



## Digital Diplomacy and Soft Power : The Case of the Israeli Image Building as a Strategy for Relationship Normalisation with the Arab World

### الدبلوماسية الرقمية والقوة الناعمة:

### حالة بناء صورة إسرائيل كاستراتيجية لتطبيع العلاقات مع العالم العربي

المدرس / محمد إبراهيم عبد الله الزبيدي

الجامعة العراقية – كلية الإعلام

[mohammad.i.abdullah@aliraqia.edu.iq](mailto:mohammad.i.abdullah@aliraqia.edu.iq)

#### الملخص

تهدف هذه الورقة إلى اختبار نموذج 4D في العلاقات العامة الدولية فيما يتعلق ببناء الصورة الذهنية، من خلال اتخاذ الاستراتيجية الحالية للدبلوماسية الرقمية الإسرائيلية الموجهة إلى جمهور العالم العربي بوصفها دراسة حالة. فقد حالت عقود طويلة من العداء دون تطوّر علاقات طبيعية بين هذه الأطراف، الأمر الذي يجعل إدارة العلاقات العامة الدولية في منطقة الشرق الأوسط ذات أهمية بالغة. وبالاعتماد على منهج مرگب يجمع بين تحليل المضمون الكيفي والكمي، تقوم هذه الدراسة بفحص محتوى حساب رسمي إسرائيلي على موقع فيسبوك، بهدف فهم الكيفية التي تُسهم بها استراتيجية الدبلوماسية الرقمية الإسرائيلية في الدفع باتجاه تطبيع العلاقات بين إسرائيل ومستخدمي وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي من الجمهور العربي. الكلمات المفتاحية: العلاقات العامة الدولية، الدبلوماسية الرقمية، فيسبوك، القوة الناعمة، التطبيع.

#### Abstract

This paper aims to test the 4D model of international public relations on image building, taking the current Israeli digital diplomacy strategy towards Arab world audiences as a case study. Decades of hostility have hindered the development of normal relationships between these parties. As a result the management of international public relations in the Middle East is extremely important. Using combine method of qualitative and quantitative content analysis, this paper examines the contents of an Israeli official Facebook account to understand how Israel's digital diplomacy strategy is effectively leading to relationship normalisation between Israel and the Arabic users of social media.

**Keywords:** international public relations, digital diplomacy, Facebook, soft power, and normalization.

#### Introduction

The concept of digital diplomacy is a rather new area in academic research. From the international public relation perspective, the exploration of this concept is essential as the popularity of social media soars. The importance that governments and non-government organisations place on social media as a communication tool to engage other countries public opinions must rise and reflect active dialog with international and regional public opinions as a priority (Eleta & Golbeck, 2014). Previous studies on the concept of digital diplomacy are little, and have only focused on local levels e.g. governments, organisations and interest groups (Lovez & Murray, 2013). The little studies in this area have focused on either Europe or U.S's contexts and not on other regions such as Africa or Asia including the Middle East (Pamment, 2016; Park & Lim, 2014; Spence, 2017). The need to expand related theories and models of digital diplomacy to the Middle East region is an overdue task. Particularly, given that the Middle East is known to be a conflict-ridden region that suffers from barriers for effective communications on all fronts.

#### 1- Literature-review

First, the role of Israel's digital diplomacy is reviewed. Second, the benefits of other countries public engagement are explicated to demonstrate the potential benefit of using of the notion of soft power via social media platforms. Third, we view the use of soft power on the international level and by governments to facilitate building and

strengthen relationships with significant publics to create a positive national image. Finally, we review the concept of nation rebranding as a strategy, and how it used on the context of Israeli recent engagements with the Arab audiences.

#### 1-1 Narratives of Israeli public diplomacy

Since its establishment in 1948 Israel has utilised traditional media platforms such as Television programs and newspapers in the Arabic language in an attempt to gain recognition as a legitimate state (Rabinovich, 2015; Samuel-Azran & Yarchi, 2018). Two decades later, during the 1967 conflict or the called six-day war between Israel and the Arab states, the Israeli radio broadcasted to Arabic listeners for the purpose of psychological warfare (Samuel-Azran & Yarchi, 2018). The Israeli propaganda targeted Arab states' listeners in an attempt to destabilize their faith in their leaders and media. The strategy was expanded after the war and the occupations of Palestinian, Syrian and Egyptian territories to include media efforts which extended beyond psychological warfare. Israel emphasised on its military superiority, by utilising (*Voice of Israel*) radio in Arabic. This furthered its soft power abilities through messages that attempted to communicate to Israel's new Arab residents in the occupied territories that they could benefit from belonging to the Jewish state (Samuel-Azran & Yarchi, 2018). Lately however, there is an observable increase in the Israeli efforts to reach out to the Arab viewers particularly the users of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube as the usage of digital media in the region rises.

