Imagine There Is War and It Is Tweeted Live – An Analysis of Digital Diplomacy in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

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Abstract: The interplay between use of force in conflicts and involved parties' rhetorical efforts to determine related international discourse has long been subject of research and debate. However, how and why states adopt digital media in conflict, as well as how the emerging opportunity for "Digital Diplomacy" influences their actual communication warrants further consideration. This question raised in public, media and academia during Israel's eight-day operation "Pillar of Defense" in Gaza in November 2012, when the military confrontation between Israel and Hamas was mirrored in a clash on social media as additional battlefield. The presented analysis of Israel's online performance bases on Ben Mor's self-presentation framework (2007, 2012), which explains constraints for structure and substance of communication by which states seek to build, maintain or defend their image in home and foreign audiences. Relevant Israeli Twitter feeds are analyzed and results flanked by semi-structured interviews with Israeli communication officials.
Accordingly, Israel more than other political actors engages in proactive Digital Diplomacy, expecting benefits of directly reaching crucial publics and providing an alternative story, while accepting a certain loss of control. The constant communication aims at explaining and thus "humanizing" Israel's militarized image in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, with a focus on hard-power messages (threat scenarios, delegitimization, in-group/ out-group thinking, military instead of political successes) and the absence of political solutions, it is unlikely to convey a peace-oriented image or even – taking a longer view – to prepare the ground for a political solution.

Keywords: Digital Diplomacy, Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, Public Diplomacy, Conflict Communication, Twitter, Communication in Grand-Strategy

Introduction

"The IDF has begun a widespread campaign on terror sites & operatives in the #Gaza Strip, chief among them #Hamas & Islamic Jihad targets" (IDF_spokesperson, 2012). Sent by the Israel Defense Forces' (IDF) official Twitter account on November 14, 2012, it was the first ever tweeted declaration of war. Soon after, the first bombs hit Gaza. In the ensuing armed conflict and the Israeli Operation Pillar of Defense, the hostilities between Israel and Hamas found a new battlefield: social media. Both the IDF and Hamas' armed wing, the al-Qassam

Brigades[1], kept up dueling live Twitter feeds, each constantly informing on rocket attacks, casualty numbers as well as giving their perspective on the conflict.

Due to the mediatisation of conflict in a transforming global media landscape, the prime strategic objective is not solely military success, but also the (re)shaping of public opinion (i.e. Der Derian, 2002; McInnes, 2002). Public Diplomacy (PD) aims to inform foreign publics of a state's intentions in order to gain their – and finally their governments' – support (Zaharna, 2004, p.5). It is, next to military force and traditional diplomacy subordinated to a grand strategy (Liddel Hart, 1967), which coordinates these three components towards more fundamental political goals. One of the key driving forces that makes PD ever more important has been its digitalization: the instantaneous reporting of events has led to an increased visibility of war which amplifies the need for explanation (Mor, 2006, p.162; Sheafer & Shenhav, 2009, p.272). While the interplay between the use of force and mediated PD has been subject to research, the question how the emerging opportunity for 'Digital Diplomacy' (DD) is changing grand-strategic thinking still warrants further consideration. This is the broad research agenda that informs this study.

The Israeli case provides an opportunity to study this transformation: Israel has been criticized by its own media and academia for not putting enough emphasis on proactive communication (i.e. Sheafer & Shenhav, 2009; Gilboa, 2008). Failing to legitimize its actions especially in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Israel has maintained a militarized image. To what extent this shortcoming is tackled via digital media, is the immediate interest. This question is addressed first at the theoretical level, by resorting to the social psychological theory of self-presentation, and then empirically examined in an analysis of Israel's actual communication on Twitter during the Operation Pillar of Defense, contextualized with subsequent expert interviews.

Public diplomacy as strategic communication: A view from self-presentation theory

A state's grand strategy – as Liddel Hart already stated in 1967 – aims "to coordinate and direct all the resources of a nation, or band of nations, toward the attainment of a goal defined by fundamental policy'" (p.335). Resources can be hard power such as coercion (military threat) and payments (economic sanction) and/or soft power (attractiveness, moral authority) (Nye, 2004, p.40ff), with the grand-strategic challenge to combine them. According to Mor (2006), grand strategy thus requires the "integration and application of three fundamental components: force, diplomacy, and communication" (p.161). The latter lies at the core of Public Diplomacy (PD) which is defined as "a government's process of communicating with

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[1] Hamas Twitter account (@alqassamBrigade) was suspended by Twitter in January 2014, when users suggested that the online platform's rules were broken, which prohibit hate speech and harassment (haaretz.com, 14.Jan. 2014, Twitter suspends account of Hamas military wing).

foreign publics in an attempt to bring about understanding for its nation's ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture, as well as its national goals and current policies" (Tuch, 1990, p.3). It is especially crucial in conflicts when observable hard power is likely to hold attention (Mor, 2009, p.219; Dimitriu, 2012, p.196): public perception is then "greatly shaped by the narratives that governments construct and communicate in order to convey a sense of cause, purpose and mission" (Dimitriu, 2012, p.219). Implemented seriously, PD does not aim to win "hearts and the minds" as an end in itself but to create a basis for collaboration for achieving not only military victory but winning peace (Liddel Hart, 1967, p.362).

Despite the growing importance of PD in peace and war, and the wide acceptance of strategic communication as its conceptual core (i.e. Cull, 2008; Gilboa, 2008; Gregory, 2005; Mor, 2006; Seib, 2009; Rasmussen & Merkelsen, 2012), research on communication content and the underlying intentions – hence on the question *what* governments say when they publicly communicate, and *why* – has been rare. This is addressed here with a focus on strategic communication[2] in conflicts, using Ben Mor's definition as self-presentation "by which states, like individuals, try to affect the attributions that significant others (in this case: foreign publics) make with respect to their identity" (Mor, 2009, p.220), thereby forming public images[3]. Self-presentation follows a strategic logic: the motivation to influence images (communication goal) and the corresponding behavior (different self-presentation strategies), are a result of the communicators' ability to anticipate the relationship between what they choose to say and the effect on public opinion (ibid., p.226).

