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New Media and Web 2.0: An Irish Republican Example

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Abstract
The initial development of the Internet and the World Wide Web was based upon the presentation of static information, this only allowed for the access and consumption of that information. The development of Web 2.0 has resulted in a situation where information is displayed in a dynamic manner and allows for interaction between the viewer and the site or application showing this information. The information may no longer just be text based but could be video, audio and information presented in an interactive manner though applications.

The terms terrorist or terrorism are highly emotive terms but the general term, terrorist, is used to denote revolutionaries who seek to use terror systematically to further their views or to govern a particular area. Terrorist organisations are reflective and adoptive, this paper focus on the impact of Web 2.0 and its potential use by terrorist organisations. The paper uses real life case studies to identify the key issues and possible trends.

Introduction
Information access, anytime, anywhere, any place is one of the features of the twenty first century. The widespread global adoption of the Internet and faster Internet access through broadband provides access to business and commerce from a networked desktop computer. The initial focus of the Internet was the distribution of information in a static manner, but over time the Internet has now developed into Web 2.0. The Web is no longer a collection of static pages of information that describe something in the world. Increasingly, the Web is the world where everything and everyone in the world casts an “information shadow,” an aura of data which, when captured and processed intelligently, offers extraordinary opportunity and mind-bending implications (O'Reilly and Battelle, 2009).

The difference between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 is shown in Figure 1. In essence the difference in development and usage relates to the move from static information to dynamic information and this transformation is encapsulated as Web 2.0. A major issue for successful Web 2.0 applications is the involvement of users to add value (Serrano and Torres, 2010). The emergence of Web 2.0 and related Internet sites such as Facebook has had a major impact upon the Internet in recent years. One of the interesting aspects of Facebook is the use of third party applications and the interactions that this allows. This means that individual Facebook pages now act as web pages, blogs, instant messengers, email systems and the use of third party applications allows for real time functionality (DiMicco and Millen, 2007; Shuen, 2008).
The term terrorist or terrorism is a highly emotive term. But the general term, terrorist, is used to denote revolutionaries who seek to use terror systematically to further their views or to govern a particular area (Wilkinson, 1976). Terrorist organisations are reflective and adoptive, this paper focus on the impact of Web 2.0 and its potential usage by terrorist organisations.

The aim of the paper is to assess the research question Are extreme Irish Republican groups are using social networks and if so to what extent. The paper will focus on the actions of the Real IRA / 32-County Sovereignty Movement.

In order to assess this research question, the SNS activity of the Real IRA / 32-County Sovereignty Movement will be examined in two separate years; 2010 and 2012.

The History of Social Networking
Social networking sites (SNS’s) are virtual spaces where people congregate to discuss ideas, share information and communicate (Raacke and Bonds-Raacke, 2008). Social networking sites are being used on a daily basis by millions of users across the globe.

The first accepted SNS was SixDegrees.com, which was launched in 1997 and allowed users to create a profile, list their friends and view their details. It closed as a business in 2000. This may be due to the limited functionality of the early sites or the fact that it was still early in the evolution of the Internet and many people may not have had a large number of friends who were also Internet users to connect with via social networking. In the early part of the millennium a new wave of SNS’s were released which included Ryze, Friendster and LinkedIn. Only LinkedIn achieved a good deal of success. The others (which include many more) failed to achieve mass popularity, this has been in part blamed on the fact that these SNS felt they could support each other and did not need to compete against each other (Boyd and Ellison, 2007; Festa, 2003). This mistake meant that the sites failed to evolve to meet the needs and expectations of users.

From 2003 onwards the SNS, which are still used today, were developed. MySpace in particular picked up many users after the failure of Friendster by encouraging music bands, music promoters and music lovers to join. This niche market allowed MySpace to expand quickly however it may also be a part of the explanation of the popularity of Facebook, which
does not have a music focus. One other notable policy of MySpace was to allow minors to have profiles however this decision also led to a number of legal actions regarding sexual contact between adults and minors (Chang, 2010; Consumer Affairs, 2006).