Social networks in Arabic language have already been used in recent years by Israel but such usage was to promote its military aims and sometimes as a deterrent strategy to its adversaries by utilising *cyber-war* technologies and social media militarism's channels (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015). The focus of these social media networks was largely on military activities. The Israeli international public relations management efforts particularly by use of the digital media platforms runs by government's bodies such as, Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) who operates solely on reporting specifically on the IDF's operations to the foreign media and international public, with the aim of promoting the Israeli army's ethics and values, as well as its professional stance and worldwide might, including with its enemies. However, these diplomacy efforts did not aim to interact with the other side, the Arab viewers, but to persuade global public opinion. But with the recent developments in Israel's regional's strategy to establish an effective communications with other important publics (Rabinovich, 2015; Samuel-Azran & Yarchi, 2018). The Israeli focus on social media to convey designed ideas to its Arabic environment in recent times is evident. Israel has setup several official social media networks using Arabic language such as, the Facebook page of the (IDF), Facebook page of the (MFA) and the Facebook account of Israel speaks Arabic. There is a growing reactions and attraction to the contents of those posts by the Arabic audiences, unlike the early style of Israeli communications patterns. Despite the growing use of online social networks as a new channel for Israeli military and foreign affairs to communicate with Arab audiences, there are little to no studies in this area which have focused on messages aimed at building a positive image. From an international public relations lens, the Israeli case of image building can contribute significantly to the soft power literature. Israeli unique case uses social media channels disseminate political messages to publics of 22 Arab country. Indeed, the Israeli foreign affairs which seem to aim to attract attentions from the Arab world make it a fascinating case study to explore from both academic and practical perspectives. As an exploratory analysis, this study aims to examine recent Israeli digital media engagements with the Arab audiences to understand whether these digital engagements are aimed to rebrand Israel's image in the region so it can attract supporters among Arab populations and refute the negative beliefs held by its Arabic surroundings, or it is a phase of relationship normalisation with Arab states taking a digital form?

#### 1-2 Soft power, international public relations and social media

Digital diplomacy can be described as a type of public diplomacy which also referred to as media diplomacy or cultural diplomacy represents a contemporary form of diplomacy (Ang, Isar, & Mar, 2018, p. 368). Whilst public diplomacy is a term used to describe the efforts by nations to win support and a favourable image among the general public of other countries, usually by way of news management and carefully planned initiatives designed to foster positive impressions, digital diplomacy facilitates those efforts significantly by of the socio-technological based means such as: Facebook, Twitter and YouTube (Gilboa, 2008; J. Pamment, 2014). Digital diplomacy can be considered as a form of soft power's notion that has been introduced by international relations theorist Joseph Nye in early 1990s. Nye proposed to describe that social and political values, cultures, foreign relations and policies have become integral parts of international relations which are not directly dependent on

the hard power of economics and military force might (Nye, 2004). The usage of soft power in the world of politics has been intended to create a certain climate to influence the public opinion and utilize an agenda from one party to influence the diplomatic decisions by the public opinion of the second party rather than by their political elites only. Soft power rests primarily on three resources: a country's culture, its political values and its foreign policies. These three resources as identified by Nye are also present in the digital diplomacy form of soft power. Culture as a set of practices that create meaning for a society, and it has many manifestations it must be utilised by digital diplomacy to be effective. Bearing in mind, at the same time, the initiator must also distinguish between high culture such as literature, art, and education, which appeals to elites; and popular culture, which focuses on mass entertainment (Nye, 2008).

Nye also emphasises that the influence behind soft power is contingent on the pre-existing preferences of the other party. Therefore, soft power is only meaningful in the context of a conflict of objectives (Fan, 2008). The role of soft power becomes more essential when a country is willing to alter its perception of its objectives under the influence of another, where previously it perceived such action to be detrimental to its own interests (Fan, 2008). The difference between soft and hard power is that soft power is the power of attraction while hard power is a power of deterrence. The power concept whether soft or hard has always given raise to the dichotomy of attraction and repulsion (Fan, 2006). However, there is a paradox in the use of digital diplomacy as from of soft power. Soft power rests on the attraction; the 'power' lays not the hand of the party who possesses it, but in the response and reaction of the party who receives it. This makes the use of digital diplomacy in many cases ineffective. The raise of social media platforms conform Nye's predictions that the sources of power are always changing and twenty-first century power dynamics will be based on intangible assets. With the increasing cost of military build-up and decreasing legitimacy of direct force use, great powers might see resorting to 'softer' assets to change the behaviour of other actors as a more useful option (Nye, 1990, p. 33).

In the case of most of Arab countries in the Middle East and elsewhere with the lack of freedom of expressions, political activism along with the governments control over mainstream media (televisions, newspapers etc), people found social media platforms as a space of exchanging ideas and opinions about issues of their socio-economic, governments and political concerns. Thus, it is not surprising to see high usages of social media in the Middle East (Poushter, 2016). Such high usages of social media create a channel of communication where ordinary people will be able to see different pictures of other countries and their public opinions. Utilising elements of soft power strategy such as culture and historical commonalities, policies and moral stances to change other publics' perceptions to gain relationship normalisation is different from an attempt to positioning one's country in the international stage. Specially, given that Israel's ability to affect its neighbouring countries has been severally limited by a number of external political obstacles that have shed light on Israel's regional presence not in terms of rivalry but in terms of corporation and coexisting peacefully with its neighbours. Obstacles range from occupation and land disputes, non participation in sport tournaments and educational activities to citizens travelling bans among others. A condition that had caused a lack of physical diplomacy between Israel and the Arab world which perhaps could be described as a 'disaster' in international public relations.

