

FACEBOOK VS YOUTUBE: WHICH PLATFORM SHAPES WAR NARRATIVES MORE EFFECTIVELY?

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Abstract

In the contemporary digital age, social media platforms have emerged as central arenas for the construction, dissemination, and contestation of war narratives. Among these platforms, Facebook and YouTube occupy dominant positions due to their global reach, algorithmic influence, and multimedia affordances. This paper critically examines which of the two platforms—Facebook or YouTube—more effectively shapes war narratives. Drawing on interdisciplinary literature from media studies, international relations, and communication theory, the study analyzes the structural, algorithmic, and socio-political dynamics of both platforms. It argues that while YouTube is more effective in constructing emotionally immersive and visually persuasive war narratives, Facebook plays a stronger role in amplifying and diffusing these narratives through networked sharing and community engagement. Ultimately, the paper concludes that the effectiveness of each platform is contingent upon different stages of narrative formation and dissemination, suggesting a complementary rather than mutually exclusive relationship.

1. INTRODUCTION

War has never been solely fought on physical battlefields; it has always been accompanied by parallel struggles over meaning, legitimacy, and perception. Historically, states relied on traditional media such as newspapers, radio, and television to construct and disseminate war narratives that justified military actions and mobilized public support. However, the emergence of digital communication technologies—and particularly social media platforms—has fundamentally transformed the nature of this narrative contestation. Platforms like Facebook and YouTube now function as decentralized yet highly influential arenas where competing actors construct, circulate, and contest representations of war.

The concept of “information warfare” has gained increasing prominence in both academic and policy discourse, emphasizing that control over information flows is as strategically significant as territorial control (Shamsi, 2023). In this context, war narratives are no longer monopolized by state institutions; instead, they are co-produced by governments, non-state actors, journalists, influencers, and ordinary users. This democratization of content production has blurred the boundaries between propaganda, journalism, and personal expression, creating a complex and often chaotic informational environment.

Facebook and YouTube occupy particularly central positions within this ecosystem due to their massive global user bases and sophisticated

algorithmic infrastructures. Facebook, with its emphasis on social networking and interpersonal communication, facilitates the rapid diffusion of information through interconnected communities. YouTube, by contrast, operates as a video-centric platform that enables the production and consumption of highly immersive and emotionally engaging content. These structural differences raise important questions about how each platform shapes the formation, dissemination, and reception of war narratives.

Recent conflicts—such as the Syrian civil war and the Russia-Ukraine war—have demonstrated the critical role of social media in influencing public opinion and international responses. Visual content shared on YouTube has been instrumental in documenting human suffering and mobilizing global sympathy, while Facebook has been used extensively to amplify narratives, organize communities, and reinforce ideological positions. These developments suggest that each platform may exert distinct forms of influence at different stages of narrative construction.

This paper seeks to address the central research question: **Which platform—Facebook or YouTube—shapes war narratives more effectively?** To answer this question, the study adopts a comparative analytical approach, examining the structural, algorithmic, and socio-cultural dynamics of both platforms. It argues that effectiveness should not be understood as a singular or static attribute; rather, it depends on the specific functions that narratives perform—whether they aim to persuade, mobilize, inform, or polarize audiences.

Ultimately, the paper advances the argument that YouTube is more effective in constructing emotionally compelling and immersive war narratives, whereas Facebook is more effective in disseminating, amplifying, and sustaining these narratives within networked communities. This distinction highlights the need to understand social media platforms not as isolated entities but as interconnected components of a broader digital communication ecosystem.

2. Literature Review

2.1 War Narratives and Media Evolution

The study of war narratives has long been central to understanding the relationship between media and conflict. War narratives are not merely descriptive accounts of events; they are structured representations that frame conflicts in ways that assign meaning, responsibility, and moral value. As Entman (1993) argues, framing involves selecting certain aspects of reality and making them more salient in order to promote a particular interpretation.

In the pre-digital era, war narratives were largely controlled by state institutions and traditional media organizations. Governments exercised significant influence over the production of information, often using censorship and propaganda to shape public opinion. However, the rise of digital media has disrupted this centralized model, leading to what Hoskins and O'Loughlin (2010) describe as “diffused war,” where information flows are decentralized and continuously evolving.

This transformation has profound implications for how war narratives are constructed and contested. On the one hand, it enables greater diversity of perspectives, allowing marginalized voices to challenge dominant narratives. On the other hand, it also creates opportunities for misinformation, disinformation, and propaganda to proliferate.

