

**Palestinian - Israeli Cyber Conflict:
An Analytical Study of the Israeli Propaganda on Facebook
Adraei's page as an example**

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Abstract

The way social networks are used in Palestine often mirrors and incorporates the ongoing political and military conflict in the region; another episode which inflames this long-lasting conflict. The cyber battle has deepened and taken on new dimensions, especially on Facebook, the most widely used network in Palestine. Through a case study, this article explores the Israeli official propaganda on social networks, the most important cyber space platforms, by analyzing the official page of the Israeli Military Spokesman, Ofajaa Adraei. The study is descriptive studies and utilizes the Survey Method and Content Analysis Method (both quantitatively and qualitatively). The study identified the existence of security, military, social and religious issues on Ofajaa Adraei page, which broadcasts news and seeks to reach out to more Palestinians. The page uses different propaganda methods: creating mental images, posting some carefully selected news and using slogans. The page also addresses the issues of conflict in many ways: flexing muscles, rapprochement and exploiting the human dimension, and as such it only manages the conflict with no intention to further communicate or create a fruitful debate. The page portrays the alleged human side of the Israeli military, while demonizing the Palestinians and intimidating them.

Keywords: *new media, political propaganda, Israeli-Palestinian conflict, social media, Facebook, Ofajaa Adraei*

Introduction

The Internet is rapidly earning multiple roles in every walk of life, and thus transforming the way people communicate. The pace of the transformation is so remarkable, especially with more innovative technologies, applications, networks and services being relentlessly introduced. This has certainly been associated with a parallel increase in the number of users of these technologies, particularly social networks. What starts with one user eventually inspires millions of people, and what begins on a small scale ensues almost all those who have access to the internet, each with his/her own intention— some seeking a match, others promoting a business, another group promoting a political propaganda, etc.

In times of heated political bickering, social networks serve as channels to communicate political platforms. Using these networks, conflicting parties can implement propaganda campaigns, attack opponents, and reach out to the public and influence their views. This has eventually created a platform of virtual conflict that equates with, and sometimes outweighs, the real conflict on the ground. Taking advantage of the easy access to social networks, a political party can use the virtual world to harness all of its interactive, decentralized energies to mobilize the public and maximize the number of supporters. The ease with which people can now communicate has created electronic communities with different or shared interests. The Arab-Israeli conflict is at the heart of this conflict due to many reasons: the nature of the political conflict transcends the limits of time and space; the Israeli occupation is the last occupation in the world; and the Palestinian struggle for freedom is legitimate. These particularities have created a conflict cyberspace that can, in some accounts, be described as the most colossal ever. However, such a cyber conflict is not at all commensurate with the real conflict, as it has not yet developed into an intellectual media warfare equivalent to the real life engagement between the Israelis and the Palestinians. While the Palestinian cyber discourse is mainly tailored and channeled to the Palestinians, the Israeli counterpart utilizes the virtual world to convey messages and express its ostensible attitudes to the Palestinians and Arab young people, who extensively use social networks (Abu Mualla, 2009, p. 161)¹.

This Israeli influx of messages is conveyed via state-run web pages that use Arabic as the means of communication. Examples of these pages include the page of Ofajaa Adraei (The Israeli Military Spokesperson) and the 'Israel Speaks Arabic' page, the official page of the State of Israel. The Palestinian side, on the other hand, does not have such pages that can address the Israeli community. This has created a situation where hundreds of thousands of the Arabs are

only recipients of the Israeli side messages, typically expressing the Israeli ideological view of the conflict, while the Arabs have nothing to convey to the Israeli community.

This study argues that Israel, at the official level, exploits the social networks to reach out to the Arab young people with the intention of distorting their political and cultural beliefs. By doing so, Israel also breaks down the barrier of communication and drives the Arab youth to voluntarily and publicly interact with the Israeli officials. The present study seeks to identify the nature of the Israeli official propaganda through Facebook— one of the most important cyber space platforms. As such, the study will try to elucidate the Israeli political discourse (which is part of the political and media conflict) and disclose its means, goals and implications.

The Palestinian - Israeli Facebook Conflict

The Arab-Israeli cyber conflict is an offshoot of the media conflict triggered by the political and military conflict that dates back to the first half of the 20th century. Such a warfare is now being waged using social media including blogs, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube (Abu Mualla, 2009, p. 163)².