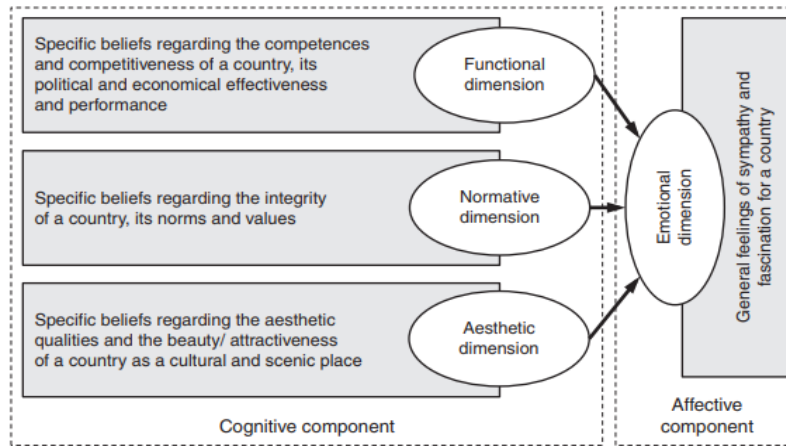
### 1-3 Nation rebranding

The notion of nation image rebranding is tied to the nation's soft power abilities, because countries must manage their branding if they want to effectively compete with other countries (Dinnie, 2015; Kotler & Gertner, 2002). According to author James Pamment soft power is 'by which intellectuals of statecraft 'spatialize' international politics in such a way as to represent it as a 'world' characterized by particular types of places and people (J. Pamment, 2012). Consequently, nation rebranding of its image through public diplomacy is about positioning a nation in a wider context and strategically establishing relationships to accomplish the nation's goals. However, also one of the purposes for a nation to rebranding its image is repairing reputations damaged by legacies of hard power (Aronczyk, 2008, p. 44). This is perhaps reflects the situation in the Middle East most correctly.

The central aspect is often seen in the affective image component or a country's 'ability to attract' as it constitutes a nation's soft power in the international system (Nye Jr, 2004). Furthermore, and according to authors Buhmann and Ingenhoff (2015) who argued that what constitute an image of a country is an epistemic structure. This structure can be tested by producing concrete measures for intangible elements like a country image in order to assess its affects on stakeholder behaviour. The epistemic structure of the country image, the exogenous constructs of the functional, normative, and aesthetic dimension (cognitive country image component) were operationalized with formative indicators while the endogenous construct of the emotional dimension (affective

country image component) was matched with reflective indicators in 4D model of (Buhmann & Ingenhoff, 2015, p. 8).

Figure 1: Buhmann and Ingenhoff (2015) dimensions for building a country image.



Source: Buhmann and Ingenhoff (2015)

Figure 1. The 4D Model of the country image

We are using this model as a backdrop to explain the recent Israeli digital media diplomacy strategy towards the Arab audiences, and to test the validity of the model itself on the complex Middle Eastern context.

This model was chosen as the construct on image building is based on an epistemic structure (Buhmann & Ingenhoff, 2015). While most existing approaches on measuring a country's image specify which dimensions should constitute the overall image construct, researchers in the field of international public relations do not discuss how these dimensions should be specified as measurement models. Idea behind a nation branding is alter or change the behaviour, attitudes, identity of the nation in a positive way. Therefore, nation branding is often conceptualised as national image management, and similarly other definitions of place branding –image promotion is identified as its central function. Accordingly nation branding authors and practitioners tend to attribute a large importance on image building, and usually make the assumption that there is a single and uniform image that can be developed and promoted everywhere and to everybody (Szondi, 2010). Furthermore, nation image can be constructed through diplomatic process in times of peace, and military propaganda in times of war (Curtin & Gaither, 2007).

Additionally, a significant part of the public relations functions in many countries, is the formation of a unified national brand that can attract foreign investment, hosting sport activities, and tourism (Chong & Valencic, 2001). Public diplomacy and soft power as a communicative practice in foreign policy involve traditional and digital communication methods. This study considers nation image as a resource of soft power, shaping perceptions in the region's political field. Defined as such, the concept of nation image, nation reputation and nation identity can be systemized by drawing on the distinction between the characteristics of what have been termed as primal perspective, which is the national versus international strategy, and what have been termed as constitutive process, which is the perception versus communication strategy.

Building image can be through engagements in various activities like sport, tourism and education. But in the Israel's and the Arab states' case, particularly after the long history of hostility and conflict, and with the limited diplomatic presentations in the political level, such conditions have created a complex international image building for Israel. Israel efforts took a wide range, from including elements of political issues, public and private diplomacy and cultural exchanges to foreign aid. We considered these elements as 'indicators' using Buhmann and Ingenhoff (2015) 4D model which provided this study with a broad assessment of image building of Israel's through Facebook posts targeting the Arabic audiences. Through these indicators, Israel is promoting its nation

image to gain regional recognition by a studied digital communication and social media strategy. Nation image building is a central construct in international public relations and public diplomacy according to Buhmann and Ingenhoff (2015) 4D model. We adopt this model in our study's context on nation image building with conceptual insights on national identity construct applied an integrative manner in order to analyse the Israeli image building that have been delivered through social media's posts. We are focusing on four central dimensions including; the functional, the normative, the aesthetic and the emotional dimensions. While the functional, the normative and the aesthetic dimensions constitute what is called the 'cognitive component', the emotional dimension constitutes the 'affective component' of the nation image.

## 2-Methods and Materials

To achieve the study's goals, a multi-method approach, including both qualitative and quantitative content analysis was conducted. Content analysis is the research technique for systematic, replicable, and quantitative description of the manifest or latent features of communication text. While the qualitative content analysis assesses the role of political public relations in relation to Israel's image building and digital relationship normalisation with the Arabic audiences, the quantitative content analysis assesses the frequency's post types. Content analyses have been conducted on 'Israel Speaks Arabic' Facebook account which an official Israeli account, to examine their patterns and trends of communication in image building and their strategies aimed to achieve a digital relationship normalisation with the Arabic audiences. The paper followed a conventional content analysis which is directed content analysis, where it starts with initial coding to a theory or relevant research findings. Then, during data analysis, we as the researchers immersed ourselves in the data and allow themes to emerge from the data. The purpose of this approach was to validate or extend a conceptual framework or theory (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2016). Situating the study as primarily exploratory research aims to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations for official Israeli Facebook's strategies towards its audiences. It provides insights into to develop ideas and understanding for further and future potential research.