Self-presentation strategies and tactics in image-threatening or image-enhancing situations

Mor maps out why actors engage in communicative image-management as well as how they actively deploy complex rhetorical strategies to impede image attacks, so-called image predicaments. Based on an originally socio-political framework, he explains rhetorical reactions in (a) image-threatening situations when an actor's public image is under threat of being held responsible for negative actions and/or outcomes and is therefore blamed. The framework also responds to (b) image-enhancing situations when the credit for positive actions and/or outcomes is ignored or under threat of denial.

Mor further breaks down self-presentation strategies to lower-level arguments, which can be conceptualized as tactics. Self-presentation tactics challenge or accept so-called "blame components": the attribution of *responsibility* as well as the (negative or positive) perception of *actions* or *outcomes* (Tedeschi & Riess, 1981,

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[2] This definition avoids playing "the merely semantic game" (Kunczik, 2009, p.770), meaning to respond to and distinguish the variety of expressions used by scholars which are closely related or essentially mean the same as "strategic communication" - such as "soft power" (Nye, 2004), "engagement" (Gregory, 2011), "persuasion", "advocacy" (Deibel & Roberts, 1976) or "propaganda wars" (Mor, 2009; Zaharna, 2004).

[3] Mor uses "identity" and "image" inconsistently and synonymously. This paper is concerned with the attribution that audiences make with respect to state actors – defined as public images – and only uses that term.

p.5ff; Mor, 2009). Actors hence may question their responsibility or may mini-mize/maximize the perceived negativity/positivity of an action (act or policy) as well as of outcomes (consequences) for which being held responsible.

Table 1: Strategies & tactics in an image-threatening and -enhancing predic-aments

Situation	Strategy	Tactic	Typical statement	Blame component addressed:		
				Responsibility	Action	Outcome
Image-threatening						
Self-triggered: Image Protection Predicament	Blame Avoidance	Denial	"It did not hap-pen"	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge
		Dissociation	"It wasn't us"	Challenge	Accept	Accept
		Excuses (non-dispositional attribution)	"We had no choice"; "they left us no alternative" 'we did not intend X'; 'we did not foresee X'	Challenge	Challenge	Accept
		Reframing	"It was different"; "it wasn't so bad" "others have done worse"	Accept	Accept/ Challenge	Challenge / Accept
		Justification	"It was legitimate"; "we played fair"; "we meant well"	Accept	Challenge	Accept
		Regret, concessions, apologies	"We're sorry"; "forgive us"	Challenge /Accept	Accept	Accept
Opponent-triggered: Image Enhancing Opportunity	Blame Imposition	Association	"They are re-sponsible"; "they were the ones who initiated action X"; "they had a choice"	Challenge	Accept	Accept
		Delegitimization	"Their actions were not legitimate"	Accept	Challenge	Accept
		Offensive reframing	"it was different [bad, negative]"; "it was worse"	Accept	Accept	Challenge (maximize)
Image-enhancing						
Self-triggered: Image Protection Predicament	Credit Gain	Entitlements	"We were re-sponsible"; "it was our policy that brought such results"	Challenge (gain or maximize)	Accept	Accept
		Enhancements	"We paid a high cost for doing X"; "We (or our policy) managed to achieve X";	Accept	Challenge (maximize)	Challenge (maximize)
Opponent-triggered: Opportunity for image protection	Credit Denial	Offensive dissociation	"It's nothing they did"	Challenge (deny)	Accept	Accept
		Offensive reframing	"It would have happened anyhow"; "it wasn't such an achievement"; "it was different"	Accept	Challenge (deny)	Challenge (deny)

Mor, 2007; own rearrangement.

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In order to grasp the competitive and interactive character of strategic communication when several actors are dueling with alternative explanations for own and other's behavior, Mor (2007) broadened the concept as "competitive self-presentation". Competitive self-presentation also consists of strategies that focus on the opponent's responsibility, action, or outcome. Within that setting, each actor has partial control over the other's image. If one of the actors is successful with a negative campaign, the other actor is forced into defense, trying to protect its image against further deterioration (ibid., p.668f). An image-threatening situation for the adversary equals an opportunity for own image enhancement. Table 1 shows a matrix of strategies and tactics for both image-threatening and image-enhancing situations, which provides a framework for empirical analysis.

Strategies and tactics of self-validation

A precondition for self-presentation's effectiveness is to support claims with evidence, to intertwine self-presentation arguments with self-validation arguments (Mor, 2012, p.395). Credibility talk is urgent when unexpected behavior creates irritation and demands for explanation (ibid. p.402ff), for example when actors behave inconsistently as "credibility is diminished when words and actions do not match" (Gregory, 2005, p.17).

Especially in conflict situations, claims about motivations are questioned by the public or the adversary, with politics turning into a contest of competitive credibility.

Credibility talk then can either mean direct crediting own claims by introducing new factual material or physical evidence (such as photos, video clips, leaflets). If an actor pursues indirect crediting, he either presents arguments on the reliability of evidence presented or on the reliability of interpretation by referring to credibly third parties sharing or endorsing the presented interpretation. Another indirect crediting strategy is to project character credibility through the provision of common indicators of sincerity or integrity.

Strategies of discrediting the opponent's accounts have the same objective and are even more prevalent in actual rhetoric. They follow either a direct argumentation that opponent claims are inconsistent or unsupported by evidence; or actors deploy an indirect argumentation by presenting facts that undermine the opponent's accounts or its self-proclaimed motivation.

Digital diplomacy: New affordances for self-presentation

Considering that "channels through which nations communicate with their publics are almost as important as the messages themselves" (Uysal, Schroeder & Taylor, 2012, p.339), digitalization has changed these contests of self-presentation and self-validation. It has "devolved state influence over its national image while simultaneously offering new tools for the practice of public diplomacy" (Arsenault,

2009, p.136). Digitalization thus affords the practice of "Digital Diplomacy"[4] (DD) as self-presentation on digital media or by using digital tools (specific services i.e. Facebook, Twitter). Digital media provide a channel for self-presentation that allows direct, unfiltered information subsidies as a method for a consistent image-building. It also affords social interaction and a two-way communication that characterizes DD as dialogue-oriented while traditional diplomacy often inherited a monologue-character (Kampf, Segev & Manor, 2015).