Facebook was also initially developed for a niche group of users by only allowing users with a .edu email address to register (Dwyer et al, 2007). Its purpose was to allow communication, collaboration and networking amongst US college students. In 2005 other groups were subsequently allowed to join, ending in Face3book being open to anyone with a valid email address. Facebook has travelled a different route to MySpace, as it has not focussed on any particular niche of users (beyond the group on its inception). This, along with its heavy focus on the use of “applications” (such as games, groups, personalisation options etc) has given it mass popularity among a wide demographic. There are still many sites, which bring together users with particular interests and hobbies, however the most successful SNS’s appear to be those that are organised around people rather than their interests. The introduction of web capable mobile devices has also fuelled the increase in popularity such as the uptake of devices such as the iPhone and especially created mobile versions of SNS systems (Banerjee et al, 2009).

The Use of Internet and Cyber Terrorism
Cyber Terrorism is a different form of terrorism since physical systematic terror does not occur (unless, for example, the attack causing a critical system to fail), but systematic wide spread destruction of information resources can occur (Warren, 2008). In the context of the paper, all groups will be defined as terrorist/resistance groups in order to give a neutral perception of their activities/aims.

The reasons why the use of the Internet has become more attractive to terrorist groups are (Warren, 1998; Warren and Purnell, 1999):

- the risk of capture is reduced since attacks can occur remotely;
- it is possible to inflict grave financial damage without any loss to life;
- the expertise for these attacks can be hired;
- a successful attack would result in worldwide publicity and failure would go unnoticed;
- terrorist/resistance groups can attract supporters from all over the world;
- they can use the Internet as a method of generating funds for their cause worldwide;
- the Internet offers the ideal propaganda tool for a terrorist/resistance group, one that operates on a global basis and that individual governments cannot control or censor.

The authors propose that the following characteristics relate to the terrorist/resistance group usage of social networking sites:

- Information from a group can be visible to wide audience, e.g. 500 million people use Facebook. The information on SNS’s is accessible by a mainstream audience;
- SNS’S can be used to link to alternative information sources, e.g. developing a distributed network of information;
- The content is harder to delete and remove, any removed content can quickly be reintroduced;
- SNS’S also provides passive services such as secure communications;
New Media and Web 2.0: An Irish Republican Example

- Government actions such as Internet content control would not be effective, because entire SNS's would have to be blocked.
- Prior research (Weiman, 2006) has shown that terrorist/resistance groups are now using the Internet for many different purposes, but these groups are now learning how to use the technologies of the Internet in order to advance their causes.

In order to describe this development of cyber terrorists, research (Warren, 2008) has developed new criteria, which represented the levels of development for these groups. There are researchers however who believe that the usage of the Internet by terrorist organisations is Hacktivism, which is the political usage of hacking and online activism (Meikle, 2002; McCaughey and Ayers, 2003).

Case study
The following case study is focused around the Real IRA and their use of Web 2.0 applications. Historically, the Irish Republican Army also showed interest in the usage of the Internet and explored ways in which IT based systems could be attacked (Geraghty, 2000).

The Real IRA emerged as one of the groups opposed to the Good Friday agreement. The organisation is reportedly led by the man who resigned as the Provisional IRA's 'quartermaster-general' in October 1997 after he broke with Sinn Fein because of its support for the peace process. The Real IRA is believed to be responsible for a series of large scale attacks, including a 500lb car bomb which devastated the market town of Banbridge, County Armagh in August 1998. The Real IRA also carried out the Omagh bombing on the 15 August 1998 in which 29 people were killed after apparently driving towards the bomb after being given misleading warnings. The 32-County Sovereignty Movement, is a group of dissident republicans, believed to be closely related to the Real IRA (BBC, 2012).

The Real IRA is listed as a terrorist organisation by the USA (US State Department, 2012) and the European Union (European Union, 2009). The IRA is listed as a terrorist organisation by the UK (Home Office, 2010) but the Real IRA is not. Not every country recognises the Real IRA or any Irish groups as terrorist organisations; such is the case with Australia (Australian Government, 2010).