### 2-1Data Collection and Reliability

The Israel speaks Arabic account with more than (1,694,023) active followers was chosen as the main source of data collection, written under platform Mission that Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) has created this Facebook account as a resource of information on the state of Israel in Arabic to provide updates on its activities to the general public. We recorded five social media official Israeli accounts channels towards Arab audiences, One Facebook account belongs to the Israel defence forces (IDF) spokesperson Avichay Adraee with (1,351,881) followers mainly addresses the military policy and activities. The other four official accounts are under supervision of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs includes: Israel Speaks Arabic. The three are designed toward specific countries, one is called Egypt in Israel established in June 2012 with (226,835) followers. The second, is Jordan in Israel established in February 2016 with (70,601) followers. The third is Israel in the Iraqi dialect established in May 2018, with (83,066) followers. Under declarations of the social media channels usage, these official Facebook accounts are aimed to strengthening the relationships, provide, share and link what is taking place in the Israeli' society with the citizens of Egypt, Jordan and Iraq.

The period from: 1 of September 2018 to 30 December 2018 is the date of data collection to our study. The sample of 317 Facebook posts published during this period, concurrent with some significant events were taking place in the Arab world. The collection of data occurred after two months of the election campaigns in Lebanon and Iraq as well as during the Khashoggi murder scandal. This period also witnessed improving relationship between Israel and the Sultanate of Oman and the first visit of Israeli prime-minister to a Gulf state since 1996. In addition, during this time, Israeli athletes participated in sport tournaments in the U.A.E and Qatar. The data imported and recorded regularly every 24 hours at 12: 00 am Australian Eastern Standard time in Melbourne to Microsoft word and import again to Excel to analyse. After that the process of data analysing in a series of procedure, coding and find the similarities and differences of the themes.

The reliability of the measures applied in our study, on how reliable the coding process was. We focused on demonstrating the unitizing procedure to be carried out in a reliable and valid manner. To ensure the rigour of our data analysis approach, we independently compared the extent to which we agreed on the various coding units of our data. Also to ensure the consistency of coding among ourselves as multiple coders, the method followed was to calculate the amount of agreement with a measure of Inter-coder reliability according to authors (MacPhail, Khoza, Abler, & Ranganathan, 2016). In doing so, our method of analysis can be operationalized for measurements; we reviewed and surveyed a total of 24 items. A high level of Inter-coder reliability demonstrates

that the coding is both reliable and replicable, which therefore strengthens evidence that the results of a qualitative study are scientifically valid.

#### 2-2 Model (scale) test and development

The results of scale examination which are aimed to verify the dimensions used on a country's image building are based on the 4D model. Our results showed although confirming to most of the model's dimensions, a new indicator emerged from the data analysis for the scale. The new indicator has been generated in this study which we termed 'regional stabilizer'. Israel's brand and nation image building on the (MFA)'s Facebook account was measured using 26 indicators mentioned below. Although a country image building based on the 4D model, is believed to be a universal and multidimensional construct, there is a new emerging construct. After a comprehensive review of the data, we identified another dimension which was consistently mentioned through the MFA's posts. The first four dimensions were obtained from the 4D adopted model. The test of indicators during analysis validated the existence of these dimensions. However, the last dimension was included because of the consistent emphasis on this dimension by multiple posts of Israeli image building strategy. The study developed the 4D model's construct using the iterative procedure of emerging indicators. From existing measures of country image were collated and additional items that we developed independently supplemented the collated list. See table below.

Table (2)

Scale test from (Buhmann & Ingenhoff, 2015) and the developments of country Image

Emotional dimension	Functional dimension	Normative dimension	Aesthetic dimension	Regional Stabilizer dimension
Posts aimed to promote: Country fascination	Posts aimed to promote: Country innovativeness	Posts aimed to promote: Environmental protection	Posts aimed to promote: Cultural goods	Posts aimed to promote: As the region's superpower
Sympathy for the country	National products and services	International social responsibility	Culinary	The ability to secure the state and its citizens
Country attractiveness	Competence of national businesses	Respect for other nations	History and tradition	Provide security to the region's citizens
	National prosperity and wealth	Civil rights	Landscapes and scenery	Power and military superiority
	Economic strength of country	Fairness of international economic and trade policy		Able to provide security for the region's countries
	Labour markets			Ability to face any external threats
	Competences of political leadership			
	Political stability			
	Infrastructure			
	Innovativeness in research			
	Educational opportunities			
	High Level of education			

A number of items were combined during this process, leaving us with 24 items representing 5 distinct dimensions of country image. The final phase involved testing these measures are described in the Results Section.