The relevance of digital media as an additional communication channel in conflicts is related to the assumed impact of traditional media: the way media accepts and frames chosen self-presentation strategies has the decisive effect on the public's support for war and peace. The expected causal chain leads from media news coverage to public attitudes, again to government policy, and finally contributes to the (de-)escalation of conflict (Wolfsfeld, 2004, p.75). The rise of digital media, as Kaempf argues, results in "a massive broadening and diversification of the number of actors who can produce media and utilize media platforms" (2013, p.599). Image predicaments are likely becoming intensified not only due to the plentitude of detractors but also due to the rapidity in which they reach global audiences – which intensifies the need for immediate competitive self-presentation.

On the other hand, digital media affords new ways to prepare for and deal with image predicament situations. In the conflict fermenting and conflict receding phases, Zhang (2013, p.1325) sees their power especially as tactical tools related to daily, routine and small-scale actions. They are helpful in identifying new predicaments, to decide about action, to proactively and reactively communicate and after closing an issue, to continue communication in order to build relationships.
Furthermore, even though the number of critical voices potentially increases, official communication via these channels is perceived as relatively trustworthy – even more than via traditional media (Johnson & Kaye, 2000, 2004, 2010) – and may foster character-credibility of states. This, however, does not obscure the importance of self-validation with accurate, credible, and stringently ethical messages (Arsenault, 2009, p.141) once you have gathered attention.

Research so far has shown a general disconnection between digital media's assumed potential for interactive communication, and how it is utilized by political actors in general (Jackson & Lilleker, 2009; Peterson, 2012) and by governments in particular (Uysal et al., 2012; Kampf et al., 2015). Kampf et al. (2015) showed – based on cross-national comparison of social media content by eleven foreign ministries – that engagement is limited to specific issues and dialogic communication is rare. Content represents a continuous supply of press releases targeting foreign, rather than domestic, publics. Druckman, Kifer and Parkin (2007, p. 428) trace

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[4] Government officials, journalists and academia refer to new PD practices on digital media in various terms, i.e. e-diplomacy (Lee, 2009; BBC News, 2012), Digital Diplomacy (Zhang, 2012; The economist, 2012), Public Relations 2.0, Diplomacy 2.0 (Hayden, 2012; Arsenault, 2009), cyber diplomacy (Gilboa, 2008), web-based public diplomacy, the creation of "e-images" (Gilboa, 2008) or Twiplomacy (Sandre, 2012).

that to a dilemma which all political actors face: the tradeoff between (information) control and flexibility. While appropriation of technical affordances seems to not greatly vary cross-nationally, self-presentation strategies as message content are "likely to show variability according to the different interactional contexts they are constructed to serve" (Edwards & Potter, 1992, p.28). Thus a specific context (Israeli-Palestinian conflict), and specific actor (Israel) are selected to be analyzed in order to understand the motivations for and suspicions towards DD as well as the resulting message content.

The Israeli experience of self-presentation

Israel faces recurring public criticism for its policy decisions, military actions, and is more than most countries challenged to pursue self-presentation. This is firstly due to the consistency of Israel's involvement in the conflict over the creation of a sovereign Palestinian state – a conflict between the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) and the Israeli government, which has existed since the formation of Israel in 1948. The regular outbreaks of violent conflict in particular require explanation for the use of military force.

Secondly, the conflict attracts a significant amount of media and thus international attention (Shenhav, Sheafer, & Gabay, 2010, S. 146). The persistent medialization emphasizes the need for persistent self-presentation to account for omnipresent actions – especially since all parties strive to achieve favorable media coverage as a prerequisite for political influence (ibid.).

Thirdly, Israel as a democratic state is not only legally bound to international law but also expected "to implicate the legitimacy of its fight against its adversaries" (Kedar & Mansdorf, 2008, p.40). This complicates due to the asymmetry of conflict: it is not an interstate conflict but carried out between Israel as a state and a variety of political groups in the Palestinian Territories and the Arab neighboring countries. The governing authority in the Palestinian Territories is a recently unified interim government of the secular Fatah party and the Hamas, an elected Islamic-fundamentalist group. Hamas has conducted many anti-Israel attacks in both Israel and the Palestinian territories since the 1990s – reason for being classified as terrorists by the United States, Germany, and other Western powers. Israel as well as other Western powers has struggled with how to interact with these groups as they are partly elected but also partly classified as terrorist. Plus, Israel's military superiority is an undeniable fact, which leaves room for anti-Israeli criticism (ibid., p.38).

This complexity of legality of, legitimacy of and capacity for the use of force amplifies the need for explanation, which has in fact been long noticed by politicians and scholars (Shenhav et al., 2010). Already in 1982, the Knesset, the Israeli Parliament, adopted the Hebrew term for "explanation" – *Hasbara* – not only as a keyword within the political discourse but also a key concept in Israel's international relations. Despite conceptual differences, Shenhav et al. (2010, p. 145) suggested

considering Hasbara as the Israeli implementation in the larger field of PD[5].
Criticism of lacking strategic Hasbara is as old as the concept. PD as a grand-strategic approach takes public opinion and mediated environment into consideration as part of policymaking, integrating long-term media relations. Hasbara, on the other hand, "assumes a tactical, rather than a strategic approach aiming to explain actions and policy" (ibid., p.147), which tends to result in "limited, defensive and apologetic" messages (Gilboa, 2008, p.735).

One branch of research argues that this constant backdrop is the cause for Israel's bad international image, described as the "Hasbara problem" (Greenfield, 2012). Messages by Israeli authorities were identified as reactive, uncoordinated and inappropriate to draw a consistent big picture (Shenhav et al., 2010, p.158). While focusing on current news management, Israel "failed to prepare for, and to deal with, Arab and Palestinian propaganda" (State Comptroller, 2001/2002 [Hebrew]; as cited in Gilboa, 2008, p.727). By denying access for journalists to control information flow instead of proactive media management, Israel seemed to move away from democratic standards (Banham, 2013).
Israel also has missed the chance to build a positive image during the few periods of constructive negotiations (Gilboa, 2008, p.715), being unaware that also "good policy, such as a peace initiative, needs (...) PD to convince others that it is useful and good" (ibid., p.736). As political context and goals were hardly clearly communicated, the "Gordian knot between the Israeli presence in international media and the harsh context of military violence (...) becomes even more difficult to untie" as Shenhav et al. (2010, p. 157f.) argues. The reasons for the Hasbara problem were attributed to a lack of coherent communication strategies, a lack of coordination among the ministries involved, and to inadequate funding (Gilboa, 2006, p.715, based on the State Comptroller reports).

