

5. Empirics I – Identifying strategies of external communication in the conflict in Israel and Palestine

Having developed the necessary framework consisting of conceptualizations, theory and research design, the first empirical chapter of this study explores empirically *what communication strategies conflict parties use in their external communication*. The results of the empirical analysis answering this question reveal an interesting trend regarding the kinds of communication strategies the different conflict parties select for their external communication: The external communication on the Palestinian social media channels strongly focuses on shaming their opponent. The channels of the State of Israel, in contrast, are dominated by branding and the majority of all of their posts do not even refer to the ongoing conflict at all.¹ It is only during a few short stages of the conflict, that the external communication is dominated by shaming on both sides. The observed selection of communication, therefore, contradicts with what would be expected from the perspective of common theories and assumptions: The strong focus on branding on the Israeli side cannot be explained with the theory of the negativity bias, which would expect all actors to choose shaming. The strong focus on shaming on the Palestinian side, in contrast, does not fit to the trend in marketing and social media practices to focus especially on positive self-promotion.

1 The results also comply with the research of Sarvestani et al. (2018: 11), though this research focuses only on Israeli communication directed toward US audiences, is less differentiated concerning the communication context and lacks theoretically conceptualized categories for distinguishing different strategies of external communication (cf. Sarvestani et al. 2018: 7).

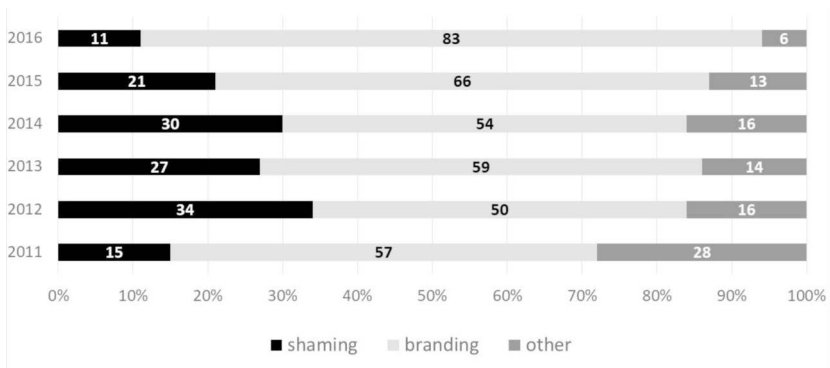
5.1 Results of the quantifying qualitative content analysis

5.1.1 Israel – The strategy of external communication of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF)

General tendency

The quantifying empirical analysis shows that the external communication of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) is strongly dominated by branding. More than 80% of the analyzed posts from 2016 feature a branding message (cf. figure 13):

Figure 13: Themes used on the English-speaking Facebook page of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) (last 100 posts each year)



Shaming, in contrast, is only used sporadically. In general, even though the IDF is the military branch of the State of Israel, only very few references referring directly to the conflict can be observed on its English-speaking Facebook page. Other communication tactics hardly play a role in the external communication of the IDF on its English-speaking Facebook page (cf. figure 13).

Branding

The reference themes used by the IDF for branding on its English-speaking Facebook page are quite diverse:

Some of the branding posts showcase the military capabilities of the Israeli army (34.1% of all examined branding posts for 2011-2016). Among these more military-related branding posts, posts that demonstrate the professional skills and attitude of the IDF are prominent. Often these skills are presented in action-packed videos showing spectacular scenes from the trainings of the IDF. In these military-related posts, the IDF often presents the modernity of their weaponry and that their international partners, such as the United States, also make some of

their most modern weaponry available to Israel. A minority of the posts also describe military and security related success stories of the IDF (6.0% of all examined branding posts from 2011-2016).

Besides being the social media channel of a military entity, however, even more posts among the branding posts are not directly linked to classical military topics but to widely relatable topics (59.9% of all examined branding posts from 2011-2016). These not conflict-related posts showcase the diversity of the IDF, its humanitarian aid missions, soldiers celebrating Jewish and other holidays, the international cooperation of the IDF, or even modern technology, artistic performances or efforts for more sustainability, to name a few.

Shaming

While most of the posts in the analyzed sample are posts with branding, a minority of the posts also contain shaming. Notably, the shaming of the IDF, however, is not directed against "Palestine" as a whole or the Palestinian civil population, rather they either mention as perpetrators "Hamas" (24.6% of the examined shaming posts from 2011-2016), "Palestinian extremists" or "Palestinian terrorists" (53.6% of the examined shaming posts from 2011-2016). The Palestinian civil population, in contrast, is mentioned in the external communication only as a group who receives help from Israel, or as a group who suffers from (alleged) misdeeds of "Hamas" or other "Palestinian extremists" as well.² The shaming of the IDF mostly refers to acts of physical violence (67.4% of the examined shaming posts for 2011-2016³) such as rocket attacks, stabbings or shootings, often labeled or framed as "terror attacks". Occasionally, the construction of terror tunnels, incitement and the fear of the Israeli population to become victims of an attack are also used as reference themes for the shaming of the IDF.

