

WEB CONFLICTS: DEFINITION AND CLASSIFICATION

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Introduction

Conflict situations can happen at any setting. With the growth on the Internet significant part of social conflict sphere moved to the new communication environment. Web and Web 2.0 media became powerful tools for conflict development. We think that being a part of virtual reality these conflicts still have important impact on real life. Moreover in the emerging Information (or Digital) Society where interpersonal and social communication and relations are greatly influenced by the technology, knowing how to deal with this type of conflicts can become vital.

According to Jessica McFadden, Katlyn Roggensack and others the topic of social conflicts on the Internet has not been researched enough and, as mentioned by Erik Gartzke, there are few studies of the issues related to the change of nature of such conflict.

We believe that the clear definition and classification of social conflicts that occur and develop with the help of modern IT tools is necessary for further research. We also think that information flows related to particular conflict situations and particular Web media can be analysed and even managed with the help of the same media tools. The goal of this paper is to provide the definition and classification such social phenomena.

Social Conflict and the Web

According to Sara Kiesler “Social conflict entails the perception of divergent interests, which means that the parties believe that they have incompatible preferences among a set of available options”. In the Digital Age the social conflicts expand to the Internet and their prevention, management and resolution becomes a necessary part of social life. As well as in real life the conflicts on the Internet can exist in a variety of forms, in different ways and include wide range of tools.

In recent years the topics of cyber conflict, cyber warfare or netwar are very popular but they do not address the issue of classification and there is no clear definition of particular types of such conflicts. In Daniel Ventre’s book “Cyber Conflict: Competing National Perspectives” there is a classification of the layers of the cyberspace:

- the first layer that is related to the Internet infrastructure and hardware that can be attacked physically or by hackers,
- the second layer of applications that can also be attacked in the course of cyber criminal activity,
- the third and the highest layer that Daniel Ventre calls “cognitive layer” where social interactions can cause conflicts.

As the cognitive layer is related not to the Internet (in its technical meaning) but to the content and the types of social interactions we think that it directly addresses what is called Web and Web 2.0. The Web is a set of online services that provide different types of information sharing and distribution. It is both technical and social phenomenon.

In our opinion there is clear distinction between the conflict that aims at the domination on the

level of a network infrastructure, hardware and software and the level of information (how it influences people and groups). The first type of the conflict is usually addressed as “cyber conflict” or “cyber war”. The second type of the conflict that represents a social conflict on the Web we can call the “Web conflict”.

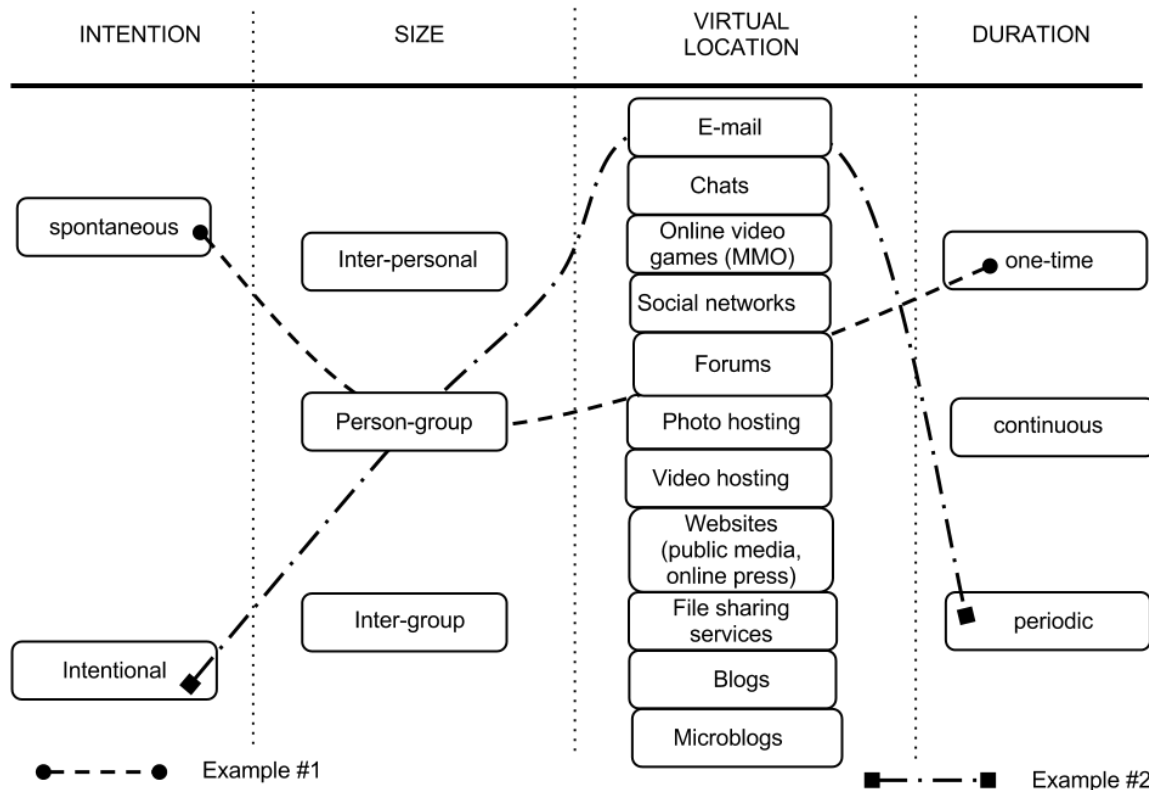
In our opinion the Internet conflict classifications can be based on the following principles:

1. By intention
 - a. intentional,
 - b. spontaneous.
2. By size:
 - a. interpersonal,
 - b. inter-group,
 - c. person-group.
3. By usage of Web services (“virtual location”):
 - a. E-mail,
 - b. Instant text message and VoIP services,
 - c. Video hosting,
 - d. Photo hosting,
 - e. Websites (online press and public media),
 - f. Blogs,
 - g. Microblogs,
 - h. Social networks,
 - i. Online video games (MMO),
 - j. Forums,
 - k. File sharing services.
4. By duration:
 - a. one-time conflict,
 - b. periodic,
 - c. continuous.

There can be other foundations for classification. They can be used to specify the conflict type and are important for understanding its nature, however, in our opinion, they are not related directly to its Web characteristics. Here some of the most important:

1. By type of conflict parties (actors):
 - a. corporation vs. corporation,
 - b. corporation vs. state,
 - c. state vs. state,
 - d. individual vs. state,
 - e. individual vs. corporation.
2. By legal status:
 - a. criminal;
 - b. non-criminal.

The following scheme can be used to classify the conflict on any stage of its development on the Web.



In this scheme we have two examples of Web conflict. In Example #1 we use this classification to present one type of social conflict that is often called “trolling”. In Example #2 we have a model of a typical e-mail spam attack. Using this scheme almost any type of Web conflict can be defined and classified. This model provides a method of web conflict analysis through classification and visualisation that can be used for tracing conflict development.

Conclusion

The classification of Web conflicts can be used in further research of this topic as the basis for Web conflict analysis. Better understanding of the nature of such conflicts can play an important role in conflict resolution and conflict management process.