

## 4. Case selection, research design & methodology

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### 4.1 The case of the conflict in Israel and Palestine

In order to test the assumptions made in the theoretical chapter, and so as to reconstruct the selection process of strategies of external communication during asymmetric conflicts, an in-depth case study has been conducted. In this chapter, first, the selected case for the case study, i.e., the conflict in Israel and Palestine, and the reasons for the selection are introduced (section 4.1.). Then, the research design and methodology of the case-study are explained: The empirical analysis of this study encompasses two parts: The first part, for which the research design and methodology are introduced in section 4.2., aims to identify the conflict parties' strategies of external communication used in the conflict in Israel and Palestine. This has been done in order to answer the first research question: *Which strategies of external communication do the conflict parties choose for their external communication?* The second part, for which the research design and methodology are introduced in section 4.3., then, aims to explain the selection of the strategies identified in the first part in order to answer the second research question: *What shapes the selection of communication strategies of conflict parties?*

#### 4.1.1 The conflict in Israel and Palestine – Reasons for the case selection

For testing the assumptions made in the theoretical chapter and in order to reconstruct the selection process of external communication strategies used during asymmetric conflicts the conflict in Israel and Palestine has been selected as an exemplary case for the empirical analysis. More specifically, the analysis focuses on the most recent stage of the conflict: the time onwards from which social media has been used by the conflict parties as an arena for their external communication. At this recent stage<sup>1</sup> of the conflict, the focus of attention is on the struggle between

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1 In the past, the general focus of attention in the context of the conflict in Israel and Palestine was on other conflict constellations. In the 1960s, for example, Israel's conflict with its Arab neighboring states was in the focus (Rettig 2018: 19; Commentary Magazine 10/2009).

Israel and the Palestinians (or more specifically, the major entities representing them). The important conflict parties are consequently:

**Israel:** The Israeli side is represented by the State of Israel, which declared its independence in 1948 and which was recognized as a full member of the United Nations in 1949. Since the Six-Day War in 1967, the State of Israel and its army control large parts of the so-called West Bank (Daase 1999: 159-165).

**PLO & PNA:** The first important conflict parties on the Palestinian side are the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Palestinian National Authority. The PLO has been able since the 1960s to establish themselves as the domestically as well as internationally recognized (or at least tolerated) representation of the Palestinian people. The Palestinian National Authority (PNA) was established later following the negotiations for the Oslo Accords in 1994. Following the Oslo Accords, the Palestinian National Authority controls the urban Palestinian territories in the West Bank.<sup>2</sup> While the PLO & the PNA are separate structures, they are both intertwined and controlled by the political party and resistance movement Fatah. While other groups are also represented in the PLO & the PNA, Fatah has been the dominant faction in these structures since the establishment of the PLO & the PNA.

**Hamas:** Since 1987/1988 a second actor, Hamas, has emerged on the Palestinian side as a central conflict party. Hamas presented itself as an alternative to Fatah, which was deemed corrupt, and attracted attention and support by parts of the population. They achieved this by offering a more radical approach to end the occupation than Fatah's moderate and diplomatic but slow approach: conducting terrorist attacks against Israel. This way Hamas could win in 2006 the elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council. The election result caused violent clashes between Hamas and Fatah resulting in Fatah maintaining control over the West Bank and Hamas taking control over the Gaza Strip, from which all Israeli settlers had been removed unilaterally by Israel in 2005 (Brown 2012: 1; Shlaim 2009).<sup>3</sup>

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2 The Oslo Accords grant the PNA the powers and responsibilities for internal security and public order in the so-called "Area A" (Oslo II Accord XI 3a, XIII 1), encompassing most major cities populated by Palestinians in the West Bank (about 18 % of the West Bank territory and 55% of its Palestinian population (European Parliament 2013: 4)). Additionally, the treaty grants the PNA the civil control in "Area B", while the security control is supposed to be a joint responsibility of the Israeli and the Palestinian side (Oslo II Accord XI 3b, XIII 2). "Area B" encompasses most rural communities populated by Palestinians in the West Bank (about 20 % of the West Bank territory and 41% of its Palestinian population (European Parliament 2013: 4)). "Area C", in contrast, has remained under full control of the Israeli side, both concerning civil and security affairs (Oslo II Accord XI 3c, XVII 2). "Area C" is only sparsely populated by Palestinians (about 62 % of the West Bank territory and about 150,000 of the West Bank's 2.5 million Palestinians (European Parliament 2013: 4)).

3 On the Palestinian side, furthermore, some minor factions such as, for instance, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) exist that are not controlled directly by the PLO & the PNA or Hamas.

Focusing on the conflict in Israel and Palestine as an example of an asymmetric conflict offers a series of advantages:

**A typical case of an asymmetric conflict structure:** First of all, so as to observe the potential impact of the asymmetric character of the conflict structure, it is necessary to select a conflict in which this character is clearly present. Section 4.1.2. examines the distribution of (military, economic & financial and social/institutional) capabilities among the conflict parties in the case of conflict in Israel and Palestine in detail, demonstrating that the conflict in its present stage can be deemed a typical case of a conflict with an asymmetric conflict structure (as defined in chapter 3), as the distribution of capabilities amongst the different conflict parties in the conflict in Israel and Palestine is extremely unequal.<sup>4</sup>

**The asymmetric constellation as the only dominant conflict line:** Many modern conflicts do not have a dyadic character in which one single conflict line is dominant, but they have two or more overlapping conflict lines of similar importance. The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in Northern Syria, for example, do not only fight with the Turkish army and militias supported by Turkey but also with Daesh. Whilst the sub-conflict with Turkey has asymmetric characteristics,<sup>5</sup> the sub-conflict with Daesh, does not fulfill the ideal-typical characteristics of an asymmetric conflict structure (e.g. none of the conflict parties is a recognized state and, furthermore, the military power ratio between the conflict parties has been less clearly unequal during most of the conflict as can typically be seen in asymmetric conflicts). Both conflict lines are, however, more or less equally important for the perception of the SDF abroad. It can, therefore, be expected that the structures of both conflict lines simultaneously influence the selection of a communication strategy of the SDF and in the end a mixed strategy can be observed, which is not only a result of the influence of the asymmetric conflict structure of the sub-conflict of the Syrian Kurds with Turkey but of the more symmetric structure of the sub-conflict with Daesh as well. In such cases, however, the influence of the structure of

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As they are rather small factions and they hardly engage in external communication, this study focusses only on the main factions.

- 4 Besides the asymmetric distribution of capabilities, additionally, also two other characteristics of asymmetric conflicts mentioned frequently in the literature on asymmetric conflicts can be observed: (1) divergent interests of the conflict parties shaped by the influence of the unequal distribution of capabilities and (2) different typical military and political strategies the conflict parties use to deal with the asymmetric distribution of capabilities, differing between topdogs and underdogs. These characteristics resulting from the unequal distribution of capabilities are described later theoretically in sections 3.3. and 3.4.2. as part of the description of the different pathways explaining the selection of strategies of external communication by the conflict parties and are shown empirically in chapters 6 and 7 as part of the empirical analysis of the different pathways.
- 5 Cf. for comparison the IISS indicators describing the power capabilities of Turkey (IISS 2017: 166ff.) and the YPG (IISS 2017: 406f.).

the asymmetric sub-conflict on the selection of external communication strategies overlap with the structure of a non-asymmetric conflict, what makes it more difficult to identify what has been the influence of the asymmetric conflict structure. In order to only evaluate the impact of the asymmetric conflict structure and no other influences, a case should therefore be selected in which only one – asymmetric – conflict line is dominant and where other overlapping conflict lines with similar dominance and with a conflict structure with other characteristics do not exist. This way the interference of the impact of a second conflict structure with non-asymmetric characteristics on the selection of the strategies of external communication of the conflict parties can be avoided; the conflict in Israel and Palestine is such a conflict. It only has one clearly dominant and asymmetric conflict-line – that of the struggle between Israel and the Palestinians.<sup>6</sup>

**Controllable communication context and equal target audiences:** Moreover, in order to be able to assess the impact of the asymmetric conflict structure it is also important to select a case that allows control for the communication context. As pointed out in section 2.1. in the conceptualization chapter, different communication constellations provide different conditions for communication and its perception. As strategically thinking actors can be expected to adapt their external communication toward different communication contexts and target audiences, this has an impact on the selection of communication strategies as well. Therefore, so as to understand why a conflict party selects a particular communication strategy, it is important to examine similar types of communication, and that, for example, external communication is not compared to communication directed to domestic audiences. This, however, distorts the analysis, as for different types of communication different conditions apply (domestic audiences can, for instance, be expected to react differently than foreign audiences). In order to avoid mixing up different types of communication in section 2.1. it was decided to focus on a single communication context: external communication. The data used for the empirical analysis, therefore, should be clearly attributable to this type of communication. As section 4.2.1.2. shall show in detail, the conflict in Israel and Palestine provides such data.