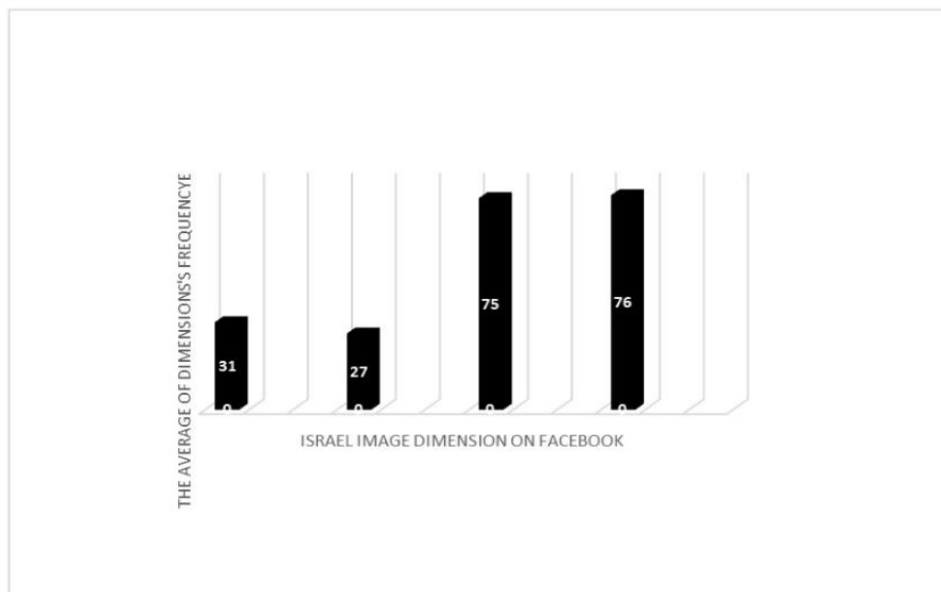
### 2- 3The Findings and Discussion

This paper studies the phenomenon of Israel’s nation branding and how this concept has been applied in the Israel digital diplomacy for it distribution. The aim of this study is to understand the strategy of the Israeli public relations using digital soft power in building its image. Attempting to gain a better understanding of the interactive communications between the strategic communication of official Israeli accounts and the Arab public, the findings are discussed in more details through the examination of the posts published on the Israel Speaks Arabic’s Facebook account. A total of (317) posts from the Israel speaks Arabic account were collected for this study over a period of four months. As the title indicates ‘Israel Speaks Arabic’ aimed to speak to the emotional dimension. But also, several additional distinctive items were also generated to form new dimension. For example, the Israeli digital diplomacy uses a variety of different themes to spread elements of its soft power in the Arab world. Such themes not only aimed to include activities related to tourism, environmental, geographical and financial discounted rates, but also focus on the similarities between the Israeli national culture and Arabic cultures in relations to shared history, music styles, food and recipes, regional interests and language.

These elements are designed to present aspects of soft power that serve to attract Arab audiences. What is important to note here, is that the Israeli efforts in establishing public relations with the Arabic audiences seems to achieve relationships normalisation at least in its digital form. The bar- Chart below provides information about the average rate of posts in relation to the Israeli nation image building dimensions on MFA’s Facebook account aimed at the Arabic audiences. The aesthetic dimensions reached to the highest point in the average of frequencies of (75%) of total posts, followed by the regional stabilizer dimension which was almost (76%) of total posts. But unexpectedly the functional and normative dimensions were relatively no difference proportion of (31%) and (27 %) respectively. See figure (2).

**Figure (3)**

The average of dimensions’ frequencies of Israeli image building on MFA’s Facebook

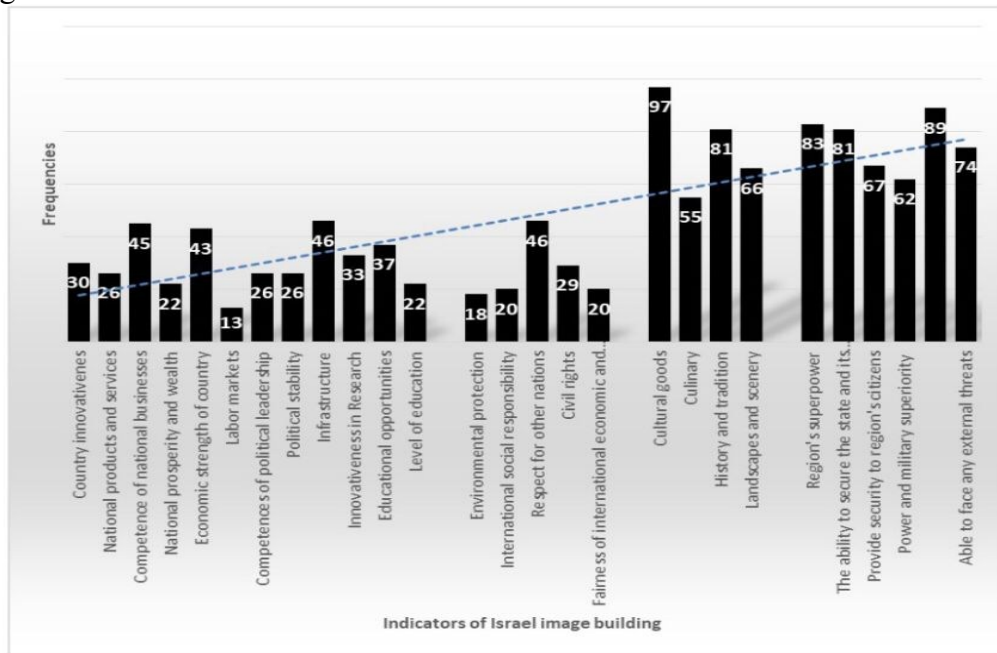


The average frequency of indicators illustrates that the Israeli efforts on image building using the digital environment focus at first at the aesthetic, then regional stabilizer, followed by the functional and the normative dimension. While the aesthetic dimension belongs to cultural sphere in relation to the soft power’s use, the regional stabilizer dimension reflects aspects of the Israeli foreign policy’s strategy. The political values of Israel are considered in the functional and the normative dimensions including democratic values and the recognition of the ethnic and non Jewish cultural groups in Israel such as Arabs and Muslims.