Other scholars argue that there has recently been a massive growth in Hasbara, indicated by the increase in funding for it and by its professionalized and centralized character (Aouragh, 2016; Greenfield, 2012). In fact, in 2007, the national Hasbara headquarter was established in the Prime Minister's Office from where so-called Hasbara authorities are to follow a reliable, uniform and consistent Hasbara policy (Greenfield, 2012, p.28). Especially DD seemed to be expanded in crisis situations: instead of inconsistent messaging and access control, dynamic media management was now pre-planned and carried out in a "situation room", mainly by young soldiers. While Gilboa still criticized a weak "cyber PD" in 2008 (p.74), a "new media strategy" aimed to round-the-clock undermine anti-Israel agenda online (Greenfield, 2012, p.35). And yet, this second school of thought argues that despite those efforts, Israel's image as well as its international relations has not noticeably changed. They blame not the communication but the actual policies leading to Israel's image as a "colonial power engaged in violent occupation" (Aouragh, 2016). Aouragh (2016) even sees Hasbara online as damaging for Israel's image as self-

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[5] The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs has also adopted PD as more universal translation for Hasbara (Shenhav et al., 2010, p. 145)

presentation would seem obviously contradictory to Israel-critical online journalism and suppression of solidarity for Palestine would be exposed. All this would trigger criticism, with public support diminishing.

In short: theory and research on Hasbara seems as controversial as the conflict situation itself. Perspectives range from considering Hasbara as the main problem for Israel's image while disregarding the impact of problematic political actions, to seeing Israeli DD as sophisticated and beneficial for image-improving, to portraying digital media as the public space where Israel's colonialist behavior and suppression would be revealed – no matter how well-thought through self-presentation ever would be. While the internal restructuring and the emphasis on the use of digital media – especially in acute war situations – is a fact, there is no research yet on the actual impact of Israel's DD, no evaluation of its effect on image-making, to support any of those arguments.

Research questions

Before, however, measuring impact, actual performance on digital media needs to be mapped and contextualized first – which is likewise a lacuna in research. Mor's self-presentation framework, which explains constraints for structure and substance of communication by which states seek to build, maintain or defend their image, will be applied here for that purpose. While Mor himself spot-checked the framework through plausibility probes (2009, 2012), a more comprehensive analysis aims to answer the research question (RQ) *What strategies of image projection does Israel employ on digital media?*

This research question comprises three sub-questions: Against the background of Israel's difficulties to frame coherent alternative explanations, rarely responding to (opponent-triggered) image-threatening situations, the first sub-question is: (SQ 1) *What strategies does Israel employ in image-threatening situations on digital media?* In order to evaluate to which extent Israel unties the "Gordion Knot" between international presence in the context of military violence, the second sub-question follows as: (SQ 2) *What strategies does Israel employ in image-enhancing situations on digital media?* Thirdly, the effectiveness of chosen self-presentation strategies depends on how communicators support claims they make with respect to responsibility, actions and outcomes - which leads to the sub-question (SQ 3) *How does Israel credit its messages?*

Methodology and research design

The research questions were addressed with a mixed methods design of both quantitative and qualitative analysis of Twitter messages (Tweets), combined with expert interviews with Israeli Hasbara actors.

Twitter is considered as a relevant tool for DD since it is (a) a direct thematic-informational self-presentation channel, especially important in conflict when other media sources lag behind (Howard, 2011; Verweij, 2012; Papacharissi & Oliviera, 2012), and (b) it presents access to a wide network in which governments can engage with the public as well as with opinion leaders such as journalists, politicians, bloggers (Larsson & Moe, 2012, p.741f.; Verweij, 2012, p.683). Twitter was also attracting more attention than any other factor in the media campaign accompanying the operation Pillar of Defense (Hadari & Turgeman, 2016, p.400). The derivate version of a weblog allows its users to send status updates from their account – tweets – with up to 140 characters each, which present here text units for analysis.

Content analysis

A content analysis as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (…) to the contexts of their use" (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 18) structured the actual implementation to make inferences to the political context. The illustration of quantitative results by selected tweets guaranteed contextualization (qualitative advantage) without diminishing the explicitness and objectivity of scientific data processing (quantitative advantage) (Krippendorff, 2013, p.89f.).

Two accounts of Hasbara actors were chosen for their range of coverage, their official PD mandate in times of conflict and English as operating language: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' account (@IsraelMFA) and the IDF spokesperson's account (@IDFspokesperson). An analysis was conducted on the totality of the tweets over the sample period of the 8-day Operation Pillar of Defense (14-21 December 2012: 269 tweets by @MFA_Israel; 351 tweets by @IDF_spokesperson adding up to N=620 tweets).

The Twitter analytics tool "twitonomy" (twitonomy.com, 2014) facilitated data collection as it allows retrieving tweets according to selected criteria. The sample material was downloaded on 10 January 2014. It was examined by using a coding protocol which included verbal definitions of variables based on theory, former plausibility probes (Mor, 2007, 2009, 2012), and test coding. Analysis focused on message text in order to detect strategies and tactics of image projection. A test of intracoder reliability, using Holsti-coefficient (Holsti, 1969), proved an acceptable reliability standard (100 percent for formalities; 88.3 percent for strategies and tactics).

Expert interviews

In order to prevent theory ending up in a catalogue of strategies and tactics, the second step reflects actual implementation against motivation for DD. Therefore, semi-structured expert interviews with official IDF and MFA representatives were conducted (June 11 & 12 2013, Tel Aviv & Jerusalem). Yoram Morad (Director, MFA's Department of Digital Diplomacy), Paul Hirschson (Deputy Spokesperson, MFA), Allison Rubin (MFA Public Diplomacy Office) and Sacha Dratwa (Head of

New Media Desk, IDF Spokesperson's Unit) were chosen as representatives of the so-called "functional elite" (Meuser & Nagel, 2002, p.75). Since their expert knowledge has the potential to become hegemonic in an organizational and functional context (Bogner & Menz, 2002, p.85), their statements implicate DD strategies and goals, as well as their relevance next to military and political goals. The interview guideline consisted of 22 open questions, sub-questions and exemplary alternatives on (I) Hasbara in general and the participant's function, (II) their perception of DD, (III) the relevance of Twitter as a DD tool, (IV) Operation Pillar of Defense as an example for DD in conflict situation. The interviews were transcribed while engaging in some grammatical editing and directly confronted[6] with actual content/ tweets.