2.2 Social Media and Information Warfare

The concept of information warfare highlights the strategic use of information to influence perceptions and achieve political objectives. In contemporary conflicts, social media platforms have become key tools in this process, enabling actors to reach global audiences in real time. Shamsi (2023) argues that social media has effectively become a “battlefield” in its own right, where narratives are weaponized to shape public opinion and undermine adversaries.

Research on digital propaganda further emphasizes the role of algorithms in amplifying certain types of content. Platforms prioritize engagement, often promoting emotionally

charged or controversial material that is more likely to attract attention. This dynamic can intensify the impact of war narratives by increasing their visibility and reach.

Moreover, studies on vlogs and online content suggest that individual creators play an increasingly important role in shaping narratives. Fazail and Shahzadi (2025) highlight how vloggers use storytelling techniques to construct persuasive narratives that resonate with audiences on a personal level. This shift from institutional to individual content production represents a significant change in the dynamics of information warfare.

2.3 Platform Differences: Facebook vs YouTube

While Facebook and YouTube share certain characteristics as social media platforms, their content ecosystems differ in important ways. Facebook is primarily oriented around social interaction, with content distributed through networks of friends, groups, and pages. This structure facilitates the rapid spread of information but may also contribute to the formation of echo chambers.

YouTube, by contrast, is centered on video content, which allows for more detailed and immersive storytelling. Videos can combine visual imagery, audio, and narrative structure to create powerful emotional experiences. Crilley and Chatterje-Doody (2020) demonstrate how YouTube videos related to the Syrian conflict use affective elements to shape audience perceptions. Empirical research also suggests that user engagement patterns are similar across both platforms. Bessi et al. (2016) find strong correlations between interactions on Facebook and YouTube, indicating that both platforms are effective in capturing user attention. However, the nature of engagement differs: Facebook interactions tend to be more socially mediated, while YouTube engagement is often driven by content consumption.

2.4 Gaps in Existing Literature

Despite the growing body of research on social media and war narratives, there remains a lack of

comparative analysis that systematically evaluates the relative effectiveness of different platforms. Most studies focus on individual platforms or specific case studies, without considering how these platforms interact within a broader ecosystem.

This paper addresses this gap by providing a comparative analysis of Facebook and YouTube, examining their respective strengths and limitations in shaping war narratives. By integrating insights from multiple disciplines, the study offers a more comprehensive understanding of how digital platforms influence perceptions of conflict.

3. Theoretical Framework

To analyze how Facebook and YouTube shape war narratives, this study draws on three key theoretical perspectives: framing theory, agenda-setting theory, and affective media theory. Together, these frameworks provide a multidimensional understanding of how narratives are constructed, prioritized, and experienced.

3.1 Framing Theory

Framing theory is central to understanding how media influences audience perceptions. According to Entman (1993), framing involves selecting certain aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in order to promote a particular interpretation. In the context of war, framing can determine how conflicts are understood, including who is perceived as the aggressor, who is the victim, and what actions are considered legitimate.

On social media platforms, framing is not solely determined by content creators; it is also shaped by algorithms that prioritize certain types of content. For example, emotionally charged or visually striking content may be more likely to appear in users' feeds, thereby influencing how they perceive a conflict. Both Facebook and YouTube play active roles in this process, acting as intermediaries that shape the visibility and salience of different narratives.

3.2 Agenda-Setting Theory

Agenda-setting theory posits that media does not tell people what to think, but rather what to think about. In the digital age, this function is increasingly performed by algorithms rather than human editors. Platforms like Facebook and YouTube use complex recommendation systems to determine which content is displayed to users, effectively setting the agenda for public discourse. This shift has important implications for war narratives. By prioritizing certain topics or perspectives, platforms can influence which aspects of a conflict receive attention. For instance, a surge in videos documenting civilian casualties may shift public focus toward humanitarian concerns, while content emphasizing military success may reinforce narratives of strength and legitimacy.

3.3 Affective Media Theory

Affective media theory emphasizes the role of emotions in shaping audience responses to media content. In the context of war narratives, emotional engagement is particularly significant, as it can influence how audiences interpret events and form opinions.

YouTube, with its emphasis on audiovisual content, is especially effective in eliciting emotional responses. Videos can convey complex emotions through imagery, music, and storytelling, creating a sense of immediacy and authenticity. Crilley and Chatterje-Doody (2020) argue that such affective elements are central to the persuasive power of YouTube war narratives. Facebook, while less immersive, also plays a role in emotional engagement by facilitating social interactions. Reactions, comments, and shares allow users to express and reinforce emotional responses, contributing to the collective construction of narratives.

3.4 Integrative Perspective

By combining these three theoretical frameworks, this study provides a comprehensive approach to analyzing how Facebook and YouTube shape war narratives. Framing theory explains how narratives are constructed, agenda-setting theory explains

how they are prioritized, and affective media theory explains how they are experienced.