The post-second Intifada period has seen a proliferation of using the internet, particularly as most Palestinian households now have broadband connections. The cyberspace has thus emerged as a conflict arena side by side with the political struggle. The conflict takes an attack-and-retreat form, and often entails a counter attack when one party intensifies its pressure (Ibid, p. 180)³.

The multiple use of the cyberspace (for communication, socialization, expressing self and affiliations, advocating ideologies, disseminating views, as well as managing the conflict with the enemy) has created a public virtual sphere in which the Israeli side (that has built channels of communication using Arabic) is the winner and the Palestinian/Arab side (that lacks the channels of communication with the Israeli public) is the loser.

The Israeli presence on the social media is vigorous, particularly on Facebook, which attracts millions of users. Data shows that more than one million Palestinians (most are young people) have accounts on Facebook, making it a fertile environment for publicizing and advancing the Israeli political agendas (Fatafta, 2011, p 20)⁴. Facebook is also a draw for young Arabs from other countries. One study⁵ found an unprecedented growth of social sites user-base in the Arab region. It estimated the Arab users of Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn at 70.3 million in the middle of 2013.

The study, released by Go-Gulf (a web design company), found that Facebook accounted for the lion's share, with a share of about 82.5% of total users (58 million). According to the study, Facebook is spreading in the virtual world and has shown an increased demand by Internet users around the world.

The events of the so-called Arab Spring in a number of Arab countries have significantly increased the number of the users of social networks, especially Facebook which has played an important role in communicating news, exchanging views and mobilizing the public in the face of the autocratic regimes.

The cyber Palestinian-Israeli conflict started to materialize when Facebook deleted the name of Palestine from the drop-down menu containing names of countries chosen by users when they sign up for a new account, thus stripping Palestinians of their right to choose their place of residence. The Facebook administration move triggered a heated debate that forced the administration reinstate the name 'Palestine' to the list⁶. This conflict has intensified and eventually yielded a number of pages run by the Israelis:

First: Israeli Pages in Arabic

These are Facebook pages that are official, semi-official or individual targeting Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza and Arab-Israelis, as well as Arabs from other countries. Examples of these pages:

1. 'Israel Speaks Arabic' Page⁷

This page was launched by the Israeli Foreign Ministry as the 'Official Arabic Facebook Page for the State of Israel'. The admin wrote on the page: The Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs has created this Facebook page as a source of information on the State of Israel. It seeks to keep its audience updated with the events and activities of the Ministry.

The team, who encourages visitors to debate openly with officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, urged visitors not to use violent content, racism or incitement in their comments, and if these rules are flouted, the visitor will be blocked. The admin also stated that the spokesperson for the ministry is ready (through specific links) to respond to any inquiries regarding the media. Israel Speaks Arabic Page claims that it has 285 thousand members; Cairo has the largest number of visitors; the majority of visitors are from 18-24 age group.

Israel Speaks Arabic Facebook Page, just like other Israeli Arabic pages, mainly publishes news that embellishes Israel's image. The news on Facebook is particularly professional, such that

Israel is portrayed as a humanitarian state. For example, it posts a picture of a plastic tent with doctors inside. Under the picture there is a caption that reads: this is the mobile operations unit that the Israeli doctors use when they perform thousands of surgeries to restore sight to patients in Asian and African countries. The page also strives to show the other face of the Israeli politicians—depicting them as compassionates. For example, it posted a picture of Israel's Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, playing football with kids in Jerusalem—claiming that he is playing with children, including Arabs, and that his foot was injured while playing. The Page also pictures the Israeli society as tolerant and pluralistic. For example, it posted a story about the Embassy of Israel in Oslo with a caption that read: This is the Israeli ambassador, the Druze Naim Araydi, together with his Christian deputy, George Dweik, and the Consul, Jewish Rvital Ben Naim.

2. Adraei's Page⁸

Ofajaa Adraei (the Israeli Military spokesperson) is renowned for his interest in communicating with the Arab public on Facebook. His page has about 188 thousand members and fans, mostly aged 18 to 24 years. Since Gaza is the most strained spot and usually the hottest arena of conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis, it is natural that Gaza has the largest number of visitors to this page.

Adraei wrote on his page "There is no doubt that my position as a spokesperson of the IDF involves a noble message. It functions like a bridge of peace connecting the IDF and the Arab public. I wish we could achieve the dream of our ancestors: the dream that all of us hope it will come true: the dream of peace between our deep-rooted nation and neighboring Arab countries."