Findings: Strategies and tactics of image projection

Quantitative analysis showed that self- and other-presentation encompassed a significant portion of strategic communication (84% of tweets encompassed at least one strategy; in 37% even two). Experts explained these results with Israel's early awareness for DD as the Israeli MFA was the first foreign ministry ever to set up a website (YM_87f); and the "need which is stronger than in other places" (YM_87f) to bypass traditional gatekeepers and to be directly where the audience is (YM_79). This need is firstly related to a perceived bias against Israel in traditional conflict coverage and secondly to respond to Israel's complex social setting. "Foreign public" means on the one hand the Jewish Diaspora in order to mobilize them as so called "citizens diplomats" (YM_390). But it also proved to be "the only way in" (PH_YM_264) to Iran and the "Arab world", which raised hopes to break through walls of censorship to create a dialogue with Arab foreign publics (YM_279).

The MFA's prime communication goal seemed proactive image broadening, to open up the "relatively narrow prism of the conflict and political situation" (YM_96f) as a preparation for image predicaments:

> "We try to cultivate our audience, to make it bigger (...) and to keep them interested in what we have to tell about Israel. Also, because we know, that when a crisis comes, we have to have our audience ready in a way that they see Israel in a broader context" (ibid.).

The IDF with its military information monopoly on the other hand, primarily considers Twitter as a tool to respond to predicaments in order to maintain credibility: "People are listening to your bombs and you need to respond to the bombs" (SD_183f).

Digital media is not seen as a platform for banalities but "(...) to defend Israel, not

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[6] Quotes are cited with the abbreviation of the name (YM= Yoram Morad; AR= Allison Rubin; SD= Sacha Dratwa; PH= Paul Hirschson) in conjunction with the line number in the interview transcripts (i.e. SD_162). Hirschson participated in two interviews. He is quoted in conjunction with his interview partner, and the line number (i.e. PH_AR_87). Tweets are cited as handle name in conjunction with the tweet number (i.e. MFA_25 or IDF_276).

only on the actual battle field but also on this new field" (SD_286f). The perceived chances afforded by digital media seemed to correlate with the acceptance of potential mistakes. Due to the empowerment of diplomats and reduced centralized control, problematic content was expected – "mistakes have to happen" (YM_182f) – and seen as incitement to understand DD's conditions better:

> "But when we ask ourselves - what should we do? Should we limit the activity and freedom of people and thus not using the advantages of these platforms the way we can - or should we instead develop the expertise how to deal with these prices we have to pay?" (YM_193f)

A range of Israel-specific self-presentation patterns was identified, in most cases intertwined with self-validation claims. This underlines the used framework's construct validity. The Israeli specific strategies and tactics presented in Table 2 are specified in the following.

Table 2: Israel-specific self-presentation and -validation tactics

Situation	Strategy	Tactic	Function	Self-Validation Tactic
Image-protecting	Blame Imposition	Association: Hamas & "Gaza"	Simplifying complex actor constellation; balancing asymmetry (Israel not the aggressor)	Facts of association; support by third actors
		Delegitimization: Acts of terrorism	Simplifying moral status quo; creating acceptance for counterterrorism	Invoking Western norm:
		Delegitimization: Hamas' Double War Crime	Simplifying moral status quo; creating acceptance for counterterrorism	Support by third actors; invoking global norm (LOAC)
		Offensive reframing: Use Fajr-5 missiles	Technological differentiation; balancing asymmetry (challenging military inferiority)	Factual claims about Fajr-5 Missiles
	Blame Avoidance	Reframing: Objectification	Balancing asymmetry (challenging abuse of military superiority); emphasizing proportionality of force	Factual claims about Iron Dome; on-site data collection
		(Offensive) Reframing: Israel under fire	Counterbalancing aggressor image; proportionality of force; creation of threat scenario	Factual Claims: Update on rocket numbers; personalization
		Justification: Right to self-defense	Counterbalancing aggressor image;	Invoking global norm
Image-Enhancing	Credit Gain	Entitlement/enhancement: Humanitarian aid	Softening image, showing "human face"	Invoking global norm (LOAC); change in policy supports character-credibility
		Entitlement: Military success	Raising Moral, intimidating opponent	Factual claims: updates on targeted infrastructure

Strategies and tactics in image-threatening situations

Messages showed a heavy dose of blame imposition on groups that are widely acknowledged as terror organizations (61%), and related tactics such as association (15%), delegitimization (19%), and offensive reframing (27%) as expected after Mor's plausibility probes (Mor, 2009, p.237). Blame avoidance strategies were used in a smaller portion (19%), predominantly reframing (9%) and justification tactics (9%). Responsibility for actions was hardly challenged but competence for the use of military force mostly assigned to the IDF as the military organ (39%).

(i)   Association & Delegitimization: "Hamas and other terrorists in Gaza"

The first two tactics functioned as simplification and interpretation of the status quo: responsibility was solely associated with Hamas or other terroristic groups (MFA: 27%; IDF: 39%) – or to "Gaza" as a 'quasi-actor' (MFA: 13%; IDF: 29%; e.g. "*Iron Dome system successfully intercepted 28 rockets fired from #Gaza at major Israeli population centers*" IDF_310. This reduced the complexity of the conflict by leaving out moderate political parties and civil society.

This tactic required a parallel evaluation of associated actions. The Hasbara authorities aimed to clarify Hamas' ambiguous moral and legal status as well as to elucidate their use of force by choosing strategies of delegitimization such as:
• directly framing Hamas as terrorists ("*Hamas = Terror: Terror must be stopped, Hamas must be stopped! [...] #IsraelUnderFire*"; MFA_216) and
• indirectly framing Hamas as terrorists by neglecting the alternative interpretation of Hamas as a legitimate political party ("*Think #Hamas is just a political party? Think again. [...] #Gaza*"; IDF_505).
Hamas' ideology and resulting actions were delegitimized by describing it as "global jihad" (e.g. MFA_203). This tactic emphasized the intentionality of Hamas' attacks on Israel's citizens, assigned the reason for the conflict to Hamas' ideology and aimed to generate public support for counterterrorism.

