

(IN)FORMING CONFLICT PREVENTION,
RESPONSE AND RESOLUTION:



THE ROLE OF MEDIA
IN VIOLENT CONFLICT

INFOCORE Definitions

“Source/Advocate”

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Definition: “Source/Advocate”

The term ‘source/advocate’ describes two roles an informing/speaking actor can hold in the public sphere during the process of content production for the news media, social media and semi-public intelligence/expert analysis:

(1) A ‘source’ tends to be relatively passive, and can be connected to **pull**-communication. This means that the journalist actively approaches a source in order to receive information. Additionally, a source is someone whose frames and agendas (if existing) are brought into a public debate by someone other than themselves (e.g. journalists) in pursuit of their own agenda. An example for a source is an individual eyewitness that is interviewed about an event that occurred.

(2) An advocate can be seen as a pro-actively communicating person which is interested in the publication of his/her provided information/spoken word and who actively tries to get heard (via professional PR or through organizing pseudo-events for example). (S)He represents **push**-communication. (S)He sends out her/his message without being asked for it beforehand. An advocate always has a clear agenda that can be identified within his/her statement. (S)he actively brings frames and agendas into the public debate and, thus, into a public sphere, in a pursuit of a discernable agenda for action. As a result, an advocate uses professional communication techniques “to transform social power into political muscle” (Habermas, 2006: 419). An example for an advocate is a politician, handing out his interpretation of that event as a press release or during a press conference. Another example is an official representative of an NGO holding a speech during an organized event.

Consequently:

- a) One can be a source and advocate at the same time, because his/her status is relative to a public sphere. While one can, for example, actively advocate an agenda in the online public sphere, one can simultaneously function as a source for offline media coverage that follows the journalist’s own agenda.
- b) Hence, publishing messages on the internet makes you an advocate as far as the online public sphere is concerned, but if someone links that material online or uses it for an offline purpose, you are also a source for that advocate’s communication.
- c) You are not an advocate if you do not insert your texts yourself into a sphere of debate, or if you do so without a discernable agenda (e.g., a statistics office publishing routine data normally does so without following political agenda). One cannot be considered an advocate, if (s)he does not have a discernable agenda. In this case the person can still be a source, when quoted for someone else’s agenda. Finally, someone who is never cited/linked to/imported into public by a third person cannot be a source, but may still be an advocate.

The concept of ‘advocate’ is much more close to the concept of advocacy/PR/strategic communication than the concept of ‘source’. An advocate (in the sense of an **interceder or proponent**) ‘pleads’ and/or ‘campaigns’ or ‘indorses’ (for) something while a ‘source’ behaves more fact oriented and acts or is used (by journalists) more as a **reference**. Nevertheless it is important to point out that neither a source nor an advocate behaves unbiased or neutral. The most important difference between both roles concerns the initiative. A source is being approached by the journalist, who chooses which questions to ask and hence determines the agenda of the interview. An advocate, on the other hand, approaches the journalists on his/her own initiative. This means that the advocate determines the questions (s)he is answering and hence also sets the agenda and frames his statements. As a result, an advocate is an actor **processing** and articulating specific information for the media, while a source is an actor

providing information for the media or others in public discourse. However, the problem with this is that the researcher will not always be able to gather enough information in the news coverage on the actual initiative (journalist or advocate).

It is also important to point out that there might be a difference between the role an actor sees himself/herself in, and the role (s)he actually performs during the news production process. This differentiation leads to differing perspectives of 'source/advocate' between the WPs of the interviewing group and the WPs of the content analysis group. The former represent a role oriented perspective that grasps how an actor sees himself or how others interpret an actor's role and assigns the role of source/advocate accordingly. The latter, on the other hand, are more content and agenda oriented, analyze whose agendas/frames enters the news discourse and who is (only) used as a simple source for (simple) facts and date (incl. 'vox pop'), thus, assigns the roles.

The concept of 'source/advocate' mostly concerns five of our WPs:

WP1 focuses on journalists and their contact with sources and advocates

WP2 focuses on political actors and officials in their double role as sources/advocates and audiences/users.

WP4 focuses on the critical role of NGOs as news sources/mediators and actors in media assistance.

WP6 analyzes the information provided by sources/eyewitnesses or advocated by strategic communicators.

WP6 & 7 analyzes the transformation of information offered by sources and advocates into media content.

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