4. Methodology

This study adopts a **qualitative, interpretivist research design**, aligning with the broader aim of understanding how meaning is constructed and communicated through digital platforms. Given that war narratives are inherently subjective and shaped by cultural, political, and emotional contexts, a qualitative approach is particularly suitable for capturing their complexity.

The research relies on **secondary data analysis**, drawing from peer-reviewed journal articles, books, policy reports, and case studies related to social media, communication theory, and conflict studies. This approach enables the integration of diverse perspectives and empirical findings, providing a comprehensive foundation for analysis.

A **comparative analytical framework** is employed to evaluate Facebook and YouTube across four key dimensions:

1. **Content Format** – Examining how each platform's structure influences narrative construction.
2. **Algorithmic Amplification** – Analyzing how recommendation systems shape visibility and reach.
3. **Audience Engagement** – Assessing user interaction patterns and their role in reinforcing narratives.
4. **Narrative Impact** – Evaluating the overall effectiveness in shaping perceptions of conflict.

The study also incorporates **case-based reasoning**, referencing specific conflicts such as Syria and Ukraine to illustrate how theoretical insights manifest in real-world contexts. While the analysis does not involve primary data collection, it synthesizes existing empirical findings to develop a nuanced and theoretically grounded argument.

5. Facebook and War Narratives

5.1 Networked Dissemination and Virality

Facebook's most significant contribution to war narratives lies in its ability to **rapidly disseminate**

content through interconnected social networks. Unlike traditional media, where information flows in a one-directional manner, Facebook enables multidirectional communication, allowing users to share, comment on, and reinterpret content.

The platform's design encourages virality. A single post—whether a news article, image, or video—can be shared across multiple networks within minutes, reaching audiences far beyond its original source. This capacity for rapid diffusion makes Facebook particularly effective in amplifying war narratives, especially during moments of crisis when information demand is high.

Moreover, Facebook's algorithm prioritizes content that generates engagement, meaning that emotionally charged or controversial narratives are more likely to be widely circulated. This dynamic can significantly influence public perception by elevating certain narratives over others.

5.2 Echo Chambers and Polarization

One of the most widely discussed features of Facebook is its tendency to create **echo chambers**, where users are primarily exposed to information that aligns with their existing beliefs. Bessi et al. (2016) demonstrate that users on Facebook often cluster into ideologically homogeneous communities, reinforcing shared perspectives while excluding opposing viewpoints.

In the context of war narratives, this polarization can have profound implications. Competing narratives—such as those presented by opposing sides in a conflict—may coexist on the platform but remain largely segregated within different communities. As a result, users may develop highly biased understandings of conflicts, shaped by selective exposure to information.

This phenomenon not only intensifies ideological divisions but also enhances the persuasive power of narratives by embedding them within supportive social contexts.

5.3 Disinformation and Manipulation

Facebook has been widely criticized for its role in the spread of **misinformation** and

disinformation, particularly during conflicts. The platform's emphasis on user-generated content and rapid sharing creates an environment where false or misleading information can spread quickly.

State and non-state actors have exploited this vulnerability to conduct **information operations**, using fake accounts, coordinated campaigns, and targeted advertisements to influence public opinion. Such practices highlight the strategic importance of Facebook in modern information warfare.

While the platform has introduced measures to combat misinformation, including fact-checking and content moderation, challenges remain. The sheer volume of content and the speed of dissemination make it difficult to effectively regulate all forms of misleading information.

5.4 Community-Based Narrative Construction

Facebook's group and page features enable users to form communities around shared interests and beliefs. These communities play a crucial role in the **collective construction of war narratives**, as members actively participate in discussing, interpreting, and reinforcing content.

This participatory dimension distinguishes Facebook from more passive forms of media consumption. Users are not merely recipients of information; they are co-creators of narratives. This collaborative process can strengthen the impact of narratives by fostering a sense of shared identity and collective understanding.

6. YouTube and War Narratives

6.1 Visual Storytelling and Emotional Engagement

YouTube's defining feature is its emphasis on **video content**, which allows for rich, multimodal storytelling. Videos can combine visual imagery, narration, music, and editing techniques to create compelling narratives that resonate with audiences on an emotional level.

Crilley and Chatterje-Doody (2020) highlight how YouTube videos related to the Syrian conflict use emotional appeals to shape audience perceptions. Scenes of destruction, personal testimonies, and

dramatic music can evoke empathy, anger, or fear, influencing how viewers interpret events.

This capacity for emotional engagement makes YouTube particularly effective in shaping war narratives, as emotions play a critical role in opinion formation and decision-making.