**A most-likely case for the strongest potential alternative explanation:** Finally, the case of the conflict in Israel and Palestine can even be considered a crucial case, as it can be considered a most-likely case for the strongest alternative explanation (cf. Levy 2008: 12f. on the logic of crucial case designs): As discussed in section 3.5.3.1., the strongest alternative explanation is that the selection of the conflict

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6 Side-lines are the tensions with Iran and Hezbollah (from the Israeli perspective often depicted as Iranian proxy) and partially also tensions with Arab neighboring states. These side-lines, however, cannot overshadow the dominant conflict-line of the struggle between the State of Israel and the Palestinians.

parties' external communication strategies is that determined rather by the identities of the actors than by strategic considerations. If indeed the expression of the identity of the individual communicating actors resulting from the individual history of each actor and conflict should have a bigger impact on the selection of communication strategies than strategic considerations, then this should be particularly observable in the conflict in Israel and Palestine, as their conflict is one that has been triggering stronger emotional discussions than hardly any other conflict, as the conflict has a complex, decades-long history and is one that is placed in a setting that is perceived to be particularly important for many religions and denominations. Furthermore, it is one that is characterized by a population from a wide range of diverse cultural backgrounds. Against the backdrop of the strong presence of such strong identities, an influence of emotional and/or cultural acting that even overshadows strategic considerations in the process of the selection of strategies of external communication should be, therefore, particularly likely especially in this particular case.

#### **4.1.2 The conflict in Israel and Palestine as a typical asymmetric conflict – Distribution of capabilities in the conflict in Israel and Palestine**

Having briefly outlined the reasons for selecting the case of the conflict in Israel and Palestine for the empirical analysis, the following sections shall further elaborate why the conflict in Israel can be considered an almost ideal-typical case of an asymmetric conflict: The conflict is characterized by a significantly disparate distribution of capabilities among the conflict parties: The State of Israel has by far more capabilities than both Hamas and the PLO & the PNA. This disparity, as the following sections show, can be observed for the distribution of military capabilities (section 4.1.2.1.), economic & financial capabilities (section 4.1.2.2.) and social/institutional capabilities (section 4.1.2.3.). The State of Israel is clearly a “topdog” in the asymmetric conflict, while Hamas and the PLO & the PNA are “underdogs”:

##### **4.1.2.1 Distribution of military capabilities**

Possibly the most visible aspect of the inequality among the conflict parties is the disparate distribution of military capabilities amongst the State of Israel as topdog on the one side and Hamas and the PLO & the PNA as underdogs on the other side. This disparity is well-known, but becomes even more apparent, when looking at some of the key indicators for measuring military capabilities also used in the literature on asymmetric conflicts (cf. section 3.2.2.2.):

The military superiority already becomes apparent when comparing the manpower of the military and security forces of the conflict parties: The Israeli army (the Israeli Defense Forces – IDF) has a manpower of 176,500 active soldiers and a reserve of 465,000 women and men, making the IDF one of the biggest armies in

the world (IISS 2017: 382). Additionally, the State of Israel employs a border police unit of 8,000 members (IISS 2017: 382) and has, in general, a strong and heavily equipped civilian police apparatus. In contrast, the PNA employs in their National Security Force only about 10,000 men, controlling additionally a presidential security unit (3,000 men), some special forces (1,200 men), the Palestinian police (9,000 men), a preventative security unit (4,000 men) and a civil defence unit (1,000 men) (IISS 2017: 398f.). The ruling faction in the PLO & the PNA, Fatah, additionally has a paramilitary wing called Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades with a few hundred members.<sup>7</sup> Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip, has by far fewer combatants than the State of Israel. Its paramilitary wing called Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades encompasses approximately 15,000-20,000 militants (IISS 2017: 399). Even when considering the existence of other minor militant groups such as the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and lone-wolf attackers as well, the State of Israel remains by far the conflict party with the stronger manpower.

When comparing the resources available for the military and security apparatus on both sides, an even larger contrast can be observed: In 2016 the State of Israel invested 38.3 billion US dollars into its military. This made the Israeli defense budget the 14<sup>th</sup> biggest defense budget of all states in the world (IISS 2017: 19). In 2016, the military expenditures of the State of Israel equaled 6.1% of its GDP,<sup>8</sup> which is more than the entire GDP of the Palestinian Territories.<sup>9</sup> Israel also has access to leading military technology and its military and security industry is one of the leading military and security industries worldwide. According to the SIPRI database in 2017 three of the leading top 50 arms-producing & military service companies were based in Israel.<sup>10</sup>

Consequently, the equipment of the Israeli military is by far superior as well. Unlike the Palestinian actors, the Israeli army has a strong air force, navy, high-tech military technology and even nuclear weapons. Israel is, for example, estimated to have at least 80 nuclear warheads (SIPRI 2018: 236), about 500 main battle tanks, 530 artillery vehicles, 5 submarines and 431 combat capable airplanes (IISS 2017: 383f.). In terms of conventional strength, therefore, the IDF is considered to be one of the most powerful armies in the world (O'Sullivan & Subramanian 2015: 41). The equipment of the PLO & the PNA, in contrast, is comparatively simple: The Oslo Accords limits the types of weapons the National Security Force of the

7 According to the US Department of State – Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism (2012): Country Reports on Terrorism 2011 Report, chapter 6.

8 CIA World Factbook (20.06.2018): Country Report Israel.

9 The military expenditures of the State of Israel are about 1.44 times as high than the entire Palestinian GDP; calculation:  $144.366\% = ((317.748 \text{ billion USD} * 6.1\%) / 13.426 \text{ billion USD})$ , calculated based on World Bank national accounts data, and OECD National Accounts data files, in current US dollars (World Bank 2018a) and based on IISS 2017 report.

10 According to the SIPRI Arms Industry Database (2016).

PNA, which had succeeded the Palestinian Liberation Army of the PLO (Pan 2005), is allowed to possess to small arms (Hunter & Jones 2006: 30). Though partially trained in Jordan and the USA, the unit is supposed to fulfill gendarmerie-like functions rather than those of an army<sup>11</sup> and it is often described as poorly funded and lacking efficiency (Brom 2008). Similarly, neither Hamas nor any other Palestinian paramilitary group can compete with the IDF in terms of military technology and equipment for conventional warfare: Hamas is estimated to have a yearly budget of about 700 million US dollars,<sup>12</sup> from which it spends an estimate of about 100 million US dollars on its military activities (Times of Israel 08.09.2016), a sum nowhere nearly as high the Israeli expenditures. Since the early 2000s Hamas has developed stronger, and increasingly sophisticated rocket-artillery capabilities, generally Hamas still relies on comparatively simple and inexpensive weaponry that is far from both the technological level and the destructiveness of the weaponry of their Israeli counterparts (IISS 2017: 398).

#### 4.1.2.2 Distribution of economic & financial capabilities

Similarly, marked differences can be observed for the distribution of economic & financial capabilities. The classical indicators for economic strength show a tremendous advantage for the Israeli side:

In 2016 Israel had a total gross domestic product (GDP) of 317.748 billion US dollars<sup>13</sup> and a GDP of 37,180.85 US dollars per capita.<sup>14</sup> The West Bank and Gaza, in contrast, had in 2016 together a total GDP of 13.426 billion US dollars<sup>15</sup> and a GDP of 2,949.688 US dollars per capita.<sup>16</sup>

Israel is a member of the OECD and has a “very high” Human Development Index (HDI) value (UNDP 2016). The OECD assesses Israel’s economy as strong, pointing out that Israel’s strong GDP growth was above the OECD average as well as highlighting Israel’s strong macroeconomic and fiscal performance (OECD 2018b). Israel’s public debt is well below the OECD average and even further declining, with a low level of unemployment, which continues to fall as well (OECD 2018b). The backbone of Israel’s economic strength is the high level of technological development and the diversity of Israel’s industry, encompassing, for example, a strong

11 According to Brom 2008 and US Department of State – Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) (2018) – Country Report – West Bank.

12 According to Counter Extremism Project (2018) – Report on Hamas.

13 According to World Bank national accounts data, and OECD National Accounts data files, calculated in current US dollars (World Bank 2018a).

14 According to World Bank national accounts data, and OECD National Accounts data files, calculated in current US dollars (World Bank 2018b).

15 According to World Bank national accounts data, and OECD National Accounts data files, calculated in current US dollars (World Bank 2018a).

16 According to World Bank national accounts data, and OECD National Accounts data files, calculated in current US dollars (World Bank 2018b).

start-up culture and a high number of high-tech industries.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, Israel profits from a comparatively well-developed infrastructure and a good global sales system. This way, for example, the international tourism expenditures in Israel were with 8.607 billion US dollars<sup>18</sup> more than 13 times higher than the expenditures in the Palestinian Territories (658 million US dollars<sup>19</sup>) in 2016.