(ii)   Delegitimization: Hamas' double war crime

Delegitimization frequently (IDF 15%; MFA 9%) referred to Hamas' double war crime of involving "its own civilians" by using them as "human shields" *("#Hamas doesn't seem to have any problem with using #Gaza's civilian population as human shields. [...]*"; MFA_167 also e.g. IDF_445), while at the same time firing at Israeli civilians. This practice has seen a revival in recent conflicts, by which the weaker party has often sought to gain an advantage over the militarily superior enemy. It presents an infringement to humanitarian law (Law of Armed Conflict, LOAC) and is one reason why Hamas is categorized as a terror organization (Goodman, 2014). By emphasizing that even Palestinian civilians suffer under Hamas, Hasbara actors responded to widespread sympathy for suffering Palestinians (Mor, 2009, p.237), while maximizing Hamas' responsibility:

> "All we had to do was to show Hamas' actions. (...) It is a fact that more Palestinians were killed by Palestinians than by Israelis during the years of the conflict. The famous image was the number of people who were executed by Hamas and then dragged on the street behind motorcycles. This is Hamas. We just had to present that this is our enemy. They stand against each and every value of the rest of the world" (YM_399f).

Hasbara authorities emphasized that while Hamas accept casualties or even understand them as a part of its belligerence, Israel does everything to avoid them, which conforms Mor's finding (2009, p.237) of 'moral differentiation' (delegitimization combined with justification) as a major narrative. However, the continuation of own attacks, despite the evident knowledge on intermingled civilians, undermines their own recurring argument. This contradiction – which became evident during the attack on a media outlet in Gaza[7] – does not only create new self-triggered image predicaments, in which non-dispositional attribution ("we did not foresee") becomes non-credible, it more fundamentally questions Israel's character-credibility. It triggers the perception that it is immoral for Hamas to use Human Shields but likewise immoral for Israel to bomb Human Shields (see Goodman, 2014), which debilitates moral differentiation and again fails to respond to the international indignation about civilian victims of Israel's military actions.

(iii)   Reframing: Objectification

In order to avoid criticism for disproportionate use of force and minimize the outcome negativity, the IDF's actions were mostly presented as aimed at the technical infrastructure that facilitates execution of terroristic acts (IDF: 15%; MFA: 9%). In combination with denominating the Iron Dome – a truck-towed mobile air defense system, which counters short-range missiles and rockets which pose a threat to civilian population – as an important 'actor' (assigning responsibility), Israel's belligerence was objectified. The impression of proportionality was created by presenting the undeniable technological edge as military competence of precise targeting and the capability to avoid casualties or demolition, which challenged the negativity of the action.

(iv)   (Offensive) Reframing: Use of Fajr-5 rockets

While the use of both justification and delegitimizing tactic resulted in moral differentiation, the IDF also contrasted the Israeli military knowledge – employed to destroy rockets at Israel and protect citizens – with Hamas military capacity to reach and endanger several millions of civilians with Fajr-5 missiles[8] ("*Fajr-5,Iranian-made rocket in Hamas' hands, has a range that threatens over 3.5M*

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[7] On November 18, 2012, the Israeli air force struck a media building, hosting Hamas TV in which four Jihad militants were said to be hiding (Kalman, Nov. 19, 2012). However, also several local and foreign correspondents were in the building (ibid.), considered as civilian targets according to the Geneva Convention. At least nine journalists were injured.

[8] The Fajr-5 is an Iranian made 333mm mobile multiple rocket launcher system, which reportedly has a range of 75 kilometers and can fire one rocket every four or eight seconds (see http://www.armyrecognition.com/iran_iranian_army_artillery_vehicles_systems_uk/fadjr-5_fajr-5_333mm_multiple_rocket_launcher_system_technical_data_sheet_specifications.html from December 22, 2011).

Israelis [...] #PillarOfDefense" IDF_404; i.e. also IDF_295). This tactic combination as 'technological differentiation' illustrates that (a) Hamas are not defenseless and Israel's military superiority is overestimated (b) that Hamas exploited their military capacity in order to harm civilians. This narrative could be seen as one strategy to counterbalance the "asymmetric advantage born of psychological impunity" (Kedar & Mansdorf, 2008, p.38) which Hamas enjoys according to many Israeli officials.

(v)　(Offensive) Reframing: Israel under fire

Reframing in order to illustrate "why Israel was forced into this operation" (YM_376) was according to Yoram Morad a core message during Pillar of Defense, which was prepared at the Hasbara Forum in the days before the operation. The first tweet answered this question, conveying that the IDF only reacted to – as typed "in bigger letters: '130 rockets in 72 hours'" (YM_362). It created a background against which force could be perceived as necessary, challenging its negativity. Presenting a reactive context of "defense" or "punishment" instead of a proactive context of "preemption" or "initiation" made retaliation appear less objectionable. By describing the ongoing rocket threat (e.g. IDF_419, IDF_552) as well as constantly updating on Hamas' rockets during PoD ("*Over 420 rockets fired from the #Gaza Strip hit southern #Israel in the past two days*"; IDF_378; also IDF_403), the operation was presented as indispensable for self-defense.

"The second [message] put emphasis on the people around Gaza and also Ashdod and Beer-Sheva – but we focused on the struggle of people" (YM_377f). This offensive reframing maximized the negativity of the outcome by presenting the life of Israelis ("*Harmless rockets? Staggering number of kids in southern #Israel have PTSD [...] #Gaza*", IDF_492, also IDF_392).

(vi)　Justification: The right to self-defense

Within this offensively reframed situation, justification of own actions could become meaningful. SD saw the "biggest message" (SD_89) in giving the IDF further legitimization. This materialized in the recurring question "what would you do if your country was attacked?" Officials neither challenged the responsibility for action, nor the outcomes but invoked the universally accepted norm of a right to self-defense (e.g. MFA_33). Military actions thus were presented as the last option. The more humanitarian message –

> "Look, we don't want to be here, we don't want to be in this conflict, we want to get it over as quickly as we possibly can, we are left with no choice and we do what we possibly can to avoid civilians" (PH_YM_419f) –

was targeted at people in Gaza, the wider Arab world and the West. It was particularly conveyed by the MFA (ibid.; also MFA_32).

