world of ordinary people where “nothing happens.” It is precisely by insisting on reporting on events from the places they occur—an activity that ostensibly challenges the exclusive role of professional journalists—that the women of MW strengthen the conservative conception according to which “slices of reality” appearing in media frames are collected from the places where they occurred and from which ordinary people (the audiences) are absent.

This symbolic rift is further reinforced because MW members, whose activities underscore the significance of being present at events, eliminate the testimonies of “others” (soldiers, for example)—who also witnessed the events reported first-hand—from the media space they establish. The activists thus sustain the existing division wherein mediators of social reality are located at the places events occur but do not play an active part in the occurrences they observe.

## Conclusions

In adapting Anthony Giddens’ (1984) Structuration Theory to research on use of networked digital technologies, I attempted to show how individual enactments with these devices facilitate both the conservation and the diversion of social structures reflected and created in the journalistic environment.

Giddens’ (1984) duality of structure concept proved useful here because this model resolves a fundamental division concerning the classic agent/structure dichotomy. Giddens argued that when human agents carry out their actions, they draw on the existing social structure; human action, however, also simultaneously produces (and reproduces) social structures. Hence the structure, according to Giddens, is both enabling and disabling.

Giddens’ Structuration Theory was adopted by Wanda Orlikowski’s (2000) who framed the role of technology in terms of mutual interaction between human agents and technology, thus declaring it to be structurally and socially constructed. In her practice lens model for studying technology in organization, she underlined the following constituents: (a) technology is affected only by creative human action; (b) technology facilitates (and constrains) certain types of activity; (c) when acting on technology, human agents are influenced by the organizational properties of their settings, relying on existing reservoirs of knowledge, resources, and norms to perform their journalistic work; and (d) when human agents employ technology, their actions impact the institutional properties of their organizations by either reinforcing or transforming them.

Predicting on Orlikowski’s (2000) practice lens model, I focused on the online activities of members of MACHSOM Watch. By opting for an examination of the activists’ activities instead of examining consumption patterns, for example, I showed how their enactment with the technology at hand undermines the structures that reinforce the power of mainstream media organizations to construct public visibility of social reality (Couldry, 2000; Thompson, 1995). By being present at military

checkpoints in the Occupied Territories, observing the events as they occur, writing personal reports, and posting them on their website, members of this organization, through the very act of reporting, expose a marginalized social reality. In testifying to this reality of wrongdoing and agony, the activists challenge exclusion of these experiences and allow their return to the collective consciousness, which in turn makes it possible to change realities.

By applying works on structuration to technology in the journalism environment, I also demonstrated, however, that while drawing public attention to a marginalized reality of suffering and evil, MW members simultaneously support the structures that hinder their activities by legitimizing the conventional practices of mainstream news organizations and naturalizing their representations of evil and suffering.

## Notes

- 1 The term was introduced by Wanda Orlikowski (2000), who intended it in the conventional sense of “constituting, acting, performing” (Oxford English Dictionary).
- 2 The journalist is defined in this essay as a person who collects information firsthand with the aim of presenting it to a public via various technologies, such as print, radio, television, and the Internet. Journalism is thus defined according to the goal of the individual who undertakes it and not according to the medium in which that individual manifests professional affiliation or training. See, for example, Prof. Thomas Goldstein’s declaration of April 8, 2008 before a California court: <http://www.eff.org/cases/apple-v-does/attachments/declaration-professor-thomas-goldstein>
- 3 The various dimensions of the media’s power to construct social reality (Ashuri, 2011; Coudry, 2000) are relevant mainly to Giddens’ and Orlokowski’s conceptions of “norms” and “interpretative scheme” and will thus be presented primarily in the second and third parts of the empirical section.
- 4 The website was accessed between July 2009 and May 2011.
- 5 A few reports (from different checkpoints) are published on the website daily. As a detailed analysis of all reports is beyond the scope of this study, I used reports published on days selected at random.