The Palestinian economy, in contrast, is much weaker and more fragile,<sup>20</sup> with an HDI value of only “medium” (UNDP 2016). The life expectancy in Israel is almost 10 years higher than in Palestine (World Bank 2018c). Restrictions on the movement of people and goods (e.g. the blockade of Gaza, checkpoints and restrictions on imports and exports), as well as the destruction of infrastructure in the course of the conflict, have hampered the economic development in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip<sup>21</sup> as well as the establishment of international trade relations.<sup>22</sup> Currently, neither international airports nor ports in the Palestinian Territories are in service, this has been the case since 2001 (Washington Post 11.08.2014). The Gaza Strip even lacks a reliable electricity supply.<sup>23</sup> Besides administration and agriculture, the Palestinian economy is dominated by retail and services, construction, manufacturing, mining and, to a smaller extent, by the ICT and financial sectors; they lack the high-tech and high-profit sectors as can be found in the Israeli economy (UNSCO 2017: 2; Office of the Quartet 2018). Additionally, the unemployment rates in the Palestinian Territories are high (19.6% in 2016 in the West Bank and far higher rates in the Gaza Strip).<sup>24</sup>

#### 4.1.2.3 Distribution of social/institutional capabilities

Finally, notable differences can also be observed in the distribution of social/institutional capabilities for the different conflict parties: In this case, Israel also has more social/institutional capabilities than their opponents, both in regard to their formal recognition and the degree of development of their governance structures.

Most notably Israel is recognized, unlike the PLO & the PNA and Hamas, as a full member state of the United Nations. While the PNA has been able to join a series of international organizations and treaties, over the last years as the “State of Palestine” (Alashqar 2019), however, to date the status of full membership has been denied to them in the United Nations. Instead, the State of Palestine has only

17 CIA World Factbook (20.06.2018): Country Report Israel.

18 Calculated in current prices based on Knoema 2018a.

19 Calculated in current prices based on Knoema 2018b.

20 CIA World Factbook (04.06.2018): Country Report West Bank.

21 The Gaza Strip suffers particularly strongly, as it has been hit by the conflict and destructions particularly strongly during the last years.

22 CIA World Factbook (04.06.2018): Country Report West Bank; CIA World Factbook (03.12.2018): Country Report Gaza Strip; World Bank 2013.

23 CIA World Factbook (03.12.2018): Country Report Gaza Strip.

24 CIA World Factbook (04.06.2018): Country Report West Bank.

been able to obtain the status of a “Non-member State Permanent Observer” (and this was only achieved in 2012 after a long struggle) (UN News 29.11.2012). While many states, in the meantime, have officially recognized the State of Palestine, it still lacks the (full) recognition of three out of five veto powers of the United Nations Security Council (of the governments of the United Kingdom, France and most notably of the United States) and most Western European States, most of the NATO members and other powerful states such as Japan and Australia.<sup>25</sup> The State of Israel, in contrast, is fully recognized by all of these particularly powerful states and by the other veto powers of the Security Council as well.<sup>26</sup> However, it must be acknowledged that several countries refuse to recognize Israel’s statehood, predominantly states from the Arab world. Quantitatively, therefore, both conflict parties have a similarly high number of diplomatic relations. However, Israel is able to fund its representations more generously, giving it another advantage in relationship building. In conclusion, this institutional power constellation constitutes an advantageous position for Israel in comparison to the PLO & the PNA, even though, considering that the PLO & the PNA enjoy some formal recognition, on the one hand, and that some states refuse to recognize Israel, on the other hand, the degree of asymmetry is not as ideal-typical like for the distribution of military and economic & financial capabilities.

Even more clearly, however, is the disparity of the level of formal recognition between Hamas and Israel: Whilst the State of Israel, as mentioned, is a full member of the United Nations, the Hamas government, which controls the Gaza Strip, does not only lack international recognition, but the Hamas Movement is also designated by many states as a terror organization. Most notably, the United States<sup>27</sup> and the European Union<sup>28</sup> have deemed Hamas as a whole as a terror organization and have, therefore, imposed sanctions against the group.

The Israeli side is not only superior to the Palestinian side in terms of their formal recognition as a state, but also in terms of the degree of development of its governance structures. While Israel already declared its independence in 1948 and could since build up stable governance structures similar to those of other modern states, the state-building process on the Palestinian side has been delayed. Due to various reasons, it is still difficult for the Palestinian side to set up governance structures that fulfill the expectations that are expected from a modern state. Most importantly, the implications of the Israeli occupation and the domestic infighting between different Palestinian factions means that it remains (despite

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25 Cf. State of Palestine – Mission to the United Nations 2018.

26 Cf. Jewish Virtual Library 2018.

27 US Department of State – Bureau of Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism 2018.

28 Council of the European Union (27.01.2017): Council Decision (CFSP) 2017/154.

some progress made over the last years) difficult for the PNA to govern as government independently and efficiently within Palestine (Bouris & Kyris 2017: 763ff.; Panganiban 2015: 66ff.; Pitta 2018: 17ff.).<sup>29</sup>

#### 4.1.3 The social media as a platform for external communication and the external communication infrastructure of the conflict parties

Having outlined the advantages of selecting the case of the conflict in Israel and Palestine for the examination of the conflict parties' strategies of external communication during asymmetric conflicts and having shown what makes the conflict an almost ideal-typical example for a conflict with an asymmetric conflict structure, the following sections explain which type of data has been collected to examine the external communication of the different conflict parties in order to gain a representative impression of their external communication: The data used for examining the conflict parties' external communication in this study is the communication of the conflict parties on their most important official English-speaking social media channels. Focusing on examining data from social media offers a series of advantages:

**Social media as an accessible platform for all conflict parties:** The most important social media platforms (such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube) are comparatively easy to access for all conflict parties. Unlike setting up the infrastructure required for traditional forms of mass media, setting up a simple social media channel does not require expensive equipment or infrastructure. In order to maintain a simple social media channel merely internet access and a mobile phone is sufficient (Evans 2016: 334; Kuntsman & Stein 2010; Al-Monitor 13.10.2015).<sup>30</sup> Moreover, the infrastructure required for social media is also less vulnerable to being interfered with by military violence. Whilst broadcasting stations are easy targets for military strikes, blocking and restricting internet access even is a by far more complicated endeavor.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, whilst heavy journalist camera equipment can be easily detected, the same cannot be said for video material shot and disseminated on smartphones which are nowadays privately owned by a large number of people (Evans 2016: 334; Kuntsman & Stein 2010; Al-Monitor 13.10.2015).<sup>32</sup> Besides the chance of getting access to larger audiences abroad social media, furthermore, offers the possibility of communicating directly, without any mediation or editorial revision, with potentially large audiences abroad. Unlike in traditional mass

29 Implicitly, even the PNA acknowledges these deficits respectively challenges in its National Policy Agenda 2017-2022 (State of Palestine PMO 2016 – National Policy Agenda 2017-2022).

30 Cf. also Hanson 2013: chapter "Questioning the Media".

31 Indeed, broadcasting stations are often strategic targets in violent clashes.

32 Cf. also Hanson 2013: chapter "Questioning the Media".

media, in social media actors can directly publish their content onto the various social media platforms. Not the editorial team of a newspaper nor a broadcaster determines whether a social media post is perceived as relevant, instead, this is done by the social media users themselves and they can, therefore, decide by their interactions whether this content is shown to a broad audience or not.<sup>33</sup> This way conflict parties can spread their messages without modifications, including messages that would not have been selected by editorial boards of traditional mass media channels, they are now only limited by the terms of service outlined by the social media platforms and the reactions toward their content from the social media users. This makes the social media attractive for all conflict parties, due to the comparatively low minimal requirements, particularly for underdogs that do not have access or cannot afford other channels of external communication. Consequently, all the central conflict parties in the conflict in Israel and Palestine have a strong presence in the social media: The State of Israel as well as the PLO & the PNA and Hamas.

**Social media as a continuous and attributable source:** A big advantage of using social media data is, moreover, that social media is a source that continuously provides data for the examination of the conflict parties' external communication: On most channels, almost daily posts are published. Social media data, therefore, is a source that allows the examination of trends and developments within the external communication and not just isolated incidents. All posts being collected together on one social media channel, furthermore, are clearly attributable to the entity operating it.

**Social media as a central arena:** While traditional forms of mass media such as television, radio and newspapers continue to play an important role and remain influential, in recent years, social media has become a new arena of ever-growing importance.<sup>34</sup>

## 4.2 Identifying strategies of external communication

The first part of the empirical study aims to identify the conflict parties' strategies of external communication in the conflict in Israel and Palestine in order to answer the first research question: *Which strategies of external communication do the conflict parties choose for their external communication?* The following sections explain,

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33 In communication sciences this phenomenon is called „audience gatekeeping“. Unlike in the “traditional gatekeeping” of the traditional mass media, not an editorial team decides what contents are distributed to a wider audience but the users (Kwon et al. 2009).

34 This trend is reflected in statistics measuring the daily time spent on different types of media (cf. e.g. GlobalWebIndex 2019: 6).

first, for which reasons which social media channels have been selected for the analysis (section 4.2.1.) and, then, the methods used to identify strategies of external communication in detail: To identify strategies of external communication one sample from each side of the conflict was coded manually in a quantifying qualitative content analysis (section 4.2.2.). Then, a series of robustness checks was conducted, including an automated quantitative content analysis for a more comprehensive data set (section 4.2.3.), as well as interviews with the staff in charge of the social media channels of the conflict parties (section 4.2.4.).<sup>35</sup> While the focus of the theory and analysis lies on the variation across actors, additionally variations across time and across different social media platforms were examined as additional robustness checks to ensure that the observed selection of strategies of external communication is not merely a unique distribution for a particular moment of time and/or on a particular social media platform.