While most frequently Israeli civilians are described as victims in the shaming posts (39.9% of the examined shaming posts from 2011-2016), (unlike in the shaming posts in the external communication of the Palestinian side) in a notable amount of posts (22.5% of the examined shaming posts from 2011-2016) the victims are identified as soldiers and, therefore, clearly as combatants. Furthermore, (unlike many "Pro-Palestinian" or third-party sources) the IDF, when describing the victims

2 This way the conflict line is defined between extremists and non-extremists threatened and harmed by the extremists' actions and not between Israelis and Palestinians and the IDF perceives itself as clearly belonging to the latter "good" group while Hamas is characterized as part of the former "bad" group. Hamas is even portrayed as "a radical terrorist organization, with the same Jihadist ideology as ISIS" (IDF on their English-speaking Twitter channel, 24.08.2014: <https://twitter.com/idfspokesperson/status/503438902170877952>, source accessed on 24.04.2018).

3 Additionally, 5.1 % of the shaming posts featured thwarted attacks as a reference object for shaming.

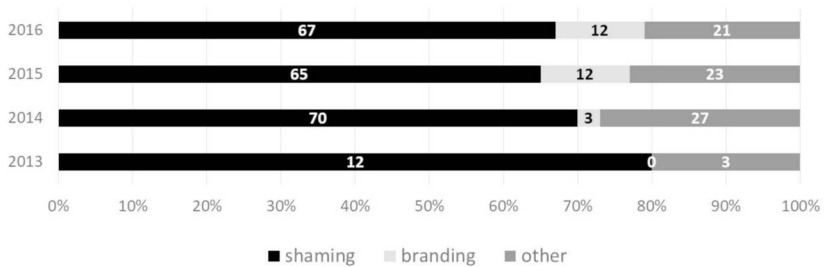
of violent incidents, do not differentiate between “settlers” as victims and Israelis living within the territory which is recognized by the international law as territory of the State of Israel.⁴

5.1.2 Palestine – The strategy of external communication of the Palestinian Information Center (PIC)

General tendency

The external communication of the Palestinian Information Center (PIC), in contrast, is clearly dominated by shaming. About two-thirds of the analyzed posts feature a shaming message (cf. figure 14).

Figure 14: Themes used on the English-speaking Facebook page of the Palestinian Information Center (last 100 posts each year)⁵



In contrast, the analysis clearly shows that branding hardly plays a role in the external communication of the PIC on its English-speaking Facebook page. Only 12% of the analyzed posts from 2016 contain a branding message. No other communication tactic plays a major role in the English-speaking external communication of the PIC either (cf. figure 14).⁶

4 Cf. e.g. this tweet of the IDF's spokesperson's unit on their English-speaking Twitter channel (10.01.2018: <https://twitter.com/idfspokesperson/status/951106733488988160>; source accessed on: 02.03.2018) about the murder of Rabbi Raziel Shevach in comparison to a report of the BBC (BBC 10.01.2018). By not mentioning the settler status, the IDF avoids associations with the accusations of occupying Eastern Jerusalem and the West Bank.

5 In 2012, no posts were published on the Facebook page. In 2011 and 2013 less than 100 posts were published in total. Almost all posts of 2011 did not contain any text.

6 A communication tactic that can be found particularly frequently among the other posts are expressions of resilience, highlighting the importance of keeping up the efforts to resist the Israeli occupation. Typically, however, these expressions are framed in a non-violent way.

Shaming

Almost all posts in the examined sample from the PIC's English-speaking Facebook page are directly connected to the conflict, and most of them contain shaming. A majority of the shaming posts describes acts of physical violence of the Israeli side and their implications to the Palestinian side (41.8% of the examined shaming posts from 2011-2016).⁷ Various different forms of violence of the Israeli side and various different forms of suffering on the Palestinian side are described. However, besides the references to acts of physical violence, additionally, several groups of reference themes for shaming can be observed on the PIC's English-speaking Facebook page that cannot be observed in the external communication of the IDF at all: In the PIC's external communication also the occupation and the blockade of the Gaza Strip (16.4% of the examined shaming posts from 2011-2016), the detention of Palestinians and the treatment of prisoners by the Israeli authorities (14.1% of the examined shaming posts from 2011-2016), Israeli settlements on Palestinian territory (4.2% of the examined shaming posts from 2011-2016) and the refuge and expulsion of Palestinians (0.9% of the examined shaming posts from 2011-2016) are frequently used topics.