The frequencies of the multiple dimensions in the 4D model of each item are presented in figure below. The Bar-Graph has transformed the data into separate columns of four dimensions; the functional dimension included twelve indicators: country innovativeness, national products and service, competence of national businesses, national prosperity and wealth Economic strength of country, labour markets, competences of political leadership, political stability, infrastructure, innovativeness in research, educational opportunities, and level of education. The normative dimension included five indicators: environmental protection, international social responsibility, and respect for other nations, civil rights, fairness of international economic and trade policy. However, aesthetic dimension encompassed four indicators: cultural goods, culinary, history and tradition, landscapes and scenery. Whares the regional stabilizer dimension included indicators: As the region’s superpower, the ability to secure the state and its citizens, provide security to the region’s citizens, power and military superiority, able to provide security for the region’s countries and the ability to face any external threats

Figure (4)

The frequency of indicators regarding nation image on Israel speaks Arabic on Facebook account-period August to December 2018.



The Bar-Graph shows that the aesthetic dimension has the highest level and accentuated through various indicators starting from the lowest (55%) in food and recipes, (66%) in relation to environmental and landscape similarities, (81%) in relation to shared historical roots and customs, and the highest proportion among dimensions was the cultural goods by (97%). The focus on the normative dimension that includes the environmental protection and international social responsibility appear less frequent compared to the rest of the dimensions. In the indicative analysis process, the Israel’s digital diplomacy focus on bringing up shared historical roots and the similarities between the Hebrew language and the Arabic language, the historical relations in Jerusalem, particularly on the resemblances of both parties religious stories. One of the posts which gained many likes and shares was the story of the first donator in history to build a mosque was a Jewish.

Also the Israeli posts seem to emphasis on the similarities in Arts and Music style. For instance, posts mentioning the names of famous Arabic signers and artists from Jewish backgrounds such as, Leila Mourad, Najwa Salem, Rakaia Ibrahim and celebrating Arabic singers who have a popular base in Israel such as, Um kalthoum and Abdel Halim Hafez.

Based on the quantitative analysis, the second frequent dimension image building was the regional stabilizer through the MFA’s Facebook account. In this dimension, there is a clear attempt to emphasise on the desire for peace in the region and that Israel does not allow any discrimination to its citizens Jews or Arabs. However, the Israel foreign policy and as diagram illustrates that Israel is more than capable to secure citizens (81%) , and able to face any external threats (74%), and provide security to citizens in the region by (67%). Able to provide security to the region’s countries (89%), power and military superiority

(62%), while the region's superpower indicator is (83%), the second highest indicators in this dimension. Such posts considering that the enemies to people in the region whether they are Muslims or Jews are Hamas movement in Palestine and Hezbollah group in Lebanon. These two factions are deemed terrorists groups in the area, as other Arabic countries such as Egypt and the Gulf States of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Kuwait also considered these groups as terrorists' organisations in the region. The MFA adopted this approach in the digital space to indicate that Israel and Arab world would face the same enemies encouraging countries in the region to build a security coalition to face such threats. This strategy allows Israel to build its regional image as a superpower that is not only able to counter the threats of the terrorists' organisations but also the external threats of Iran shall they go to war. From this angle Israel as well as the most of the Arab world countries have the same enemies. These digital engagements in fact are indicating the success of the strategic communication and the Israeli soft power utilisation to achieve relationship normalisation with the Arab audiences.

In the functional dimension, the MFA uses different strategy of soft power to introduce its country image, for example, it is talking about the international level of its educational integrity, including the many members whom were awarded Nobel prizes in different fields. Its democratic values and the strength of its economy, technological industry, and the agricultural wealth compared to the neighbouring countries. In this dimension MFA attempts to brand the country as different to all in the region. Such strategy may lead to inform, educate and even astonish the followers, it is a part of attracting method to encourage digital interaction. In this regard, relationship normalisation occurs through this process of communication on the social level rather than political level. Also in this dimension the Bar-Chart illustrates the various indicators such as, developed infrastructure (46%), the competence of national businesses (45%) and the economic strength the country (43%) were among the highest indicators, and the lowest indicator was Labour market (13%). However, the educational opportunities are (37%) and country innovativeness (30%), and the lowest in this dimension were the national products and services (26 %), and the national prosperity and wealth (22%), the political stability (26%) and competences of political leadership (26) and level of education (22%), innovativeness in research as 33%.

In the normative dimension, the Israeli digital image building is focusing on the country's political values. MFA's account used this particular dimension, to attract Arabic audiences towards its democratic values by emphasising on the Israeli human rights protection policies. The diagram shows five indicators in this dimension such as, the environmental protection (18%), the international social responsibility (20%), and fairness of international economic and trade policy was also (20%), civil rights (29%) the final indicator was the highest among the indicators was the respect for other nations (45 %). Also in the normative dimension, the MFA's account emphasised on what it called the 'compatriots policy' as a way of exerting its soft power's strategy to its Arabic neighbouring countries. In order to reach out to wide audiences as possible, the MFA's focused on the Israeli policies regarding the treatments of Israel's Arab citizens. It talked about, how Israel has teamed up with the Arab citizens in Israel to promote human rights, values and political participations which challenge the standards of the Arabic countries in political activism. The MFA's account also saw an opportunity in the current crisis in Arab world to say that in Israel there is a peaceful coexistence between the Jews and the Arabs because of its social justice and judicial system. The Israeli digital diplomacy patterns aimed to present the state of Israel as an ally to the Arabic audiences as it emphasising greatly on commonalities and similarities with the popular Arab culture.