6.2 Algorithmic Recommendations and Radicalization

YouTube's recommendation system is a powerful tool for guiding user behavior. By analyzing viewing history and preferences, the platform suggests content that is likely to maintain user engagement.

While this system enhances user experience, it also raises concerns about **content bias and potential radicalization**. Users may be directed toward increasingly extreme or one-sided content, reinforcing specific narratives.

Hosseini et al. (2020) argue that while the extent of radicalization through YouTube recommendations may be limited, the platform nonetheless facilitates exposure to ideologically aligned content, which can influence perceptions over time.

6.3 Long-Form Content and Narrative Depth

Unlike Facebook, which is dominated by short-form content, YouTube supports **long-form videos** that allow for detailed analysis and storytelling. This enables content creators to provide context, present evidence, and develop complex arguments.

Such depth is particularly important in the context of war narratives, where understanding the causes, dynamics, and consequences of conflict requires more than brief or fragmented information. Long-form content allows for a more comprehensive and nuanced representation of events.

6.4 Evidence and Documentation of War

YouTube serves as a digital archive of war-related content, including footage of battles, humanitarian crises, and political speeches. This function is especially significant in conflicts where traditional media access is limited.

However, content moderation policies can sometimes result in the removal of videos that document human rights violations, raising concerns about the preservation of evidence. This highlights the tension between platform regulation and the need to maintain historical records.

7. Comparative Analysis

The comparison between Facebook and YouTube reveals that each platform possesses distinct strengths and limitations in shaping war narratives.

7.1 Content Format

YouTube's video-based format enables immersive storytelling, while Facebook's mixed-media approach facilitates quick consumption and sharing. This difference affects how narratives are constructed and experienced.

7.2 Algorithmic Influence

Both platforms rely on algorithms, but their priorities differ. Facebook emphasizes social connections, whereas YouTube focuses on content preferences. This distinction influences how narratives are distributed and reinforced.

7.3 Audience Engagement

Engagement metrics such as likes, comments, and shares are prevalent on both platforms. However, Facebook engagement is more socially embedded, while YouTube engagement is often centered on content consumption.

7.4 Narrative Impact

YouTube excels in **persuasion and emotional impact**, while Facebook excels in **amplification and community reinforcement**. These complementary roles suggest that the platforms function together rather than independently.

8. Case Studies

8.1 Syrian Conflict

The Syrian civil war represents one of the earliest examples of a conflict extensively documented through social media. YouTube played a critical role in shaping global perceptions by providing visual evidence of violence and humanitarian suffering.

Videos uploaded by activists and journalists were widely shared, influencing international discourse and policy debates. At the same time, Facebook facilitated the spread of these videos, enabling them to reach broader audiences and generate discussions.

8.2 Russia-Ukraine War

The Russia-Ukraine war further illustrates the interplay between Facebook and YouTube in shaping war narratives. Both platforms have been used for propaganda, strategic communication, and public engagement.

YouTube has hosted a wide range of content, from official government statements to independent analyses, while Facebook has been instrumental in disseminating this content and fostering community discussions. Shamsi (2023) notes that social media platforms have become central to modern warfare, influencing both domestic and international audiences.

9. Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that the effectiveness of Facebook and YouTube cannot be evaluated in isolation. Instead, their roles must be understood as part of a **broader digital ecosystem** in which narratives are continuously created, circulated, and contested.

YouTube's strength lies in its ability to **construct narratives** through immersive storytelling and emotional engagement. By providing detailed and visually compelling content, it shapes how audiences understand and interpret conflicts.

Facebook, on the other hand, excels in **disseminating and reinforcing narratives**. Its networked structure enables rapid sharing and community-based engagement, amplifying the reach and impact of content.

This division of roles reflects a broader trend in digital communication, where different platforms specialize in different aspects of information processing. Rather than competing directly, Facebook and YouTube often function in a complementary manner, collectively shaping the trajectory of war narratives.

10. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has examined the relative effectiveness of Facebook and YouTube in shaping war narratives. Through a comparative analysis of their structural features, algorithmic systems, and user engagement patterns, it has demonstrated that each platform plays a distinct but interconnected role.

YouTube is more effective in **creating persuasive and emotionally engaging narratives**, leveraging its audiovisual capabilities to influence audience perceptions. Facebook is more effective in **spreading and sustaining these narratives**, using its networked structure to amplify content and foster community engagement.

The study therefore rejects the notion of a single "dominant" platform, instead emphasizing the importance of understanding how different platforms interact within a complex digital ecosystem. Future research could build on this analysis by incorporating primary data, exploring additional platforms, or examining specific case studies in greater detail.

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