Particularly often the Israeli army, individual Israeli soldiers or the Israeli security forces are described as perpetrators (33.8% of the examined shaming posts from 2011-2016). However, even more often simply "Israel" as a whole is identified as the perpetrator in the shaming posts of the PIC (37.1% of the examined shaming posts from 2011-2016).

The victims described in the shaming posts, in contrast, are most of the time identified as civilians (47.6% of the examined shaming posts from 2011-2016) – often as individuals from social groups such as children, youth, seniors, disabled people or women, i.e., particularly vulnerable groups. Unlike in the external communication of the IDF, not in one single shaming post a victim is explicitly described as a Palestinian combatant. In some cases, however, the status of the victims is not specified, and it remains unuttered whether the victims are combatants or not (10.4% of the examined shaming posts from 2011-2016).⁸

Branding

As already shown, branding hardly plays a role in the external communication of the PIC. Among the few branding posts particularly many showcase the beauty of the Palestinian country and its towns (8 out of the 28 branding posts in the

7 In total, 21.6% of all posts in the sample from the Palestinian Information Center are shaming posts referring to physical violence. In contrast, even though the IDF is unlike the Palestinian Information Center a military entity, only 15.5% of all posts of the IDF sample are shaming posts referring to physical violence.

8 In some cases, also no concrete victim is mentioned, especially in cases of structural violence (31.9% of the examined shaming posts for 2011-2016).

sample, Jerusalem, in particular, is depicted often in these posts) and culture & crafting (4 out of the 28 branding posts in the sample). Many reference themes that could be observed in the IDF sample, in contrast, cannot be found on the English-speaking Facebook page of the PIC at all or at least only very rarely: e.g. there are no references to technology or innovation, economic attractiveness or major sports events and festivals. Many of the branding posts, furthermore, are connected with a resilience framing, i.e., the achievements are presented as being accomplished despite the difficult context.

5.2 Robustness check – Results of the automated quantitative large-scale content analysis and the semi-structured interviews

5.2.1 Variation across actors

To test whether the tendencies observed in the quantifying qualitative content analysis can also be observed over a longer timeframe and for all other channels of the conflict parties an automated quantitative large-scale content analysis was conducted. In the results of this additional analysis, the same tendencies can be observed for the variation of the selection of strategies of external communication across the different conflict parties as were observed in the quantifying qualitative analysis: The share of negative posts on Hamas' English-speaking social media channels and on the English-speaking social media channels of the PLO's & the PNA's different branches is much higher than the share of negative posts on the English-speaking social media channels coming from the State of Israel's different branches, regardless of the varying functions of the different branches in the governance systems of the conflict parties.

Additionally, interviews with the practitioners in charge of the social media channels and additional quantifying qualitative analyses were conducted. The results of both once again confirm the initial observations from the first quantifying qualitative analysis of the IDF's and the PIC's English-speaking Facebook pages: Across all branches, the Israeli external communication is dominated by branding and the Palestinian external communication by shaming. It is only the types of reference themes and the styles used for branding and shaming that vary according to the divergent functions of the different branches, when looking at the external communication on one of the sides of the conflict, not the dimension of the shares of branding and shaming.

5.2.1.1 State of Israel – Military bodies

General tendencies

For the IDF's English-speaking Facebook page the automated quantitative analysis shows the same trend like in the quantifying qualitative analysis of the samples: In 2016, the average monthly share of negative posts⁹ on the IDF's English-speaking Facebook page amongst all of the published posts was 34.38%, i.e., comparatively low. Similarly, the interview with the IDF's spokesperson's unit shows that the unit has decided to focus primarily on content that can be characterized as branding.¹⁰

The analysis of COGAT's English-speaking Facebook page shows that the same trend can be observed for other branches of the Israeli military as well. The quantitative analysis of the posts on COGAT's Facebook page shows for 2016 that, on average, only 20.83% of all posts each month were negative. This means that the average of the monthly shares of negative posts on COGAT's English-speaking Facebook page is even lower than on the page of the IDF's spokesperson's unit. A quantifying qualitative analysis of COGAT's Facebook page and the interview with the spokesperson's unit of COGAT confirm this trend.