#### 4.2.1 Selection of social media channels

For both the quantifying qualitative content analysis and the automated quantitative analysis, it was necessary to decide which channels should be selected to collect the data for the analysis. Before explaining both methods, the following section, therefore, shall first explain the reasoning behind the selection of channels:

For the quantifying qualitative content analysis samples from the English-speaking Facebook channel of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and the Palestinian Information Center (PIC) were selected, the former as an example for the Israeli side, the latter as an example for the Palestinian side. Furthermore, the selection can be considered to be a particularly hard test of the theoretical expectations formulated in the theory chapter: The former is the most followed official social media channel on the Israeli side, the latter the most followed one on the Palestinian side. Furthermore, the former is a channel of a military branch and the

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35 While there is some exchange between the different branches and organizations of the PLO & the PNA, these exchanges are quite loosely (See answers on the corresponding question in the interviews with the branches and organizations of the State of Palestine / PNA / PLO, esp. Pal UN: 249f.). The exchange and cooperation between the different branches of the Israeli government are comparatively loosely, too. While a National Hasbara Headquarters was created (Molad 2012) and plans for coordination during times of emergency exist, the exchange during times of routine is only occasional and the margin of appreciation about the selection of strategies of external communication of the different branches is very high. The top-down political influence from policy-makers on the practitioners in charge of the social media work is low as well (Isr IDF: 26ff., 143ff.; Isr MFA2: 60; Isr GPO2: 117ff.; Isr COGAT: 72). This means the selection of strategies of external communication in the different branches is done comparatively independently from each other. If, nevertheless, the different branches of a conflict party choose the same strategy of external communication, therefore, this provides additional evidence for the validity of the corresponding theoretical argument.

latter a channel of a civilian branch. Functionally, the IDF as a military branch is closer to the conflict. If nevertheless, the former channel can be shown to be dominated rather by the typically less conflict-related branding and the latter by the typically more conflict-related shaming, this can provide particularly strong evidence for the validity of the theoretical expectations formulated previously in chapter 3.

For the automated quantitative analysis for the Israeli side the English-speaking Facebook pages of the IDF, the Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Prime Minister's Office, the Government Press Office and the Israeli Mission to the United Nations were selected. Additionally, the English-speaking Twitter channels of the IDF and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were also selected to control for potential variations across platforms. For the PLO & the PNA the English-speaking Facebook-page of the Department for Public Diplomacy and Policy of the PLO and the Palestinian Mission to the United Nations were selected. Additionally, the English-speaking Twitter channels of the Palestinian Mission to the United Nations and the Negotiations Affairs Department of the PLO<sup>36</sup> were selected, so as to control for potential variations across platforms. For Hamas, the general English-speaking Twitter channel of the Hamas and the English-speaking channels of its military branch (the al-Qassam Brigades) on Twitter<sup>37</sup> and of the Palestinian Information Center on Facebook were selected.

These channels were selected for the analysis for the following reasons:

1. They represent branches of the conflict parties with different functions. This allows controlling for a potential variation due to varying functions.
2. These channels are those that are the most central and active ones for the conflict parties' external communication. They are also the channels with the highest outreach, as the upcoming section 4.2.1.1. demonstrates in detail.
3. All of the channels fulfill the criteria used to define external communication in chapter 2 (cf. section 2.1), as the upcoming section 4.2.1.2. shall show in detail.

For the analysis all accessible<sup>38</sup> data until (and including) the year 2016, i.e., until the time shortly before which the analysis had started, was collected and examined.

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36 The department has no English-speaking Facebook page, only a Twitter channel.

37 While the Hamas-affiliated Palestinian Information Center has a Facebook page, there are no Facebook pages using the names "Hamas" or "al-Qassam Brigades", as corresponding pages would be deleted by Facebook due to its user policies.

38 The API access to historical tweets of Twitter is limited to about 3,200 tweets. Therefore, a maximum of about 3,200 tweets could be collected from each Twitter channel ([https://developer.twitter.com/en/docs/tweets/timelines/api-reference/get-statuses-user\\_timeline.html](https://developer.twitter.com/en/docs/tweets/timelines/api-reference/get-statuses-user_timeline.html), accessed: 27.06.2019).

#### 4.2.1.1 Reasons for selection of channels: The most important social media channels of the conflict parties

The selected channels are the channels of the conflict parties' branches that are the most central and active ones for the external communication and the channels with the highest outreach:<sup>39</sup>

##### Israel - military bodies

A particularly prominent role within the public diplomacy network of the Israeli authorities is taken on by the Israeli army: Within the Israeli army, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), the spokesperson's unit is responsible for taking over the media work, including the external communication. The IDF and its Spokesperson's Unit is one of the most important actors in the Israeli struggle for international support on social media. In early February 2018, the English-speaking IDF Facebook page exceeded the mark of two million followers,<sup>40</sup> making it to the second most-followed Facebook page of a national army after the US Army. The strong social media presence of the IDF resonated within traditional mass media as well. Especially during the Gaza War in 2014 almost all leading news outlets, broadcasters and newspapers reported on the IDF's use of social media.<sup>41</sup>

The prominent role for the external communication of the State of Israel is also reflected in the size of the unit: The first roots of the spokesperson's unit can be traced back to the beginnings of the IDF. During the last years, the IDF has further increased its efforts in the field of media (Magen & Lapid 2017) and in 2008 it had become "the largest spokesperson unit in Israel with more than 400 officers, civilians and soldiers and with a reserve unit of almost 1,200 soldiers and officers" (Gilboa & Shai 2011: 40). During the last years, in particular, considerable efforts were made to increase the unit's capacities in engaging within the realm of the social media. Initially, the social media work of the IDF started with small human and technical resources. As an IDF spokesperson describes, everything began in 2008 "with two soldiers with a laptop on the floor of [øµr the IDF Spokesperson's Unit's] Jerusalem office" (Isr IDF: 151). In the meanwhile, the social media branch

39 The channels could be verified as official channels of the conflict parties with the help of the verification marks of the social media platforms, interviews with the corresponding organizations and branches of the conflict parties and references in the existing literature on the use of social media in the conflict in Israel and Palestine.

40 Post on the English-speaking Facebook page of the IDF celebrating surpassing the threshold of two million followers: <https://www.facebook.com/idfonline/videos/1768763933146469/> (source accessed on: 27.06.2019).

41 E.g. the Guardian (cf. Guardian 16.07.2014), the Independent (cf. Independent 21.07.2014; Independent 14.07.2014), the BBC (cf. BBC 15.07.2014) and Channel 4 News (cf. Channel 4 10.07.2014) in the United Kingdom; the Tagesschau (cf. Tagesschau.de 30.07.2014) in Germany, Aljazeera (cf. Aljazeera 22.08.2014) in the Arab world.

of the unit has “grown unbelievably” (Isr IDF: 83). In 2017, the unit has already had “15 servicemen and women, including officers and soldiers” (Isr IDF: 151) that are only responsible for taking care of the international social media platforms of IDF in English and other languages, such as French and Arabic. This means that more staff is employed to take care of the external communication on social media than for domestic communication (According to an IDF spokesperson about eight to ten more people work for the Israeli social media channels in Hebrew (Isr IDF: 151)).

The IDF has channels on 30 social media platforms (as of 2015) (Channel 4 31.01.2015) including all leading social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram<sup>42</sup> and Snapchat<sup>43</sup> but also (though less active) channels on minor and more geographically, or functionally, specialized services such as e.g. the Russian social network VKontakte<sup>44</sup> or the social publishing platform Medium.<sup>45</sup> Besides in Hebrew,<sup>46</sup> the IDF Spokesperson’s Unit is active on Twitter and Facebook in English,<sup>47</sup> Spanish<sup>48</sup> and French.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, Avichay Adraee, the head of the Arab media division of the IDF Spokesperson’s Unit, has his own Twitter and Facebook accounts in Arabic.<sup>50</sup> As it is the most followed language, this study focuses on the external communication in English.

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- 42 Links to the mentioned social media platforms can be also found on the website of the IDF (<https://www.idf.il/en/>); cf. also Isr IDF: 5.
- 43 For an impression of typical content on the Snapchat channel of the IDF cf. <https://www.snapdex.com/idfofficial> (source accessed on: 27.06.2019); cf. also Isr IDF: 5.
- 44 Link to the mentioned channel: [https://vk.com/idf\\_rus](https://vk.com/idf_rus) (The channel has, however, not been updated since 2016.) (source accessed on: 27.06.2019).
- 45 Link to the mentioned channel: <https://medium.com/@IDFOfficial> (source accessed on: 27.06.2019).
- 46 Links to the mentioned channels: <https://twitter.com/idfonline>; <https://www.facebook.com/tzahalonline/> (sources accessed on: 27.06.2019).
- 47 Links to the mentioned channels: <https://twitter.com/IDFSpokesperson>; <https://www.facebook.com/idfonline/> (sources accessed on: 27.06.2019).
- 48 Links to the mentioned channels: <https://twitter.com/FDIonline>; <https://www.facebook.com/IDFspanish/> (sources accessed on: 27.06.2019).
- 49 Links to the mentioned channels: [https://twitter.com/Tsahal\\_IDF](https://twitter.com/Tsahal_IDF); <https://www.facebook.com/tsahalfr/> (sources accessed on: 27.06.2019).
- 50 Links to the mentioned channels: <https://twitter.com/AvichayAdraee>; <https://www.facebook.com/IDFarabicAvichayAdraee> (sources accessed on: 27.06.2019); Samuel-Azran & Yarchi (2018) examined the content of the Facebook page of Avichay Adraee during the Gaza War 2014 and the equivalent timeframe in 2015. Unfortunately, they do not differentiate in the presentation of their data between the two timeframes, what reduces the meaningfulness of the presented results, as different tactics might be used during routine situations than in war and emergency situations, as outlined in chapter 3 (section 3.5.2.) and shown empirically in chapter 8 (section 8.1.).