Strategies and tactics in image-enhancing situations

The quantitative analysis shows that Hasbara actors realized the value of promoting positive policies and communicate in image-enhancing situations. They mostly used the credit gain strategy (19%) in form of entitling (17%), in order to increase the positivity of own actions and /or outcomes. Credit denial strategies were not detected since Hamas did not give reason to relate positive action/ outcome to them.

(vii) Entitlements: Destruction of terror infrastructure

A large portion of image-enhancing predicaments was only generated by (offensive) reframing (22.1%), by creating threat situations in which military use would not only be accepted but perceived as success ("*This morning, the IDF targeted #Hamas operatives in their hiding place in #Gaza where they were building rockets. Direct hit was confirmed*", IDF_597; "*Today the IDF also targeted a number of #Hamas &amp (sic!); Palestinian Islamic Jihad terrorist squads that were coordinating attacks against #Israel*", IDF_611). Updates on intercepted rockets as well as precisely targeted terror sites took a big share of the tweets, mainly sent by the IDF. Messages on military success were according to Paul Hirschson targeted at (a) the Israeli audience in order to raise the moral (PH_YM_411f) and (b) to the Arab world as an intimidation to show that "we are big and ugly and nasty and you better be careful" (PH_YM_423) and "see, we can get you!" (PH_YM_430).
However, credit gain never referred to successful policies but to military competence which could intensify a militarized image: the inability to shape messages directed to the own constituency and to global audiences with different values at the same time is evident here.

(viii) Enhancements /Entitlements: Responsibility for humanitarian aid

Especially directed at the Western publics, diaspora and the wider Arab world, Hasbara actors emphasized the responsibility for humanitarian actions, such as aid deliveries or supply of medical treatment (PH_YM_419) ("*Flow of humanitarian aid into #Gaza goes unhindered, so as to not to harm necessary civilian lifelines. #IsraelUnderFire #PillarOfDefense*", MFA_35; see also MFA_195).
It aimed at showing the IDF's "human face" (SD_95). The positivity of own actions was maximized by emphasizing the difficulty of ensuring humanitarian aid despite the counter-efforts of Hamas (enhancements).
As during former peace processes, diplomatic efforts on a political level were not communicated. Real-political developments were rather in a mismatch with communicated events: while Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi met with U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal, but not with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu or any Israeli official (Gollom, 2012), the Hasbara authorities emphasized their responsibility for the final agreement (implicit entitling: "*After 8 days, the IDF has accomplished its goals in Operation Pillar of Defense. A cease-fire agreement has come into effect*"; IDF_616). Negoti-

ations were only marginally mentioned, especially compared to the military updates, so that the ceasefire appeared sudden and without transparent genesis. Israel – due to a lack of diplomatic efforts – did not appear as a driving force for peace, which undermines its self-perception of a "peace loving" society (Pinson, Levy & Soker, 2010, p.258).

Self-validation strategies

The importance of perceived character-credibility and the use of crediting strategies (SQ 3) were not only reflected by the quantitative use (77%: at least one tactic; 12%: two tactics). It was also shown in the expert interviews:

> "all we have is our reputation. We want people to gather the information from us and to believe it and to know that there are good chances that what we are telling them is true" (YM_105f).

Unexpectedly, the Hasbara authorities focused on crediting own statements (MFA: 87%; IDF: 90%) rather than discrediting the adversary (MFA: 11%; IDF: 8%). Validation is perceived as more relevant as technical affordances foster and demand transparency:

> "The fact that people can challenge your story very easily with facts they can get from our sources, it also changes the game of advocacy. (...) we know that we have to be reliable. We have to talk with facts or about issues we can proof" (YM_101f).

Representatives of both IDF and MFA stressed that the exposure of "Hamas' lies" would provide an argument to present its moral character (YM_393; SD_222) and explained the use of discrediting strategies.

(i)   New factual material: Updates on rockets

Especially the IDF's tweets showed an apparently factual character, with updates on rocket numbers or background facts about the constant threat Israel is facing (IDF 37%; by the MFA 8%). While factual material generally indirectly credits blame avoidance or blame imposition tactics (Mor, 2012, p.409), it here supports the offensive reframing strategy "Israel under Fire" by creating threat situations. It was mostly accompanied with physical evidence (IDF: 18%; MFA: 16%) in form of aerial pictures, videos from the street, leaflets, audio files and more.

(ii)   Reliability of evidence: Stressing sovereignty of information

Since factual claims and physical evidences leave room for interpretation, actors additionally have to persuade their audience of their interpretation through i.e. indirect argumentation of reliability of evidence (Mor, 2012, p.409f). By stressing its information monopoly which comes with first hand access to information through on-ground involvement, the IDF in particular emphasized the trustworthiness of collected evidence (IDF: 18%; MFA: 2%). Proactively sharing paid into Israel's

character credibility, reflecting its sincerity to cooperate with the media representatives on the ground. This credibility could be upheld by deliberately adhering to short-comings, such as proactive correction of statements (IDF_326; IDF_466) or technical problems, which hindered stringent communication (IDF_372) (see Mor, 2012, p.419). Distributing exclusive information was also perceived as a mean to gain and keep public attention:

> "If you want people to follow you and to continue to follow you – not just for one time – you need to give them something that they do not have on another platform" (SD_83f.).

(iii)   Reliability of interpretation: Similarity to global publics

The MFA predominantly referred to trustworthy third parties, as well as to individuals as witnesses which can theoretically support reliability of interpretation (Mor, 2012, p.409)

Firstly, they directly referred to public support of influential and stakeholders co-deciding on public image, such as media, foreign politicians and NGOs (Dormann & Kiesendahl, 2006, p.178) (MFA: 40%, IDF: 6%). Tweets like "*EU foreign relations chief blames #Hamas for starting conflict [...] #IsraelUnderFire #PillarOfDefense #IstandwithIsrael*" (MFA_104) or "*PM Netanyahu spoke with US Pres. Obama &amp (sic!); expressed appreciation for Obama's support of Israel's right to defend itself. #PillarOfDefence*" (MFA_20) not only exposed Israel's soft ties but also global support for its version of the story.