Branding

The Facebook page of COGAT is even more dominated by branding than the Facebook page of the IDF. While COGAT is attached to the IDF, it is in charge of the implementation of civilian policies and not directly in charge of military affairs. Consequently, in comparison to the IDF's spokesperson's unit the spokesperson's unit of COGAT focuses in its branding much less on military issues in the narrower sense. Instead, COGAT features in its branding posts mostly its support for the Palestinian civil population (67.9% of the examined branding posts from 2015-2016). The described measures of support include e.g. supporting the Palestinian agriculture by coordinating for example olive harvests,¹¹ the construction of in-

9 For each month the number of negative posts and the total number of posts were counted, and both numbers were used to calculate the monthly share for each month. The average monthly share for 2016 was calculated by summing up the monthly averages of all twelve months in 2016 and dividing them by twelve (i.e., the number of months).

10 In total the spokesperson's unit of the IDF has defined five categories as core themes: 1) describing threats & character of the enemies, 2) professionalism & capabilities of the IDF, 3) dealing with moral challenges, 4) innovation, start-up nation and technology, and 5) diversity (Isr IDF: 16ff.). Following the typology developed for this study (cf. chapter 2), the second, fourth and fifth category can be characterized as branding. The third category can be characterized as justification and partially as branding as well. And only the first category represents what has been defined as shaming in the typology.

11 Cf. e.g. COGAT on their English-speaking Facebook page (08.11.2017) (<https://www.facebook.com/cogat.israel/videos/vb.724192144343139/1487182231377456/?type=2&theater>) (source accessed on: 20.04.2018).

frastructure,¹² fostering the local economy,¹³ facilitating the import and export of goods from the Palestinian Territories and issuing travel and work permits.¹⁴

Shaming

Shaming is even less present on COGAT's English-speaking Facebook page than on the English-speaking Facebook page of the IDF. Content-wise the shaming of COGAT is quite similar to the shaming of the IDF. The shaming of COGAT mostly mentions Hamas as the perpetrator and focuses especially on the (alleged) misdeeds that impede its work, such as the smuggling of dual-use goods into the Palestinian Territories or "incitement", for example. Notably, it can be observed that both the IDF and COGAT avoid using certain commonly used but sensitive conflict-related terms. Both, for example, do not use the term "settlers" and speak of "Judea and Samaria" instead of using the term "West Bank".

5.2.1.2 State of Israel – Civilian branches

General tendencies

For the civilian branches of the State of Israel's administration, the same tendency can be observed as in the military branches: The share of shaming posts is comparatively low, whereas the share of branding posts, in contrast, is very high. In 2016, the automated quantitative analysis shows that the average of the monthly shares of negative posts was 19.59% on the Israeli Foreign Ministry's English-speaking Facebook page, on the Israeli Prime Minister's Office's English-speaking Facebook page 38.10%,¹⁵ on the Government Press Office's English-speaking Facebook page 14.90% and on the Permanent Mission of the State of Israel to the United Nations'

12 Cf. e.g. COGAT on their English-speaking Facebook page (10.11.2015) (<https://www.facebook.com/cogat.israel/photos/a.757361664359520.1073741828.724192144343139/902768309818854/?type=3>) (source accessed on: 20.04.2018).

13 Cf. e.g. COGAT on their English-speaking Facebook page (26.10.2016) (<https://www.facebook.com/cogat.israel/photos/a.757361664359520.1073741828.724192144343139/112800077295605/?type=3&theater>) (source accessed on: 20.04.2018).

14 Cf. e.g. COGAT on their English-speaking Facebook page (20.11.2017) (<https://www.facebook.com/cogat.israel/posts/1497439490351730>) (source accessed on: 20.04.2018).

15 The highest, but in comparison to the Palestinian side still low, share of shaming posts among the examined Facebook pages of the civilian branches of the Israeli administration can be observed for the English-speaking Facebook page of the Prime Minister's Office. The slightly higher negativity on the page of the Prime Minister's Office can be traced back to the fact that the Prime Minister's Office among the branches whose communication has been analyzed is typically considered to be the most (party-)political branch and, therefore, its external communication also differentiates a bit less clearly between domestic and external audiences in comparison to the other branches on their pages. Furthermore, the page also refers comparatively often to Iran, i.e., to a non-asymmetric opponent. Moreover, the texts of the posts on the Facebook page are most of the time much longer than the texts on the other social

English-speaking Facebook page 34.45%. The quantifying qualitative analysis of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs Facebook page as well as the interviews with the corresponding practitioners, that were conducted for additional robustness checks, can confirm this trend, too.