We will look at a number of case studies that relate to the Real IRA / 32-County Sovereignty Movement and their usage of Web 2.0 technologies.

Case Study 1 – YouTube
YouTube is used as source for redistribution of information and videos. In the context of the study the use of YouTube would be used to redistribute politically motivated materials.

2010
There was an official 32 County Sovereignty Movement video channel which is linked from the main 32 County Sovereignty Movement web site. This information channel contains 22 videos, these have been viewed 36,980 times and they have 157 subscribers to their video channel.

But 32-County Sovereignty Movement material, was also being distributed by the Free Derry Media information channel. Free Derry Media (FDM) was formed in early 2006 by activists from the Bogside and Creggan areas in Derry City. The directors of FDM create videos which focus on the Irish Troubles in Derry and elsewhere in Ireland. “Free Derry Media is being set...
up again so people can learn all about Republicanism and what it is about. Hope you like are videos beir bua 32!!!!!!” (Free Derry Media, 2010). The FDM information resource contains 35 videos that are positive towards the Real IRA / 32 County Sovereignty Movement. The videos are politically motivated about the Real IRA and Derry containing political statements, propaganda and videos of Real IRA members in combat situations. In 2010 these videos had been viewed 901,540 times and they had 1033 subscribers to this video resource.

It is interesting that in 2010 an unofficial 32 County Sovereignty Movement YouTube video stream would have a greater impact than the official YouTube stream.

2012
As was the case in 2010, there was still is official 32 County Sovereignty Movement video channel on the YouTube site in 2012. This information channel contains 23 videos, these have been viewed 55,408 times (a 49% increase from 2010) and they have 227 subscribers to their video channel (a 44% increase from 2010).

The Free Derry Media video channel on the YouTube site had been suspended due to multiple or severe violations of YouTube's policy on banning videos that incite violence (Guardian, 2010).

Case Study 2 – Facebook
As mentioned at the start of the paper, Facebook is a social networking group that allows for the exchange of information between interested parties. In this second case study, the use of Facebook by the identified organisations will be examined.

2010
A 32 County Sovereignty Movement group was evident in Facebook (32 Counties Supporters Group) in 2010. This group area allowed for the exchange of information. This exchange of information can be via postings to the general wall, as well as participation in discussion forums. The site also contained other information such as political videos, photos and links to other events (none were listed as of August, 2010). The Facebook group had 647 members as of August, 2010.

One of the problems faced, has been the closure of earlier Facebook groups, e.g. Fermanagh 32CSM Facebook Group by Facebook. The Facebook group had supposedly been used to potential recruit members to the Real IRA and the group was closed down after they were reported to Facebook (Impartial Reporter, 2010). The concerns regarding controls by Facebook being placed upon 32CSM resulted in pro 32CSM Internet based media being distributed (see Figure 2).
2012
In the 2012 study there were no official 32 County Sovereignty Movement Facebook group pages identified. A number of Facebook groups related to particular branches of the organisation were identified:

- Belfast (1324 Facebook friends);
- Tyrone (1336 Facebook friends);
- Scotland (1827 Facebook friends);
- Fermanagh (92 Facebook friends);
- Cavan (454 Facebook Friends);
- Cork (823 Facebook friends);
- South Down (268 Facebook friends).

The type of information shared and disseminated in the 2012 study was similar to that of the 2010 study in terms of information such as political videos, individual comments, photos and links to other events.

*Case Study 3 - Blogs*
Blogs are a way in which individuals can present personal information about themselves, relating to their feelings, hobbies and political views.

2010
The 32 County Sovereignty Movement has used blogs in an extensive way. They are used to report the activities of the different parts of the movement; separate blogs relate to activities in Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland, the United Kingdom and Italy. The particular blogs relate to the following regional areas: Belfast; Britain; Cork; Derry; Dublin; Fermanagh;
Galway; Italy; Kerry; Monaghan; North Armagh; North Kerry; Scotland; Sligo; South Armagh and South Down.