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## 激进分子的新闻主义：运用数字技术和破坏结构

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### 【摘要：】

本文探讨人们与网络技术的互动如何限制或滋生有利于公众知识和经验的社会结构的出现。本文运用了 Giddens ( 1984 ) 的结构理论，并将其视角向技术的角度扩展 ( Orlikowski , 2000 ) , 本文力图研究主流新闻机构以外的人员参与网络技术时是如何中和传媒机构以建构社会现实的 , 以及他们的行动如何产生新的社会结构( Couldry , 2000 ) 。这项研究基于对 Machsom Watch 组织成员网上活动的分析，该组织是一个监察巴勒斯坦人在以色列军队设立的检查站的人权的妇女组织。

## Le journalisme activiste : l'utilisation des technologies numériques et l'ébranlement des structures

Tamar Ashuri

Cet article explore les manières dont les interactions entre les humains et les technologies en réseau facilitent et restreignent l'émergence de structures sociales alimentant les connaissances et l'expérience publiques. Grâce à l'adaptation de la théorie de la structuration de Giddens (1984) et à l'extension de cette perspective à la technologie (Orlikowski, 2000), l'étude examine la manière par laquelle l'investissement auprès des technologies en réseau par des gens en-dehors des principales organisations médiatiques reproduit les structures qui neutralisent la capacité des institutions médiatiques à construire la réalité sociale, de même que la manière par laquelle leurs actions produisent simultanément de nouvelles structures sociales (Couldry, 2000). L'étude est fondée sur l'analyse des activités en ligne de membres de Machsom Watch – une organisation de femmes qui surveille les droits humains des Palestiniens aux postes de contrôle de l'armée israélienne.

## **Aktivisten-Journalismus: Die Nutzung digitaler Technologien zur Untergrabung von Strukturen**

Dieser Artikel untersucht, wie menschliche Interaktionen mit Netzwerktechnologien die Herausbildung sozialer Strukturen, die öffentliches Wissen und Erfahrung nähren, fördert und einschränkt. Wir adaptieren Giddens (1984) Strukturationstheorie und erweitern diese um eine Technologieperspektive (Orlikowski, 2000), um die Art und Weise zu untersuchen, mit der die Einbindung von Netzwerktechnologien durch Personen außerhalb der Mainstream-Nachrichtenorganisationen Strukturen reproduziert, die die Macht der Medieninstitutionen eine soziale Realität zu konstruieren, neutralisiert. Außerdem betrachten wir, auf welche Art und Weise ihre Handlungen gleichzeitig neue soziale Strukturen (Couldry, 2000) produzieren. Die Studie basiert auf einer Analyse der Online-Aktivitäten von Mitgliedern der MACHSOM WATCH, einer Organisation von Frauen, die die Menschenrechte von Palästinensern an Grenzübergängen der israelischen Armee überwacht.



Mediando el Multiculturalismo: La Representación de los Musulmanes Británicos en los Medios Estadounidenses, 1997 – 2009

Resumen

Este ensayo considera la integración de los Musulmanes en la sociedad Británica desde la perspectiva de los medios Estadounidenses. Presenta un asesoramiento longitudinal de la cobertura de los medios impresos acerca de la integración de los Musulmanes en la sociedad Británica. Es aparente que los medios de los EE.U.U. revisan las políticas multiculturales Británicas a través de una ideología hegemónica de integración en la cual la asimilación es juzgada como superior a la multiculturalidad. Los casos, que son tomados de tres períodos (1997–2001, 2001–2005, y 2005–2009), demostrarán una evolución de la cobertura de los medios Estadounidenses en la fisonomía cambiante internacional y domestica de las percepciones del Islam y la integración de los Musulmanes.

## Activist Journalism: Using Digital Technologies and Undermining Structures

### 아티스트 저널리즘: 디지털 기술의 사용과 구조의 경시화

Tamar Ashuri

#### 요약

본 연구는 네트워크화된 기술들과 인간들의 상호작용이 대중적 지식과 경험에 영양분을 제공하는 사회적 구조들의 출현을 가능하고 하고 제한하는가를 연구하였다. 기든스 (1994)의 구조주의 이론과 이의 개념을 기술에 확대 (W. J. Orlikowski, 2000)하는 것에 의해, 본 연구는 주요뉴스 조직들 이외에 위치해 있는 사람들에 의한 네트워크화된 기술에의 참여가 사회적 사실성을 만들어내는 미디어 기관들의 파워를 중성화시키는 구조들을 만들어내는 것과 그들의 행위들이 동시에 새로운 사회적 구조들을 만들어내는 방법들을 연구하였다 (N. Couldry, 2000). 본 연구는 이스라엘 군대에 의해 체크포인트에서 팔레스타인들의 인권을 모니터하는 것에 의해 유발되는 고통을 이야기하고자 하는 여성집단인 Machsom Watch 의 온라인 행위자들을 대상으로 한 분석이다. 그룹 집단들은 체크포인트에서 날마다 나타나는 사건들을 기록하고 그들의 리포트를 웹사이트를 통해 보고하고 있다.