Besides the IDF Spokesperson's Unit itself, the Ministry of Defense<sup>51</sup> and some other branches of the IDF such as the Israeli Air Force<sup>52</sup> and the Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT)<sup>53</sup> have spokespeople of their own as well as separate social media channels in foreign languages. Moreover, several (high-ranking) members of the IDF have personal social media channels.<sup>54</sup> To provide an example from this group of additional military bodies the Facebook site of COGAT was selected for the empirical analysis.

#### Israel – Civilian governmental bodies

Besides the military bodies on the Israeli side, a number of civilian governmental bodies also engage extensively with social media for the purpose of reaching out to audiences abroad. Among the external communication efforts of the civilian governmental bodies in particular the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) play a central role for the Israeli external communication efforts (Molad 2012; Gilboa & Shai 2011: 36ff.)<sup>55</sup> and were, for this reason, selected for the empirical analysis.

Already early the Prime Minister's Office played a central role for the external communication efforts of the State of Israel in the social media: The social channels of the Prime Minister's Office were set up in 2010 by the PMO's Communications Department and the PMO's National Information Directorate (Israel PMO 31.08.2010). Since then the PMO has been represented with English-speaking<sup>57</sup>

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- 51 Channels in English: [https://twitter.com/Israel\\_MOD](https://twitter.com/Israel_MOD); <https://www.facebook.com/IsraelMOD/> (sources accessed on: 27.06.2019).
- 52 Channels in English: (<https://twitter.com/IAFsite>; <https://www.facebook.com/IsraeliAirForce.EN/>) (sources accessed on: 27.06.2019).
- 53 Channels in English: [https://twitter.com/cogat\\_israel](https://twitter.com/cogat_israel), <https://www.facebook.com/cogat.israel/>; channels in Arabic: <https://twitter.com/CogatArabic>; <https://www.facebook.com/COGAT.ARABIC> (sources accessed on: 27.06.2019).
- 54 E.g. the following Twitter channel: <https://twitter.com/kerenhajioff> (source accessed on: 27.06.2019).
- 55 Some authors examining Israeli public diplomacy mention also the Israeli Ministry of Tourism as a central actor for the Israeli external communication (Molad 2012; Gilboa & Shai 2011: 27,41). Indeed, a certain level of coordination between the Israeli Ministry of Tourism and the other governmental bodies exists. Moreover, representatives from the Israeli MFA highlight the usefulness of tourist experiences for painting a positive picture of Israel. However, the officials in charge of the social media channels of the Ministry of Tourism do not consider it to be their primary task to improve the image of Israel and to engage in political affairs. Instead, they consider it to be their primary task to sell the product of tourism in Israel abroad and to help this way the Israeli tourism industry (Isr MoT: 110f.).
- 56 Number of followers / fans according to the statistics from the social media platforms on 08.02.2019 (besides figures for Israel at the UN, which are from 20.06.2019).
- 57 Additionally, separate from the English-speaking channels, the directorates in charge of the communication of the PMO also manage channels in Hebrew (Facebook: <https://www.fac>

Table 6: Overview – Official English-speaking Facebook and Twitter channels of the branches of the Israeli government most relevant for its external communication efforts (The channels that were selected for the empirical analysis are marked in light grey)<sup>56</sup>

| Branch  | Function of branch                  | Platform | Channel name   | Number of fans/followers              |
|---|-------------------------------------|----------|--|---------------------------------------|
| Israeli Defense Forces                                      | Military branch                     | Facebook | Israel Defense Forces                                    | 2,141,262 fans<br>2,100,652 followers |
|   |                                     | Twitter  | @IDF   | 961K followers                        |
| Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories    | Military / humanitarian cooperation | Facebook | Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories | 10,639 fans<br>10,938 followers       |
|   |                                     | Twitter  | @cogatonline   | 9,734 followers                       |
| Ministry of Foreign Affairs                                 | External representation             | Facebook | Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs                       | 558,281 fans<br>558,262 followers     |
|   |                                     | Twitter  | @IsraelMFA   | 191K followers                        |
|   |                                     | Twitter  | @israel  | 527K followers                        |
| Mission of the State of Israel to the United Nations in NYC | External representation             | Facebook | Israel at the UN   | 95,971 fans<br>96,233 followers       |
|   |                                     | Twitter  | @IsraelinUN  | 21.3K followers                       |
| Prime Minister's Office                                     | Head of government                  | Facebook | The Prime Minister of Israel                             | 1,216,050 fans<br>1,221,367 followers |
|   |                                     | Twitter  | @IsraeliPM   | 660K followers                        |
| Government Press Office                                     | Head of government                  | Facebook | Government Press Office                                  | 6,334 fans<br>6,716 follower          |
|   |                                     | Twitter  | @GPOIsrael   | 25.1K followers                       |

channels on various social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube,

ebook.com/HEBPMO/; Twitter: [https://twitter.com/israelipm\\_heb](https://twitter.com/israelipm_heb) ). Besides the official governmental social media channels for the Prime Minister's Office, Netanyahu also has private social media channels for himself as a politician (<https://www.facebook.com/Netanyahu/>; <https://twitter.com/netanyahu>). His political party, the Likud party, is present on different social media platforms as well (<https://www.facebook.com/LikudNetanyahu/>). All these channels are, however, only available in Hebrew. The content on the channels for external communication and domestic communication on the government pages is in contrast to the channels of other branches of the Israeli government comparatively similar (the biggest difference is that speeches of the Prime Minister in English are published only as a summary on the Hebrew-speaking channel and speeches in Hebrew only as a summary on English-speaking channel). A stronger contrast, however, can be observed between the governmental channels and the party-political channels aiming mostly to a domestic audience. The latter have a more aggressive tone than the governmental channels which also aim to reach out to audiences abroad (all sources accessed on: 27.06.2019).

Flickr<sup>58</sup> and Instagram,<sup>59</sup> using the account name “The Prime Minister of Israel” for naming the channels. The centrality of the PMO for the external communication efforts of the State of Israel is also reflected in the magnitude of the communication apparatus of the PMO: Nowadays within the PMO the National Information Directorate is in charge of coordinating “the public diplomacy activities of various governmental bodies in foreign and security affairs, and on socioeconomic issues” (Israel PMO s.a.). Additionally, the PMO has a Public Diplomacy Directorate in charge of communicating the policies and decisions of the Prime Minister and its government. The directorate is headed by the Prime Minister’s Media Advisor (Israel PMO s.a.). Additionally, the Government Press Office (GPO), a department that takes care of the relations of the Israeli government with the foreign press. This department is attached to the Prime Minister’s Office. The GPO employs its own English-speaking social media channels too.

Similar to the PMO, the MFA’s centrality for the external communication efforts of the State of Israel is also reflected in the scale of the apparatus used for the production and dissemination of media content: Besides directorates dealing with political and regional issues or more organizational and administrative issues, the Israeli MFA also has a Public Diplomacy Directorate. The directorate consists of the Media and Public Affairs Division, the Division for Cultural Affairs and Scientific Cooperation and the Bureau for Religious Affairs and Relations with the Jewish Diaspora. The Media and Public Affairs Division comprises one department in charge of “branding”, a department in charge of collecting information, producing visual media content such as videos and drafting policy papers for briefing Israeli missions all around the world, as well as the spokesperson’s bureau, which is in charge of the relationship with the press. Furthermore, the division also has an academic department and a small department dealing with issues of civil society affairs, especially the battle against BDS. Finally, the ministry has also a Digital Diplomacy Department, which is in charge of all digital channels of the ministry. Their tasks include taking care of the ministry’s websites and the central social media channels of the ministry as well as supporting the social media operations of the missions worldwide (Isr MFA2: 6; cf. also Israeli MFA s.a.).

Online activities, in particular, have become an important focus of the MFA, which is also reflected in the number of social media channels that have been set up by the MFA and the number of staff it has employed to take care for these channels: The Digital Diplomacy Department, which is in charge of the online presence

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58 Cf. New Jersey Jewish News 19.06.2013; <http://www.pmo.gov.il/English/MediaCenter/Spokesman/Pages/spokemedi310810.aspx> (accessed: 08.01.2019, in the meanwhile the link is broken).