In a video clip, Adraei explains the goal behind his page: "I personally call the Arab public to communicate with me through my page. The number of Arab users on social networks has doubled. This is a new window through which wind of change is blowing. Since we understand the importance of these networks, we have decided to join them in order to connect with the masses and convey to them the message of the IDF. I invite you to ask questions about everything, from the IDF issues to the football news in the country."⁹

3. 'Israel in Arabic' Page¹⁰

Israel in Arabic Page, launched in 2011, is the official page of the voice of the Israeli people. According to the admin, the site targets the Arab world and it aims at disclosing the true image of Israel, together with the historical, cultural and political dimensions. The site claims that it is an Arabic encyclopedia of the Israeli people and the Jewish land. The page has some 24 thousand members.

4. 'Israel Uncensored' Page¹¹

Israel Uncensored Page was launched in 2011. The team that created the account says the page seeks to convey a different image, and eventually changes the stereotypical view of Israel. It is meant to highlight Israel's true image and spot the humanitarian and civilized manifestations of the country.

The page administration says it is also seeking to create a platform for dialogue that transcends the conflict. The page publishes images of the Israeli towns, as well as cultural and scientific news from Israel, such as the most important inventions of Israel, and news that depicts the 'humanization' image of the Israeli army (e.g. Gilad Shalit riding his bike for peace). The page members totaled 1,278,572, with members from Cairo claiming the biggest share, particularly those aged 18-24 years.

5. 'Israeli Prime Minister' Page¹²

Israel's political community attaches great importance to maintaining communication with the Arab youth on Facebook. The Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's page had drawn about 64 thousand members, mostly from the age group 18-24 years. Netanyahu wrote on his home page that he is very much interested in establishing communication with the Arab world; therefore, the Israeli diplomatic circles are exerting unremitting efforts to open new straightforward avenues of communication with the Middle East nations, especially in light of regional changes and revolutions against authoritarian Arab regimes.

He continues to say that Israel's image among the Arab masses is distorted, and the reason behind that is incitement against Israel in the media, mosques and schools. Such incitement is a systematic behavior by the Arab regimes that strive to take attention away from their corruption and repression of their own citizens. He adds that the Jews are not strangers in the region and that the holy land is Jewish since the Israelites lived there more than 3500 years ago.

The Jews, he claims, have grown up there, and they have had their national identity shaped on that land.

Second: Facebook as an instrument to keep Palestinians under surveillance and to recruit collaborators

Social networking in the Palestinian-Israeli context is associated with activities that go beyond the ostensible intentions of maintaining communication. Several reports found a nexus between social networking and the Israeli exerted efforts to recruit potential Palestinian collaborators, particularly from the young people, who are usually vulnerable to reward and punishment (Amuri, 2013)¹³.

Some Palestinian circles consider Facebook as a treasure trove, where Israel and its intelligence system can obtain information on the Palestinians, eventually allowing the Israelis to recruit some young Palestinians. Facebook, these circles argue, can also be used to change the perceptions and attitudes of some Palestinians toward Israel and issues of concerns for the Israelis (The Institute of Arab Studies, 2013)¹⁴.

According to Yedioth Ahronoth Newspaper, the Israeli Mossad (Israel's intelligence agency) launched the largest campaign of recruiting collaborators and workers, including carpenters, craftsmen and even experts in chemistry. The Newspaper reporter for political affairs says that the campaign came under the slogan 'with enemies like these, we seek friends (Louati, 2013)¹⁵. Those interested in working with the Mossad can simply visit the Mossad website and sign up for membership. The campaign has diffused dramatically on the social networks. Among the urgently needed candidates, according to the Newspaper, are those who are proficient in languages, particularly Arabic and Persian.

Recently, Israel has alluded that it is spying on social networking sites in the Arab world. The official website of the Israeli Army Radio reported that the Israeli General Security Service 'Shabak' operated the 'Hatsav Unit' in 2003. Now the Unit is tasked with keeping the Arab media under the Israeli surveillance and supplying the Israeli military intelligence service with important information tapped through Facebook and Twitter. The Unit observes every word, tweet or picture posted on the Arab pages¹⁶.

The Israeli Army Radio dubbed social networks as 'treasure' that enables the Israeli intelligence to obtain important and accurate information about Arabs, especially in the last two years which

saw turmoil. In this sense, social networking serves as a spy that works freely and supplies the most up-to-date news without being arrested.