Branding

While all of the examined Israeli social media channels are dominated by branding, the type of reference themes used for branding and respectively shaming varies according to the divergent functions of the different branches: In contrast to the IDF Facebook page, military-related branding does not play a role on the Facebook pages of the civilian branches of the Israeli administration. Fitting to their representative functions, in contrast, international cooperation is used much more often as a reference theme for branding on the Facebook pages of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Israeli Prime Minister's Office. Other themes that are often used on the English-speaking Facebook page of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs are, for example, references to arts and cultural events (15.5% of all branding posts in the examined sample from 2009-2016), health-related topics and medical technology (4.4% of all branding posts in the examined sample from 2009-2016), efforts for sustainability and green technology (3.8% of all branding posts in the examined sample for 2009-2016, with increasing frequency in the last years) and Israel's economic attractiveness, innovation and other technological achievements (14.9% of all branding posts in the examined sample from 2009-2016). Like in the IDF's external communication, furthermore, the humanitarian aid of Israel (11.0% of all branding posts in the examined sample from 2009-2016), sports (2.0 % of all branding posts in the examined sample from 2009-2016) and tradition (16.7% of all branding posts in the examined sample from 2009-2016) are frequently used themes for branding on the English-speaking Facebook page of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Shaming

In general, the types of shaming themes that can be observed on the Facebook pages of the civilian branches of the Israeli administration are comparatively similar to those on the Facebook pages of the military branches. However, the shaming is partially directed to additional actors like, for example, the United Nations or other states that are shamed for a behavior contradicting with what Israel perceives as their interests. Iran, in particular, with which Israel has a hostile relationship, is a frequent target of shaming. In the sample from the Israeli Prime Minister's Office, in particular, there are many references to Iran (9.4% of all posts from the sample

media channels. This increases also the likelihood that at least a small passage of the text is referring to something negative.

for 2010-2016, with particularly many references in 2012, 2013 and 2014) can be found.

5.2.1.3 Palestine – Hamas

General tendencies

For the Palestinian Information Center's (PIC) English-speaking Facebook page the automated quantitative analysis shows the same trend as can be observed in the quantifying qualitative analysis of the samples: The average of negative posts shared monthly on the PIC's English-speaking Facebook page was 73.26%, i.e., very high, in 2016. Hamas does not have Facebook pages that do use the name of the organization or the name of its military arm al-Qassam Brigades, as this is not tolerated by Facebook and corresponding social media channels would be suspended by the social media platform (Times of Israel 08.01.2017). However, Hamas has set up corresponding English-speaking channels on Twitter. For these channels the same tendencies can be observed as for the PIC's English-speaking Facebook page. The average of the monthly shares of negative posts on the English-speaking "Hamas Movement (@HamasInfoEn)" Twitter channel was 61.74% for 2016, i.e., like the shares on the English-speaking Facebook page of the PIC much higher than the average of all examined Israeli channels. The average of the monthly sharing of negative posts on the English-speaking Twitter channel of the al-Qassam Brigades in 2016,¹⁶ that was identified with the automated quantitative analysis, was very high (83.42%), too. Moreover, a quantifying qualitative analysis of the Facebook page of the PIC and of the "@HamasInfoEn" Twitter channel confirms the trend of a strong dominance of shaming, too.

Shaming

The type of shaming used on the "@HamasInfoEn" Twitter channel is very similar to the shaming used on the PIC's English-speaking Facebook page concerning the described types of victims and (alleged) misdeeds. Concerning the described perpetrator, the Twitter channel of Hamas is often less specific than the English-speaking Facebook page of the Palestinian Information Center and generally accuses Israel as a whole instead of only its army or administration (in 73.5% of the examined shaming posts from 2015-2016). Stylistically, moreover, the shaming on the "@HamasInfoEn" Twitter channel is often also connected to demanding formulations.

16 The channel, however, was not continuously active, as the Twitter channel of the al-Qassam Brigades has been suspended several times. Yet, after the suspension each time the organization has set up a new channel with a slightly different user name (Christian Science Monitor 17.07.2014; Times of Israel 08.01.2017; BBC 15.07.2014).

Branding

While the PIC on its English-speaking Facebook page in its very few branding posts focuses on the beauty of the Palestinian country and its towns and on featuring its culture and crafting, Hamas focuses in the few branding posts on its official “@HamasInfoEn” Twitter channel on its international cooperation. The corresponding posts showcase meetings of Hamas officials with representatives of governments of other countries and, thereby, support Hamas’ demand to be recognized internationally as a stakeholder in negotiations. Rather trying to avoid showcasing the affiliation with Hamas, corresponding efforts are more subtle on the English-speaking Facebook page of the PIC.