59 Link to the mentioned channel: <https://www.instagram.com/israelipm/?hl=en> (bilingual channel in English and Hebrew) (source accessed on: 27.06.2019).

of the ministry, is comprised of twelve employees. Seven of whom oversee the social media activities of the ministry on its various platforms (Twiplomacy 28.04.2015). Additionally, almost all of the embassies and diplomatic missions of the State of Israel have their own social media channels in English or in the language of the respective host country. In each of the diplomatic missions of the State of Israel abroad, there is an employee who is responsible for taking care of the social media presence of the mission (Twiplomacy 28.04.2015). Furthermore, the ministry employs some English-speaking thematic channels, e.g. on culture and sustainability.

The Palestinian National Authority (PNA) and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) While their resources to do so are much more limited than the resources of the Israeli side,<sup>60</sup> the PLO & the PNA are also active on social media in English, mostly on Facebook and Twitter. For PLO's external communication two departments play a central role: The "Negotiations Affairs Department" (PLO-NAD)<sup>61</sup> and the "Department of Public Diplomacy & Policy" (PLO-DPDP). Both have major social media channels in English. Until 2018 the DPDP was called "Department of Culture and Information" (PLO-DCI). The renaming along with some restructuring aimed to further increase the visibility of the Palestinian cause worldwide (Wafa 20.08.2018). To improve the success of its external communication and social media work the PLO has hired experienced and professional media advisors.

Additionally, the structures attached to the PNA have social media channels used for external communication: While the government organizations in Ramallah have comparatively small social media channels (The Palestinian Ministry of

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60 In comparison to the resources of the Israeli government. the resources of the PNA and its diplomatic missions are much more limited: Within the MOFA a team of three people is in charge of the communication and media work of the ministry (Pal MOFA: 117f.) and most of the Palestinian diplomatic missions cannot afford to pay for an own position for media and communication work. However, the task of external communication is still perceived in the corresponding bodies as crucial and all of these bodies have motivated individuals within their staff trying to compensate for the lack of resources by taking over the task to manage the social media channels as an extra task.

61 Link to the mentioned channel: <https://twitter.com/nadplo> (source accessed on: 27.06.2019).

62 Branches of the PLO & the PNA that do not have a function related to external representation and diplomacy are not active in English on the social media.

63 Number of followers / fans according to the statistics from the social media platforms on 08.02.2019. The mostly in comparison to the Israeli side lower numbers of fans and followers can be explained by the high number of actors communicating on behalf of the Palestinian side: not only the PLO & the PNA but also Hamas and a particularly high number of civil society actors are active in the social media. This makes it likely that the attention is split. Furthermore, the PLO & the PNA do have unlike the Israeli side hardly any, or even no, resources for funding paid advertisement on the different social media platforms (PLO MA: 97, 133, 180).

Table 7: Overview – The most relevant official English-speaking Facebook and Twitter channels of PLO & the PNA (The channels that were selected for the empirical analysis are marked in light grey)<sup>62 63</sup>

| Branch                               | Function of branch      | Platform | Channel name   | Number of fans/followers      |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|----------|--|-------------------------------|
| PLO – DPDP                           | External representation | Facebook | PLO Department of Public Diplomacy & Policy                                | 4,426 fans<br>4,486 followers |
|                                      |                         | Twitter  | @PLO_DPDP  | 1321 followers                |
| PLO - NAD                            | External representation | Twitter  | @nadplo  | 35.2K followers               |
| PNA - Ministry of Foreign Affairs    | External representation | Facebook | Remember Palestine   | 1,486 fans<br>1,543 followers |
| Permanent Observer Mission to the UN | External representation | Facebook | Permanent Observer Mission of the State of Palestine to the United Nations | 6,578 fans<br>6,615 followers |
|                                      |                         | Twitter  | @Palestine_UN  | 45.9K followers               |

Foreign Affairs – abbreviated MOFA – has a minor Facebook page in English.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, the Prime Minister’s Office of the State of Palestine has an English-speaking Twitter channel, which uses English as the main language, however, only since 2017.<sup>65</sup>), the major representations of the PLO & the PNA abroad play a particularly central role for the external communication of the Palestinian authorities. They have their own social media channels in foreign languages (especially in English). In particular, the social media channels of the Permanent Observer Mission of the State of Palestine to the United Nations in New York enjoy a high level of

64 The page has the title “Remember Palestine” (<https://www.facebook.com/palestinianministeryofforeignaffairs/>). Furthermore, very recently, in November 2018, another minor Facebook page called “Palestinian Public Diplomacy” was set up ([https://www.facebook.com/PalestinianDiplomacy/?fref=pb&hc\\_location=profile\\_browser](https://www.facebook.com/PalestinianDiplomacy/?fref=pb&hc_location=profile_browser)) (sources accessed on: 27.06.2019).

65 Until 2017 the Twitter channel (<https://twitter.com/PalestinePMO>) was in Arabic. From February 2017 the language of the Twitter channel was switched from Arabic to English. On Facebook, the Palestinian PMO remains presented only by a Facebook page using mostly Arabic language (<https://www.facebook.com/Palestine.PMO/>). Other ministries and bodies of the PNA have only social media channels for domestic purposes in Arabic. The Facebook page of the Palestinian International Cooperation Agency (PICA) is almost completely in Arabic as well, only occasionally also English translations are provided ([https://www.facebook.com/pica.mofa/?fref=pb&hc\\_location=profile\\_browser](https://www.facebook.com/pica.mofa/?fref=pb&hc_location=profile_browser)). Wafa, the most important PNA-affiliated news agency has only social media channels in Arabic, too ([https://twitter.com/wafa\\_ps](https://twitter.com/wafa_ps); <https://www.facebook.com/wafagency/>) (sources accessed on: 27.06.2019).

attention.<sup>66</sup> With about 45,900 followers the mission's Twitter channel is one of the most followed accounts among all missions to the United Nations, surpassing, for example, the accounts of the missions of influential nations such as Germany, Sweden, Italy, Japan and China. Therefore, this channel was chosen for the empirical analysis.

### Hamas

Also for Hamas, communication and media have always been a big priority. An own information section manages a comprehensive media network within the structures of Hamas (Ganor 1992). Besides channels aimed at reaching out to the Palestinian population<sup>67</sup> and the Arab world, Hamas soon set up separate channels for reaching out to non-Arab audiences abroad, investing strongly in its external communication. As early as the 1990s Hamas had a strong presence online and social media has become a key element of Hamas' external communication (Abdelal 2016: esp. 181ff.): The most noteworthy accounts, which gained a lot of traction both internally and internationally, are an English-speaking official channel named after the organization on Twitter and an English-speaking channel of the military branch of Hamas, al-Qassam Brigades (EQB),<sup>68</sup> on Twitter,<sup>69</sup> this attention was particularly noticeable during the Gaza Wars.<sup>70</sup>

Additionally, Hamas has set up news agencies to spread its messages abroad (Abdelal 2016: 183). In December 1997 Hamas initiated the Palestinian Information Center. Only a month later the English-speaking version of the website was launched (Mozes & Weimann 2010: 222). In the meanwhile, the website is available in English, Arabic, French, Russian, Turkish, Malay and Persian.<sup>72</sup> Since 2011, the Palestinian Information Center has been active on social media with channels on

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66 Links to the mentioned channels: Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Palestine.at.UN/>; Twitter: [https://twitter.com/Palestine\\_UN](https://twitter.com/Palestine_UN) (sources accessed on: 27.06.2019).

67 The network includes magazines and newspapers such as Falestin al-Muslimah and since 2006 also an own television program, Al Aqsa TV (Ganor 1992; Mozes & Weimann 2010).

68 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 (BBC 15.07.2014; Christian Science Monitor 17.07.2014; Times of Israel 08.01.2017).

69 Neither Hamas as a whole nor the al-Qassam Brigades employ an official channel on Facebook, as channels named after Hamas are not tolerated by Facebook and would be suspended by the social media platform (Times of Israel 08.01.2017).

70 E.g. the BBC (cf. BBC 15.11.2012). CNN (cf. CNN 19.11.2012), the New York Times (cf. New York Times 21.11.2012) or NBC News (cf. NBC News 30.07.2014).

71 Number of followers / fans according to the statistics from the social media platforms on 08.02.2019.

72 Cf. language options on: <https://english.palinfo.com/> (source accessed on: 28.06.2019); cf. also Mozes & Weimann 2010: 217.

*Table 8: Overview – The most relevant official English-speaking Facebook and Twitter channels of Hamas (The channels that were selected for the empirical analysis are marked in blue)*<sup>71</sup>

| Branch                         | Function of branch        | Platform | Channel name                             | Number of fans/followers          |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|----------|--|-----------------------------------|
| Hamis Movement (in general)    | Organizational leadership | Twitter  | @HamisInfoEn                             | 71.8K followers                   |
| al-Qassam Brigades (EQB)       | Military branch           | Twitter  | Different names, as frequently suspended | Currently suspended               |
| Palestinian Information Center | News agency               | Facebook | The Palestinian Information Center       | 645,591 fans<br>714,304 followers |
|                                |                           | Twitter  | @palinfoen                               | 26.7K followers                   |
| Shehab Agency                  | News agency               | Facebook | Shehab News                              | 10,395 fans<br>10,731 follower    |
|                                |                           | Twitter  | @ShehabAgencyEn                          | 67.4K followers                   |

Facebook and Twitter. More than 640,000 fans on Facebook and about 26,800 followers on Twitter follow the Palestinian Information Center now. This makes the Facebook page one of the most-followed English-speaking pages about the Palestinian cause. The social media presence of the Palestinian Information Center has become, therefore, one of the leading gateways and a backbone of Hamas' external communication. Besides the Palestinian Information Center Hamas has also established a second major news agency, the Shehab Agency (Abdelal 2016: 183). Since 2017, the agency is also present on Twitter.<sup>73</sup> As it is the most-followed channel and as it has been in operation since 2011, the English-speaking Facebook page of the Palestinian Information Center was selected for the empirical analysis.