Moreover, MFA also focused in their posts to show the stories of many Arabs and Muslims who study or work in Israel, particularly those holding positions in the Israeli government organizations such as, schools, hospitals, sport trainers, and even in the defence forces. In one example, it shows the, story of Yahya Mahameed, an Arabic Muslim soldier in Israel's army who is proudly talks about his admiration for Israel as a society. The idea behind such stories is to emphasis on image of multiculturalism and ethnic group protection. Also during the months of September, October and November 2018 MFA used the title 'solidarity to the Egyptian victims of the terrorist attack in Almina province in Egypt'. And also shows the Israeli ambassador to Egypt visiting Cairo's Museum, and other Israelis who live and work in several Arabic countries. During the same time, it also shows the relationship's improvements between Israel and Oman, U.A.E and Chad, sharing videos of Israel's supporters in Saudi Arabia and Iraq. In terms of the aesthetic dimension, the content analysis demonstrate that the usage of cultural similarities, shared

historical places, building architecture and the religious rituals in Israel to show the relationship between Arabs and Jews historically.

Through that MFA's account is bridging the differences through the use of facts and statistical language in addressing bias and stereotyping thus disproving wrong ideas and images so it can persuade its audience to let go of their perceived image of the narrator. However, this is done through a pattern of informing, educating and usually in an entertaining manner so it can reach relationship normalising with its audiences. This strategy is deemed appropriate to attract audiences given that the long history of conflicts and war between Israel and the Arab countries.

The MFA's account usually uses an informative and friendly language to describe people, social and events in the region and elsewhere. Such technique is meant to invoke an atmosphere of thriller, as it brings urgency and excitement to the discourse, thus it can create and also maintains a positive online presence with Arabic audiences. In theory, digital technology allows Israel to engage in a level of 'conversation' with followers, but its efforts are transforming the account into something more dynamic, more of a dialogue. The MFAs' account does not seem to disregard opposing opinions as it to capitalize greatly on use of statistics with emphasis to make audiences captivated by every word. Throughout the past decades, the relationship between Israel and Arab world was branded as an antagonism at the least sense, especially there is a history of war between the two parties. Nevertheless, Israel currently is moving gradually towards an extraordinary status as the Middle East's protector.

### 3. Unexpected findings

The observations of this study indicate that general themes and impressions that emerged in the early stages of data analysis remain consistent until the end. Nonetheless, interesting and unexpected findings are uncovered when quantifiable data was accumulated, more in numbers in October month. The international public relations team of the Israel's government posted a large number of posts on Facebook after the Khashoggi's incident. The diversity in increasing number of posts is significant because focus of the posts was on the ties with Arabs and the similarities in religion, culture, names, and food instead of focusing on the Journalist murder scandal. These trends of the Israeli foreign policy and digital diplomacy occurred simultaneously with the Jamal Khashoggi's murder case on the 2ed of October 2018. The Israeli digital diplomacy starts to pay more attention to the GCC's citizens. For example, during this period the MFA official account 'Israel Speaks Arabic' reposts and re-shared videos produced by Saudi citizens to congratulate the Israelis on their religious occasions and their support for human rights. Perhaps the underlying assumption is that the aftermath of the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, an event which seems to invoke the importance of soft power and public relations management which the Arab world's lack extremely. In the other hand, the Israeli foreign policy is indeed working towards establishing its objectives. For example, the recognition of the Islamic values and occasions by the IDF's account is meant to reflect how Israel is viewing the Arabs and Muslims and their sacred practices. In our qualitative content analysis, we assessed how Israel is sought to build its nation image on social media. As a result, its image building was addressed through transcending the hostility state to a peaceful state aiming to achieve relationship normalisation at least with social media users. Relationship normalisation with Arabic audiences has become one of the main objectives of Israeli foreign policy, as circumstances of strained relationships between the major Middle Eastern regional powers such as Israel, Iran and Turkey becoming obvious. In the other hand, the relationship normalisation process that is taking place between online official Israeli teams and the Arabic audiences indicate the success of strategic communication and the Israel's soft power utilisation. Indicators of such success are the many likes, positive comments and shares of contents. For example, we recorded (364,500) of likes to contents and posts, (195,849); comments (70.345) and shares. Surprisingly the posts on cultural goods, include the similarities in music, interest, food styles, rituals and language generated more frequent 'likes' which positively correlate with user's acceptance of strategy's influence. And, less frequent likes and shares, comments correlate positively with less influence of the strategies found in the functional and normative dimensions. The new generated dimension the 'regional stabilizer' has strong correlation not only with the Arabic social milieu, but is meant to influence the political elites in the region. These correlations suggest a unique pattern of engagements towards the Arabic audiences on Facebook, as such engagements were not only designed to offer support, but to establish digital relationship normalisation with the followers.

#### 4. Conclusion

Based on our findings Israel's recent strategy in digital diplomacy and international public relations management towards the Arab world can be deemed a success particularly given the political complexities within the region. Before the establishment of the MFA's Facebook pages people in Israel and in the Arab world, did not know much about one another other than that they were enemies. However, with designed and studied efforts that are covering all aspects and through culturally appropriate framework, Israel is developing a positive image about itself that is continuing to attract audiences from all around the Arab world.