5.2.1.4 Palestine – PLO & PNA

General tendencies

The same trends as on the social media channels of Hamas and its branches can be also observed for the different social media channels of the PLO & the PNA: Their external communication is strongly dominated by shaming. The automated quantitative content analysis shows that the average of the monthly shares of negative posts was 66.03% on the English-speaking Facebook page of the Mission of the State of Palestine to the United Nation in 2016 (about twice as much as the share of the Israeli mission), for the English-speaking Facebook page of the Department of Culture and Information of the PLO (which recently was renamed to “Department of Public Diplomacy & Policy”) 85.80% and for the English-speaking Twitter channel of the Negotiations Affairs Department of the PLO 58.42%. A quantifying qualitative analysis of Facebook pages of both the Department of Culture and Information of the PLO and of the Mission of the State of Palestine to the United Nations and the interviews with the practitioners from the PLO & the PNA confirm this trend, too.

Shaming

The type of shaming used on the different social media channels of both the PLO & the PNA is quite similar to the type of shaming used on the social media channels of Hamas and its branches. In general, the external communication expresses a strong dissatisfaction with the status quo.¹⁷ The Department of Culture and Information of the PLO does not only target Israel but occasionally also the US government and Pro-Israeli groups and politicians in the USA (like especially the current US president and in 2016 presidential candidate respectively president-elect

17 Cf. e.g. the Department of Culture and Information of the PLO (PLO-DCI) on their English-speaking Facebook page (17.10.2016) (<https://www.facebook.com/PLO.DPDP/posts/983798701742314>) (source accessed on: 29.04.2019).

Donald Trump). Occasionally, the PLO channels also complain about the (alleged) inactivity of the United Nations and the international community to support their cause and pressurize Israel.

Branding

In contrast to the Israeli side, even in the few posts in which something positive is described, the positive issue is typically framed as an expression of “resilience”: Palestine is able to achieve “despite” the conditions of the occupation and the conflict, that are problematic for it, not “because of” them (PLO MA: 119). The content of the branding varies a bit from branch to branch. The Mission of the State of Palestine to the United Nations, for example, highlights mostly political successes like the recognition of the State of Palestine by international organizations and other countries. On the English-speaking Facebook page of the Department of Culture and Information of the PLO (which recently was renamed to “Department of Public Diplomacy & Policy”), in contrast, mostly arts and culture and international cooperation are featured in the few branding posts of the department.

5.2.1.5 First conclusions

The empirical analyses clearly show the trend that the Israeli external communication is dominated by branding across all channels and that the Palestinian external communication is dominated by shaming. Furthermore, it can be observed that the actors generally select for their branding and shaming pictures and stories that are particularly promising (cf. the types of pictures and stories that have been identified to be particularly promising in section 2.2.): For shaming, especially if this is chosen as the predominant strategy, pictures and stories representing particularly extreme acts of physical violence and pictures and stories representing such structural violence and disadvantages that are perceived as injustices are used and particularly often civilians are depicted as victims. For branding, especially, if it is the predominant strategy, pictures and stories that can be characterized as pictures and stories featuring something that makes it easy for the target audience to identify itself with the communicating actor (e.g. pictures and stories showing soldiers from a personal side), as pictures and stories that credibly signal to the target audience a significant potential benefit for itself (e.g. pictures and stories about economic attractiveness and international cooperation) or as pictures and stories featuring something that stands out from the average and which is particularly prestigious or is perceived as particularly admirable, surprising or innovative (e.g. pictures and stories about technology and innovation) are used. Furthermore, it shall later be shown that the types of pictures and stories which can be observed in the conflict parties’ external communication match very well with the opportu-

nities to present and convince of the different conflict parties (cf. section 7.6.4.).

Table 9: Overview – Results of the automated quantitative analysis: monthly shares of negative posts on the English-speaking Facebook pages of the conflict parties for January until December 2016 (a dark grey color indicates a high share of negative posts, a light grey color indicates a low share of negative posts)

Type of branch	Channel	Share of negative posts	Channel	Share of negative posts	Channel	Share of negative posts
	State of Israel		PNA / PLO		Hamis	
Military branch	IDF	34.38%	no English-speaking social media channel		EQB (Twitter)	83.42%
	COGAT	20.83%				
Leadership	PMO	38.10%	no English-speaking social media channel		Hamis (Twitter)	61.74%
External relations / press relations	MFA	19.59%	PLO NAD (Twitter)	58.42%	PIC	73.26%
	GPO	14.90%	PLO DCI (now PDPD)	85.80%		
Missions abroad	Israel UN	34.45%	Palestine UN	66.03%	no channels of official representations	