#### 4.2.1.2 Reasons for the selection of channels: Social media as a source allowing to control for the communication context

Another reason for the selection of the channels is that all of the selected channels meet the criteria of the definition of external communication developed previously in chapter 2 (cf. section 2.1.) and, therefore, the communication context can be assumed to be the same for all of these channels. For this reason, social media is a source providing data that allows to control for the communication context very well:

##### Differentiation between external and domestic communication

All conflict parties in the conflict in Israel and Palestine and their branches that are active on social media differentiate between external and domestic communi-

73 Link to the mentioned channel: <https://twitter.com/ShehabAgencyEn> (source accessed on: 28.06.2019).

cation.<sup>74</sup> All of them have social media channels that are aimed predominantly, or arguably mostly exclusively, for external communication, i.e., on which the communicating actors adapt their messages toward foreign audiences and not to their domestic audiences.

Target group definitions of the actors – Reaching out beyond the core of own supporters

On a more specific level, the target groups of the different conflict parties and their different branches are identical: The different branches of the conflict parties active on social media have all reflected on potential audiences of their external communication and have defined the target audiences of their external communication. Both sides distinguish between three major types of international audiences that could potentially be defined as target audiences: supporters already convinced of the own position of the communicating conflict party, supporters of the opponent position and a third group that is not yet affiliated to any of both sides. Of these three groups, the biggest group is in the perception of the conflict parties the group of people that are neither clearly “Pro-Israeli” nor clearly “Pro-Palestinian”, i.e., the group of non-affiliated people.<sup>75</sup> All branches agree that out of these three potential

74 As argued before this differentiation between external and domestic communication is crucial for the analysis, as the two different communication contexts provide different conditions to which strategic actors can be expected to adapt differently. Indeed, for a majority of the different branches of the conflict parties the content of the external communication is significantly different from the content on the channels aiming to reach out to domestic audiences, as can be also observed in practice: The spokesperson's unit of the IDF, for example, differentiates clearly between foreign and domestic social media channels in the organizational structure. An own branch is responsible exclusively for the external communication. The content of the domestic and international channels varies significantly. In particular, the focus on military content is much bigger on the Hebrew channels than on the international channels. This differentiation is perceived by the IDF to be important, as the spokesperson's unit has identified the two audiences as different target groups that need to be addressed in different ways. The spokesperson's unit considers this distinction to be part of its pioneer spirit and as a unique and innovative feature of the IDF, as in other countries (such as the United States, Germany or the United Kingdom) within the military the external communication is taken up by the regular public affairs departments and there are no separate branches of the military for communicating to audiences abroad in foreign languages and other armies (such as the French army) even do not have public affairs departments at all (Isr IDF: 179-181).

75 As the following statement of a member of the digital diplomacy team of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs demonstrates, this perception of the international public is the starting point for reflections about the definition of target groups and, therefore, subsequently also for the selection of strategies of external communication by the conflict parties: “our starting point of what we are doing is the understanding that the world is divided into three groups, as far this will concern: The group that likes Israel, which is approximately 10 to 15%, the group which hates Israel, which is about the same size – about 10 to 15%, and those 70% in the middle – the elephant in the room, which do not know much or anything at all about Israel. They have never heard of Israel and they – when you say Israel to them, they say: Okay

target groups the group of non-affiliated people is the most valuable to them. This group, therefore, has been selected by all branches as the primary target group. The other two target groups are considered to be only of secondary importance (For a detailed description of the target groups cf. the chapter A.1.4. “The target groups of the external communication on the social media channels of the conflict parties in the conflict in Israel and Palestine” in the online annex).

Attributability, directionality and relationship with the target audience

Furthermore, all of the selected channels can be characterized as official channels, and all of them are easily attributable to the corresponding conflict party or at least to the branch of the conflict party to which the social media channel belongs. Moreover, all of the selected channels can be characterized as unidirectional mass communication, as the staff taking care of the channels do not interact with their audiences in a dialogical form on the channels, or at least, they do not interact a lot. Finally, all of the communicating conflict parties and all of their branches active on social media do not treat their audiences in a hostile way but rather as potential supporters, i.e., the relationship with the target audience can be considered to be positive or at least neutral.

#### 4.2.2 Quantifying qualitative content analysis

Having explained which channels have been selected for which reason, the following sections now explain the methods used for the empirical analysis: In order to identify the conflict parties' strategies of external communication used in the conflict in Israel and Palestine and so as to answer the first research question this way (*Which strategies of external communication do the conflict parties choose for their external communication?*) a quantifying<sup>76</sup> qualitative content analysis (Mayring 1991; cf. also Ramsenthaler 2013) was conducted. As the most central accounts of the conflict parties alone have produced a data set of more than 40,000 posts, two samples were selected for the manual qualitative part of the analysis, as explained in section 4.2.1.: One sample from the State of Israel representing a topdog and one sample from Hamas representing an underdog was selected. For both of the se-

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– what is it? I have never heard about it. Because they have their own lives. They live in Brazil, they live in Ethiopia, they live in – I do not know where. And they all have their own lives and their own problems” (Isr MFA2: 9).

76 To highlight that the goal of the “qualitative” (i.e., relying on manual coding) content analysis is not only to get qualitative descriptions but also an impression about frequencies the term “quantifying” was added to the name of the method (cf. a similar terminology used by other studies, e.g. Wöhlert 2007: 82ff.).

lected accounts, the last 100 Facebook posts of each year<sup>77</sup> were collected. The data was collected with the software Facepager (Jünger & Keyling 2018) and the data was stored as CSV-files.<sup>78</sup> For each post the dominant communication strategy used in the post was coded (i.e., shaming, branding or other). By coding all of the posts from the samples, the distribution of how often which communication strategies were used by the actors that had published them, i.e., general trends or, in other terms, the overall strategies of external communication of the actors (shaming-dominated, branding-dominated, balanced or other)<sup>79</sup> could be determined. The coding was conducted based on rules (cf. also Ramsenthaler 2013: 24f.) summarized in a codebook. The codebook was developed based on the conceptualizations from chapter 2 (cf. section 2.2.).<sup>80</sup>

### 4.2.3 Robustness test: Automated quantitative large-scale content analysis

As the quantifying qualitative content analysis only examines the external communication of two particular branches of the conflict parties within a quite limited timeframe, in a second step an automated quantitative large-scale content analysis was conducted in order to test whether the tendencies observed in the quantifying qualitative content analysis can also be observed over a longer timeframe and for the conflict parties' other channels. For the automated quantitative large-scale content analysis a simple dictionary approach was applied to the entire collected data set, consisting of the complete, available data from all the channels selected in section 4.2.1. for the analysis up until the end of 2016.<sup>81</sup> The analysis uses the tendency that for shaming typically negatively connoted words are used, whilst for branding no negatively connoted words are used (see also conceptualizations in chapter 2) and determines the percentage of negative communication: A post was coded as negative, if it either mentions (1) the name of the opponent or a branch or organization of the opponent<sup>82</sup> and/or (2) it mentions a word describing a neg-

77 Not only the data from 2016 but also the data from the earlier years were collected in order to get also a first impression about the development over time.

78 The process is described in detail in the manual „Collection and storing of social media data“ in the online annex (section A.2.2.).

79 The analysis focuses on frequencies and does not distinguish between different intensities of shaming or branding, as, if shaming is used, it is done almost always with a very high level of negativity and, if branding is used, it is done almost always with a very high level of positivity.

80 The full codebook is attached to this study in the online annex of this study (section A.2.1.).

81 For examples for applications of the dictionary approach and methodological descriptions cf. also: Kreuder-Sonnen 2016: 89f.; Krippendorff 2004: 283; Rauh & Bödeker 2016; Schäfer et al. 2016.

82 Both exploratory analyses and the quantifying qualitative analysis showed that if the opponent is mentioned, it is almost always done in a negative way aiming to shame the opponent.

ative action, value or attitude.<sup>83</sup> A post that was not coded by implication can be considered to be positive or at least neutral communication. A high share of coded posts, therefore, indicates a shaming-dominated external communication, while a low share indicates a branding-dominated external communication.