#### References

- Ang, I., Isar, Y. R., & Mar, P. (2018). *Cultural Diplomacy: Beyond the National Interest?* : Routledge.
- Angey-Sentuc, G., & Molho, J. (2015). A critical approach to soft power: Grasping contemporary Turkey's influence in the world. *European Journal of Turkish Studies. Social Sciences on Contemporary Turkey*(21).
- Aronczyk, M. (2008). 'Living the Brand': Nationality, Globality, and the Identity Strategies of Nation Branding Consultants. *International journal of communication*, 2, 25.
- Baxter, L., & Babbie, E. (2003). *The basics of communication research*: Cengage Learning.
- Bjola, C., & Holmes, M. (2015). *Digital diplomacy: Theory and practice*: Routledge.
- Buhmann, A., & Ingenhoff, D. (2015). The 4D Model of the country image: An integrative approach from the perspective of communication management. *International Communication Gazette*, 77(1), 102-124.
- Chong, A., & Valencic, J. (2001). *The image, the state and international relations: proceedings from the conference on 24 june 1999 at the London School of Economics and Political Science: selected papers*: London School of Economics and Political Science.
- Copeland, D. (2011). Diplomacy in the digital age. *International Journal*, 67(1), 255-260.
- Curtin, P. A., & Gaither, T. K. (2007). *International public relations: Negotiating culture, identity, and power*: Sage.
- Denisa Adriana, C. (2015). Country image vs. Country brand: differences and similarities. *Ecoforum*, 4.
- Dinnie, K. (2015). *Nation branding: Concepts, issues, practice*: Routledge.
- Eleta, I., & Golbeck, J. (2014). Multilingual use of Twitter: Social networks at the language frontier. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 41(C), 424-432. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2014.05.005
- Fan, Y. (2006). Branding the nation: What is being branded? *Journal of vacation marketing*, 12(1), 5-14.
- Gilboa, E. (2008). Searching for a theory of public diplomacy. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616(1), 55-77.
- Gudjonsson, H. (2005). Nation branding. *Place branding*, 1(3), 283-298.
- Holden, J., & Tryhorn, C. (2013). *Influence and attraction: Culture and the race for soft power in the 21st century*: British Council.
- Hutton, J. G., Goodman, M. B., Alexander, J. B., & Genest, C. M. (2001). Reputation management: the new face of corporate public relations? *Public Relations Review*, 27(3), 247-261.
- Kotler, P., & Gertner, D. (2002). Country as brand, product, and beyond: A place marketing and brand management perspective. *Journal of brand management*, 9(4), 249-261.
- Kotler, P., Haider, D. H., & Rein, I. (1993). *Marketing places: attracting investment, industry, and tourism to cities, states, and nations*: The Free Press.
- Kunczik, M. (2016). *Images of nations and international public relations*: Routledge.
- Kuntsman, A., & Stein, R. L. (2015). *Digital militarism: Israel's occupation in the social media age*: Stanford University Press.
- Leonard, M., Stead, C., & Smewing, C. (2002). *Public diplomacy*: Foreign Policy Centre.
- Lovez, K., & Murray, A. (2013). The digital diplomacy potential. *KM World*, 22(6), 22.
- MacPhail, C., Khoza, N., Abler, L., & Ranganathan, M. (2016). Process guidelines for establishing Intercoder Reliability in qualitative studies. *Qualitative research*, 16(2), 198-212.
- Nye. (2008). Public Diplomacy and Soft Power. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616, 94.

- Nye Jr, J. S. (2004). The decline of America's soft power-Why Washington should worry. *Foreign Aff.*, 83, 16.
- Nye Jr, J. S. (2008). Public diplomacy and soft power. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616(1), 94-109.
- Nye, J. S. (1990). Soft power. *Foreign policy*(80), 153-171.
- Nye, J. S. (2004). Soft power: The means to success in world politics: Public affairs.
- Pamment, J. (2012). *New public diplomacy in the 21st century: A comparative study of policy and practice*: Routledge.
- Pamment, J. (2014). Articulating influence: Toward a research agenda for interpreting the evaluation of soft power, public diplomacy and nation brands. *Public Relations Review*, 40(1), 50-59.
- Pamment, J. a. (2016). *British public diplomacy and soft power : diplomatic influence and the digital revolution*. Cham: Springer International Publishing : Imprint: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Park, S. J., & Lim, Y. S. (2014). Information networks and social media use in public diplomacy: a comparative analysis of South Korea and Japan. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 24(1), 79-98. doi:10.1080/01292986.2013.851724
- Pfau, M., & Wan, H.-H. (2006). Persuasion: An intrinsic function of public relations. *Public relations theory II*, 101-136.
- Poushter, J. (2016). Smartphone ownership and internet usage continues to climb in emerging economies. *Pew Research Center*, 22, 1-44.
- Prior-Miller, M. (2017). Four major social scientific theories and their value to the public relations researcher. In *Public relations theory* (pp. 67-81): Routledge.
- Rabinovich, I. (2015). Israel and the changing Middle East. *Brookings Institution Middle East Memo*,(34), 5-6.
- Rugh, W. (2017). American soft power and public diplomacy in the Arab world. *Palgrave Communications*, 3, 16104.
- Samuel-Azran, T., & Yarchi, M. (2018). *Military Public Diplomacy 2.0: The Arabic Facebook Page of the Israeli Defense Forces' Spokesperson*.
- Schatz, E., & Levine, R. (2010). Framing, public diplomacy, and anti-Americanism in Central Asia. *International Studies Quarterly*, 54(3), 855-869.
- Spence, J. (2017). Naked diplomacy: power and statecraft in the digital age and The future of #diplomacy\*. *International Affairs*, 93(4), 973-975. doi:10.1093/ia/iix126
- Szondi, G. (2010). From image management to relationship building: A public relations approach to nation branding. *Place branding and public diplomacy*, 6(4), 333-343.
- Verčič, D. (2008). Public relations and power: How hard is soft power? In *Public Relations Research* (pp. 271-279): Springer.
- Vickers, R. (2004). The new public diplomacy: Britain and Canada compared. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 6(2), 182-194.
- Yang, F. (2015). *Faked in China: Nation branding, counterfeit culture, and globalization*: Indiana University Press.
- Zhang, Y., & Wildemuth, B. M. (2016). Qualitative analysis of content. *Applications of social research methods to questions in information and library science*, 318.