The information contained in these blogs relate to activities taking place in the above areas in terms of news, events and photos of past events.

The authors found no evidence of Micro Blogs (Twitter) being used in 2010.

2012
The blogs identified in 2010 (with the exception of Kerry) was still in existence in 2012. But in many of blogs the last blog posts were in the middle of 2011.

It was identified that 32CSM has set up a twitter account (32cSM) and had two tweets and 26 followers. It was also identified that some branches has also set up Twitter accounts such as the Derry branch and 1 Tweet and 48 followers.

The 2012 review found the limited use of new technologies such as Twitter and diminished use of traditional blogs to actively post information.

Case Study 4 –Web 2.0 Website Content
As described in the introduction, the focus of Web2.0 is the move from static web page content to dynamic web page content.

In terms of this case study, the focus was on the assessment of related web pages and their content.

2010
The 32 Counties Movement web site (http://www.32csm.info) had its own official web site which contained static information (Web 1.0) but did not contain dynamic information (Web 2.0). This content on their website included:

- linking to numerous 32 Counties related blogs;
- links to YouTube Videos via the 32 County Sovereignty Movement Channel;
- embedded YouTube videos into the main site (as shown by Figure 3).
In 2012, the http://www.32csm.info site was not available online. An alternative site http://www.32csm.net was available and this directs to blog style site with static information. This site contained static images, static news items and links to alternative blogs and websites relating to 32csm.

**Discussion**

The aim of the paper was to assess how over time *Irish Republican groups are using social networks and if so to what extent they are being used.* The paper has shown that Irish Republican groups are using social networks but the key issue is to what extent. In terms of the key aspects of the study:

*Case Study 1 – YouTube – 32CSM has over the period of time made use of YouTube. The study showed that between 2010 and 2012 they have made use of YouTube as a method of distributing information to interested parties resulting in tens of thousands of viewings.*

*Case Study 2 – Facebook – The initial 32CSM group was set up in 2010, but encountered ongoing problems with Facebook policies. In 2012, the official 32CSM group page was not in existence but replaced with a number of Facebook groups representing branches. This distributed approach to Facebook means that if one group page is closed, there are alternative pages that can be accessed. This approach has resulted in an increased following on Facebook, from around 600 Facebook friends in 2010 to over 6,000 in 2012 (around a 900% increase).*

*Case Study 3 – Blogging – In 2010 the initial focus of 32CSM was the dissemination of Information via blogs. During the period 2010 – 2012 the same number of blogs were being used but it was noted that the numbers of postings were decreasing. This could be the impact*
of increased popularity of Facebook. Another observation was the first use of Twitter by 32CSM in the 2012 review.

Case Study 4 - Web 2.0 Website Content – During the 2010 review 32CSM had set up a dedicated website, the content of which was mainly based around static information. In 2012, this site did not exist and new 32CSM web-site was actually a blog containing static information and links to other 32CSM resources.

32CSM during the period of the study have experimented with social media. In terms of 2010, they used a blended approach focusing on YouTube, Facebook, blogging and their own website. In 2012, the emphasis was a refocus on YouTube and Facebook, this is reflected by more individuals viewing 32CSM content or being 32CSM friends on Facebook. What is of great interest is the first use of Twitter by 32CSM, this reflects an organisation that is using new social media technology and further reflecting and expanding on that usage.

Conclusion
The aim of the piece was to assess how different Web 2.0 technologies were being used by key republican groups; Real IRA / 32 County Sovereignty Movement. The research has shown that these organisations are using Web 2.0 applications in a number of ways, which have changed in the period of 2010-2012. It is the intention of the authors to repeat the study in 2014 and further assess the progress of these organisations in their use of social media.

It is clear that Real IRA / 32 County Sovereignty Movement have a strategic approach to Web 2.0 and are utilising some of the technologies to aid their causes. It is also clear that they are not using all the available channels and their attempts lack a degree of sophistication but they are learning from their experiences, adapting and slowly improving their profiles via social media technologies.

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New Media and Web 2.0: An Irish Republican Example


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