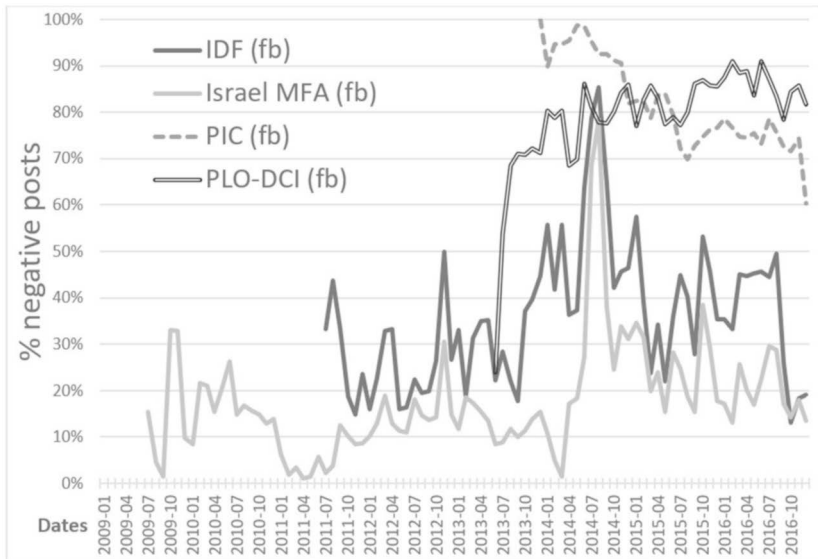
5.2.2 Variation across time

Furthermore, the automated quantitative analysis also shows that the trends described above cannot only be observed punctually but also across time for almost all stages of the conflict:

The Palestinian external communication (of Hamis as well as of the PLO & the PNA) is constantly dominated by negative communication: The monthly shares of negative posts on the Facebook pages of both the Palestinian Information Center, and the Department of Culture and Information of the PLO amount constantly to values around 80%. Only in the early stages of the Facebook pages and during the relatively calm end of 2016 a lower share of negative posts was published (cf. figure 15).

The external communication of the Israeli side (of military as well as of civilian branches), in contrast, is characterized almost all of the time by low shares of negative posts: Most of the time the monthly shares of posts with negative content on the Facebook pages of the IDF and the Israeli Foreign Ministry are lower than 40% and only rarely the shares are higher than 60% (cf. figure 15).

Figure 15: Overview – Results of the automated quantitative analysis: (smoothed¹⁸) monthly shares of negative posts on the English-speaking Facebook pages of the conflict parties across time



There are only a few exceptions to be observed, in which the Israeli external communication is as negative as the Palestinian one: Only during the summer of 2014 (the period of the 2014 Gaza War with the Israeli Operation Protective Edge) a short stage exists, during which the external communication is as negative as the Palestinian one. Further prominent local maxima of negativity in the external communication on the Israeli side can be observed for November 2012 (during the Israeli Operation Pillar of Defense) and autumn 2015 / early 2016 (during peaks of the “stabbing intifada”).¹⁹

The types of branding and shaming used on the different channels remain comparatively constant. However, especially for branding thematic trends do play a mi-

18 Exponential smoothing with the data processing function of Microsoft Excel was applied (<https://support.office.com/en-gb/article/use-the-analysis-toolpak-to-perform-complex-data-analysis-6c67ccfo-f4a9-487c-8dec-bdb5a2cefab6>; last access: 26.07.2019). A smoothing constant of $\alpha = 0.3$ was used.

19 Especially, the Israeli Prime Minister’s Office and the Mission of the State of Israel to the United Nations in New York thematize regularly also the adversaries of Israel with Iran. Therefore, on the corresponding channels, additional notable local maxima can be observed in the context of events related to these adversaries.

nor role temporarily. In 2015, for example, in the context of the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference COP21 in Paris sustainability was used more often as a reference theme for branding than usual. In general, however, the biggest adaptations in the external communication of the conflict parties have not been content-wise adaptations but rather stylistic ones: Most importantly, especially the Israeli branches have over time started to invest more in videography and to try to increase the share of video content among the posts they publish (e.g. Isr IDF: 89ff.).