Secondly, the MFA indirectly referred to common global norms to expose political and cultural proximity since individuals, journalists and organizations are more open to and interested in explanations of senders whose worldview is similar to theirs, and are more likely to understand and accept them (Sheafer & Shenhav, 2009). Notably the shared democratic principles with Western countries – which differentiate Israel from the Gaza government – were communicated to increase acceptance ("*RT @IsraelinUSA: Israel, a functioning #democracy //Pro-Gaza rally in Jerusalem interrupted by rocket sirens [...]*"; MFA_243).

Thirdly, personalization as a sub-form of argumentation of reliability of interpretation (MFA: 15%; IDF: 10%) was found as a MFA-specific validation tactic. Digital media facilitates this form of story-telling which – as a complement to pure fact-sharing – also potentially increases credibility (Wehmeier & Winkler, 2012, p.388). The intention behind personalization was to design "(...) a message that everyone can understand. It has to be a message that you can see yourself instead Israeli people" (SD_24; see also YM_87). Bloggers were hired to present a "real format. Then they look like not professional" (SD_227f.; i.e. MFA_218; MFA_226).

(iv)   Directly discrediting: Hamas' unbelievable claims

Although discrediting strategies were used less than expected, they were reliably

detectable. Especially direct charges of non-credibility easily were identified which confirms the validity of the used framework: "*Exposing the #lie: The so-called 'Injured Palestinian child' is in fact an Israeli one, injured by Hamas' rockets. #Gaza*" (MFA_149, also: IDF_450, IDF_405)

Conclusion and discussion

This study mapped and contextualized the performance of DD by comprehensively analyzing strategies of image projection that Israel employs on digital media, as well as by presenting motivation for and reservations towards DD. Israel's Twitter communication during the Operation Pillar of Defense served as case study. Expert interviews showed that DD was perceived as "one part of the whole project, the whole operation campaign" (YM_452). The expected benefits (conveying an alternative story, directly reaching crucial publics) lead to an acquiescence of loss of control. It seems that the more state actors are confronted with a negative public image, the more the willingness to accept risks increases.

Mor's self-presentation framework proved valuable to analyze this context as well as the generally abridged Twitter communication, which underpins the centrality of self-presentation as central in PD/DD. Generic self-presentation strategies and tactics, illustrated with typical statements, were specified for Israeli DD (Table 2) as those self-presentation arguments recurring almost like mantras on Twitter. While both MFA and IDF likewise recognized the intersection between new media, traditional media and the operation on the ground as crucial, their approach towards DD varies: the MFA's prime communication goal seems to be proactive long-term image broadening beyond the conflict, to mitigate arising image predicaments. The IDF on the other hand, primarily considers Twitter as a tool to respond to predicaments in order to maintain credibility, as well as to legitimize IDF's actions. Validation strategies also differ: the MFA aims to create credibility by pointing at support by influential third parties, indirectly pointing out cultural proximity with Western countries, and through personalization. The IDF refers to its information monopoly, presents proactively and timely first-hand information, presenting factual proofs such as pictures and numbers.

Looking at self-presentation strategies, responsibility for actions was hardly challenged but competence for the use of force was mostly assigned to the IDF as the military organ. In order to avoid criticism for disproportionate use of force, belligerence was objectified: military actions were presented as aimed at infrastructure that facilitates terroristic acts (minimizing negativity of action); the Iron Dome was presented as 'actor' (assigning responsibility) that prevents rocket victims in Israel. Considering other-presentation strategies, responsibility was associated with Hamas/terrorist groups or to "Gaza" as a 'quasi-actor' in order to raise support for counterterrorism. Palestinians were not portrayed as actors but victims of those terroristic groups (human shields). The content analysis contradicts thus

Aouragh's (2016) definition of Hasbara, as being predominantly "based on a meticulously engineered stigmatization of Palestinians" (p.279).

Recurring patters were 'moral differentiation' – delegimitazion of the other, combined with justification of self – as well as 'technical differentiation'. The latter gives an alternative interpretation to Israel's capacity for the use of force: while the opponent allegedly sees casualties as part of war strategy (maximize negativity of military action), Israel's technological edge is presented as military competence of precise targeting and the capability to avoid casualties or demolition (minimize negativity of military action).

While the analysis showed that Israel in fact shifted from defensive to proactive self-presentation, some findings reveal problematic aspects. Firstly, although the Hasbara authorities applied soft power instruments, they still relied on hard-power messages: offensive reframing tactics created threat scenarios, delegitimization deepened in-group and out-group thinking – which implies that a diplomatic solution is moving beyond reach – and credit gain was linked to military successes of counterterrorist operations. The presented inevitability of military means for "self-defense" further militarizes Israel's security thinking. Twitter communication again showed no political outlook on the situation. Opportunities for international credit gain through the presentation of peace-oriented policies were missed as well as the opportunity to respond to the home-publics self-perception as a peace-loving country.

Further, Twitter as a platform should not be used ruthlessly: it forces its users to curtail issues to 140 characters, to trivialize complex issues. The presentation of casualties is controversial anyway and, especially as Twitter does not allow contextualization, tends to be condemned – especially by Western countries – due to the presented naturalism of war (Campell, 2004, p.65). This could lead to new image predicaments. While PD and DD's relevance is recognized, the anticipation of predicaments or other communication effects is not yet a criterion for military decision-making (YM_438f), and shows the structural limitations for self-presentation embedded in a grand-strategy.

The presented approach to study Twitter has some clear merits – such as theory testing and quantitatively proving the centrality of self-presentation in conflict communication. It is, however, not without limitations. Analyzing the interplay of more than one player could give insight into the dynamics of self-presentation as a strategic process. Analysis of further digital tools could complement the picture of Israeli DD. Most importantly, DD's effectiveness, i.e. the transformation of image perception/ attitudes/ behavior in foreign publics, to ultimately impact on policy decision by foreign countries, warrants further examination. Considering the final goal of grand strategy as "winning peace" and assuming that "to a large extent, the character, duration, and outcomes of human conflicts are determined by rivaling parties' frames of reference and discourses about peace and war" (Pinson et al.,

2010, p.255), self-presentation can serve to prevent and de-escalate conflicts. The many-to-many online communication opens opportunities to engage people in peace-making efforts. At the same time, impact of unmediated DD can also be destructive when hate speech messages go viral and fuel violence. This shows that digital media brings responsibility for political actors to set the agenda for discussion along ethical lines to prevent escalations.

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