#### 4.2.4 Robustness test: Interviews, primary source documents and literature research

To further confirm the results of the quantifying qualitative content analysis and the automated quantitative large-scale content analysis, semi-structured interviews and a literature research were also conducted and primary source documents related to the topic of the conflict parties' external communication were collected. It was possible for almost all major branches of the State of Israel and the PLO & the PNA that are active on English-speaking social media accounts to conduct interviews with (high-ranking) officials who are currently in charge of the external communication on the corresponding accounts (for a recital of all interviewees and a description of the methods for data collection and analysis cf. section 4.3.2., as both research questions of this study were addressed in the same interviews and many of the collected documents can contribute to answering both research questions).

### 4.3 Explaining the selection of external communication strategies

Having identified the conflict parties' external communication strategies, the second part of the empirical analysis aims to explain the selection of the strategies identified in the first part in order to answer the second research question: *What shapes the selection of communication strategies of conflict parties?* Having developed a solid theory derived from the existing literature in chapter 3, the format of a within-case analysis allows theory-testing by reconstructing the selection process of strategies of external communication during asymmetric conflicts (cf. also Hak & Dul 2009a: 937ff.; Gerring 2013: 5). To demonstrate the causal interference between the conflict structure, as the condition, and the selected communication strategies, as the outcome, the empirical analysis follows the logic of pattern matching (Campbell 1988; Yin 1981: 68; Almurairi et al. 2014; Hak & Dul 2009b: 663ff.). For maximizing the (internal) validity, state-of-the-art checks and standards<sup>84</sup> for validity

83 When creating the dictionary, all words were considered that were mentioned at least ten times in the sample.

84 E.g. also checks and standards from other frameworks for the qualitative analysis of causal interferences such as (qualitative) congruence analysis and process (tracing) analysis are integrated, as far as possible.

have been integrated (for a description of the checks and standards cf. the chapter A.1.3. “Validity checks and standards” in the online annex).

### 4.3.1 Pattern matching

The logic of pattern-matching assumes that even a single case study can provide a strong test for a theory, if an entire set of expectations deduced from this theory (“a theoretically expected pattern”) can be verified empirically (Hak & Dul 2009b: 663). For the verification, the theoretically predicted patterns need to be compared with the patterns observed in the empirical analysis. If the patterns observed empirically match the patterns predicted theoretically, this indicates a good internal validity and confirms (or at least affirms) the plausibility of the theoretical propositions (Almutairi et al. 2014: 3). Good pattern-matching requires both a strong and precise theory and a comprehensive collection of empirical data (Yin 2011: 39f.).<sup>85</sup>

In this case study, the theoretically expected patterns to be examined are the three pathways derived in the theory chapter (chapter 3): the audience pathway, the prioritization pathway and the picturability pathway. All pathways represent a configuration of different elements (the steps of the pathway) and, therefore, each pathway forms a pattern suitable for examination with the pattern matching logic. Empirically, a broad range of data was collected and examined with content analyses: interviews with practitioners were conducted and press articles with references to the examined topic were collected. Additionally, conference documents, internal documents and academic contributions relevant for the research interest and, as far as applicable (e.g. to quantify the disparity among the conflict parties), statistical data were included in the analysis (cf. overview in figure 12).

### 4.3.2 Data collection

A broad range of data was collected and used for the empirical analysis, including interviews with practitioners, press articles with references to the examined topic and conference documents, internal documents and academic contributions relevant for the research interest and, as far as applicable, statistical data:

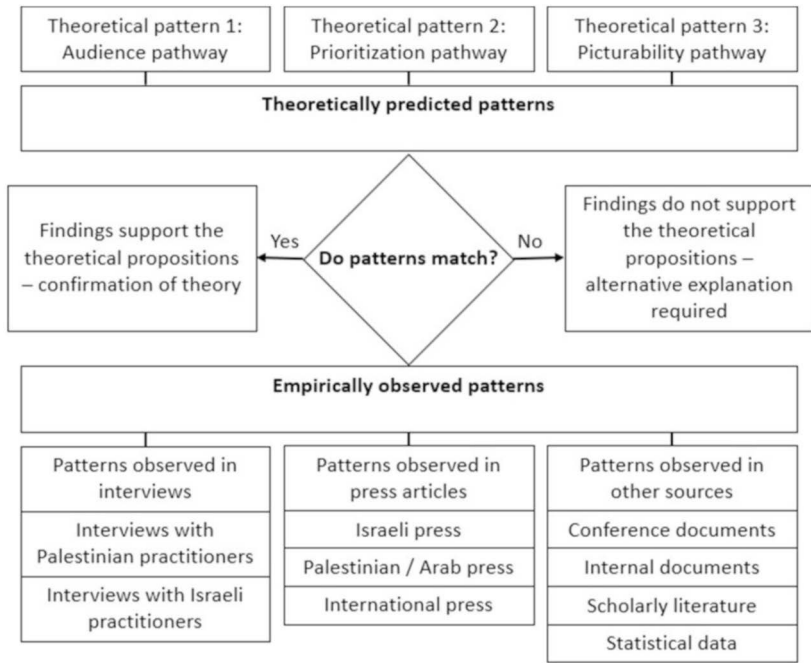
#### Interviews with practitioners

On the side of the Israeli government interviews with officials from almost all Israeli government bodies that maintain the major social media channels relevant for the Israeli external communication efforts could be conducted. Interviews were

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85 Additionally, a series of validity standards and checks were applied. For a description of the standards and checks see the chapter A.1.3. “Checks and standards for maximizing validity” in the online annex.

Figure 12: Illustration of the pattern matching process



Source: Own illustration based on Almutairi et al. 2014: 7

conducted with representatives of the spokesperson's unit of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), the Israeli Government Press Office (GPO), the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the Israeli Ministry of Tourism and the Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT). Most of the interviewees had a leading role in their units and teams. Additionally, a former IDF spokesperson and employee of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) as well as a former COGAT liaison officer and Pro-Israeli advocacy expert could be interviewed. On the side of the PLO & the PNA, interviews with officials from almost all official Palestinian bodies that maintain the major social media channels relevant for the external communication could be conducted. Interviews were conducted with representatives of the Permanent Observer Mission of the State of Palestine to the United Nations in New York, the Palestinian Mission to the United Kingdom, the General Delegation of Palestine to Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific, a PLO media advisor and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Palestine. Interviews with Hamas could not be conducted. However, the comprehensive collection of material from

the PLO & the PNA allows at least a profound analysis of one of the two (underdog) actors on the Palestinian side.

All interviews were designed as semi-structured interviews (Brinkmann 2014). To minimize the potential influence of the interviewer all interviews started with comparatively open questions, with more specific questions being asked in the second part of the interview. All interviews were conducted face-to-face in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Ramallah, London, New York and Canberra, mostly at the working spaces of the interviewees. Due to the sensitivity of the subject, many interviewees asked not to be mentioned by name. Therefore, in accordance with the established ethical standards for social-scientific research, the interviews were anonymized (Thomson et al. 2005).

Section 10.2. provides an overview of all the interviews that were conducted for this study, including the dates and locations of the interviews and an overview of which abbreviations are used to mark quotations from the corresponding interviews.

### Press articles

Additionally, press articles related to the topic of external communication during the conflict in Israel and Palestine were included in the analysis. To identify relevant articles a keyword search was conducted using keywords such as “public diplomacy”, “hasbara”<sup>86</sup> and “external communication”. Especially in the English-speaking online editions of the major Israeli newspapers (Jerusalem Post, Haaretz, The Times of Israel, ynetnews.com) plenty of guest contributions and quotations from statements of government officials, members of the Knesset and social media and public diplomacy experts could be collected, which reflect on the State of Israel’s external communication and social media work. The collection encompasses newspapers from across the entire political spectrum, making it possible to control for the political orientation as a potential interfering factor for the selection of a strategy of external communication. Major Palestinian and Arab newspapers were also searched for press articles related to the topic of external communication during the conflict in Israel and Palestine (Wafa, Ma’an News Agency, Palestinian Chronicle, Aljazeera, Al-Monitor). While these sources offer fewer references to the external communication of their own side and focus more on opinion-making articles than critical reflections of the Palestinian external communication strategy, some relevant statements and references could still be identified. Finally, articles from major international press outlets were collected. Especially during the Gaza

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86 “Hasbara” can be translated roughly with the English term “explain”. It is the Hebrew term for “external communication”. Today the Israeli practitioners rather tend to prefer the term “public diplomacy” instead, as they consider the early Hasbara efforts as too defensive (Isr MFA2: 57, 48; cf. also Kretschmer 2017: 8; Gilboa 2006: 735).

Wars in 2012 and 2014, the external communication of the IDF and Hamas was widely reflected in the international press.

### Other documents

Furthermore, the data collection is complemented by a series of other sources including conference documents,<sup>87</sup> internal documents and academic contributions which provide additional information on the processes of developing external communication strategies in the different Israeli and Palestinian branches and which also provide insights to the reflections and intentions of the involved practitioners. As far as applicable (e.g. to quantify the disparity among the conflict parties) statistical data was also included in the analysis. The data was retrieved from widely recognized databases such as the databases of the World Bank and the OECD and the CIA Factbook.

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87 Most importantly, documents from the Herzliya Conference, Israel's most prominent annual conference on global policy, could be collected. In 2010, in the context of the conference, a series of workshops were organized which reflected on Israel's external communication, in which various government officials and some other social media and public diplomacy experts took part.