5.2.3 Variation across platforms

Moreover, the automated quantitative analysis also shows that the trends observed in sections 5.1. and 5.2. are not only to be observed across channels and time but also across platforms:

Similar to the English-speaking Facebook pages the English-speaking Twitter channels of the Palestinian conflict parties are strongly dominated by shaming. In 2016, on average 58.42% of the tweets on the English-speaking Twitter channel of the PLO's Negotiations Affairs Department were negative and 44.35% of the tweets on the Twitter channel of the Mission of the State of Palestine to the United Nations in New York were negative.²⁰ This means that in 2016 the mean values of the monthly shares of negative posts for both analyzed PLO/PNA Twitter channels are higher than the mean values of the monthly shares of negative posts for all analyzed Israeli channels. As already mentioned in section 5.2.1.3., the English-speaking Twitter channels of Hamas and the al-Qassam Brigades had very high averages of the monthly shares of negative posts (61.74% respectively 83.42%) as well.

The average shares of negative tweets on the Israeli side, in contrast, are comparatively low: An automated quantitative analysis was conducted for two English-speaking Twitter channels of branches of the State of Israel, a military branch and a civilian branch. Similar to the previously examined Israeli Facebook pages, both Twitter channels have comparatively low average shares of negative posts: In 2016, on average 41.22% of the tweets on the English-speaking Twitter channel of the Israeli Defense Forces were negative and 20.63% of the tweets on the English-speaking Twitter channel of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs were negative (cf. table 10).

20 The average of the monthly shares of negative posts on the English-speaking Twitter channel of the Mission of the State of Palestine to the United Nations in New York is lower than the average monthly share of negative posts on other Palestinian channels. The reason for this is, however, that comparatively many announcements with linked attachments were posted on this channel, in which the actual message (and, therefore, also content such as, for instance, shaming messages) can be found in the attachment.

On the Israeli side, it can be observed that the content on the Twitter channels of the different branches has a tendency to be slightly more negative than the content on the Facebook pages of the same branches. These very moderate differences can be explained with the trend that Twitter as a platform tends to be a bit more political than Facebook.²¹ In general, however, the differences across platforms are mostly quite small and variations across platforms tend to be much smaller than the variations across the two sides of the conflict (cf. table 10).

The interviews with the practitioners in charge of the social media channels confirm that the messages they use on different platforms hardly vary. Considering the external communication of its unit as “theme-driven” (Isr IDF: 98), for example, a high-ranking member of the IDF spokesperson’s unit reports that only the style, not the content, of the IDF’s messages vary across different social media platforms: Adapting to the stylistic preferences of the users of the platform, for Snapchat the IDF aims for a “behind the scenes” atmosphere. The member of the spokesperson’s unit described the presentation style as “Kim Kardashian type”: “You know this is what we do. And this is how we are. And hi guys, this is the IDF, welcome. And get the behind the scenes with the IDF and how it is to be a paratrooper. Different types of things like that. So I would say each one has its own unique packaging” (Isr IDF: 103). On Facebook, in contrast, the unit tries to be “a bit more friendly and formal” and “welcoming, appealing”. And on Twitter, the unit primarily aims to have a “very informative” channel with lots of “facts and figures” (Isr IDF: 102). In general, however, the same stories are published on each channel, “produced in a different manner. And it will go out simultaneously. So you would see the same type of information going out, same times, but in different ways that are appealing to others” (Isr IDF: 104).

21 Indeed, for example, the practitioner in charge of the external communication of the Mission of the State of Palestine to the United Kingdom describes Twitter as a platform that is comparatively political (Pal UK: 33). And the practitioners of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs characterize Twitter as a more political platform than, for example, Facebook, too (Isr MFA 2: 19). Similarly, the practitioner in charge of the external communication of the Permanent Mission of the State of Palestine to the United Nations in New York assesses Twitter as a platform that in the context of their work is closely linked to the social media culture of the other missions to the United Nations, which typically act quite politically (Pal UN: 33). The audience on Facebook, in contrast, is perceived as a broader and, therefore, on average less political audience (Pal UK: 34).

Table 10: Overview – Results of the automated quantitative analysis: monthly shares of negative posts on the English-speaking Twitter channels and Facebook pages of the conflict parties for January until December 2016 (a dark grey color indicates a high share of negative posts, a light grey color indicates a low share of negative posts)

Channel	Facebook	Twitter
State of Israel		
IDF	34.38%	41.22%
COGAT	20.83%	not analyzed
PMO	38.10%	not analyzed
MFA	19.59%	20.63%
GPO	14.90%	not analyzed
Israel UN	34.45%	not analyzed
PNA / PLO		
PLO NAD	no channel	58.42%
PLO DCI (now PDPD)	85.80%	not analyzed
Palestine UN	66.03%	44.35%
Hamas		
EQB	no channel	83.42%
Hamas	no channel	61.74%
PIC	73.30%	not analyzed