The Israeli Army Radio described some ways the 'Hatsav Unit' appropriates in keeping surveillance on Arab social networks, including tapping calls made via Facebook and keeping an eye on activists that influence Facebook and Twitter users.

A report published by Al-Ahram Newspaper maintained that through social networking, Israel seeks to gather information on the security and economic situations in the Arab world, as well as information on the attitudes of the Arab youth and the relationship between the citizens and their governments. These findings were concluded after the Newspaper conducted a survey of the attitudes of young Arabs who are added to the Israeli pages (Louati, Ibid).

Third: Blocking Palestinian Pages on Facebook

The cyber conflict took a step further. The exchange of bickering has developed into the Palestinians attempting to block Israeli pages, and the other way round. However, since Israel is more powerful, it has actually made Facebook block some Palestinian pages. For example, it forced Facebook administration to close down the 'Palestinian Intifada III' page. The page that drew about half a million users was shut down following Israel's pressure on Facebook administration, claiming that the content of the page involves calls to kill the Israeli Jews¹⁷. The Facebook decision came after Yuli Edelstein, Israel's Minister for Public Diplomacy, had sent a letter to Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg complaining that the page blatantly calls for killing the Jews and liberating Jerusalem by using violence. After shutting down the page, Edelstein wrote that he highly praises the decision, adding that the Israelis, however, will continue to be targeted from their enemies who can access Facebook in one way or another¹⁸. Some Hamas leaders Facebook accounts were also shut down, including account of the leader Husam Badran, the Islamic Bloc at the University of Hebron, and Izzat Roshoq¹⁹. Palestinian news pages were also blocked, including 'Watan News Agency', under the pretext of inciting hatred. The move was severely criticized by the Palestinian media, saying it is an assault on the freedom of expression and a blatant interference in the media²⁰.

These are only very few examples on pages, that Facebook blocked, based on reports of protests from Israeli official and unofficial activists against pages of official figures and parties, as well as media outlets.

Related Studies

Few studies have ventured into the cyberspace conflict. Mahmoud (2013)²¹ found that the internet has become an arena of disputes and conflicts. It involves espionage, hacking and sensitive national security data that, when manipulated, can pose threats to nations. In 2013, Israel suffered such attacks by the 'Anonymous' group. The Anonymous attacks on different systems triggered counter attacks, and the cyber warfare occasioned financial damages with untold value.

The Israeli researcher Tomer Simon (2013)²² argues that the social networking activity of Hamas during the Israeli attack 'Operation Pillar of Defense' on Gaza was more effective than that of the Israel forces. Simon conducted a comprehensive analysis of the Hash-tags and the frequent mentions of the metadata tags used by each party. He concluded that unlike the normal channels (that involve a one-way communication that can only disseminate information), the law of social networks depends on the interaction with the audience. The researcher found that the Israeli military fully refrained from responding to the Twitter messages, and, therefore, it was not able to control the debate.

Jaloud (2013)²³ examined the influence of the electronic warfare on the Arab-Israeli conflict. The author used the descriptive, analytical approach, enumerating forms of conflict-driven electronic warfare which proliferated in the last decade. The analysis suggested that though the Arab/Muslim electronic warfare against Israel will never settle the conflict, it can still make a difference. More importantly, the Arab nonofficial initiatives have somehow been capable of dealing excruciating blows to the Israeli impenetrable cyberspace. Investigations by the author found that most of the attacks were from the Arab countries.

Gil Baram (2013)²⁴ examined the role of the cyber war technology within Israel's national security. The author based his research on the current literature on unclassified public information that includes newspaper reports, press releases, government documents and interviews with key people in the field. According to the author, Israel has prepared well for dealing with the cyber threat and therefore it has started to build the required infrastructure. The article found that in its handling of the problem, Israel has focused on three aspects: (1) defense organizations, the Israeli military, the intelligence community and the defense and intelligence industry; (2) National Information Authority-run sensitive national networks vulnerable for cyber attacks; and (3) the private sector with companies usually exposed to cyber attacks.

In an article that looked into cyber warfare, its trends and implications on Israel, Mann.C Ben David & Ivan Shmuel (2011)²⁵ found that cyber space is becoming an arena for warfare, not very much different from traditional battles. The authors say that the virtual space has exposed Israel's soft underbelly as the infrastructure on which modern states rely— such as telecommunications and systems of defense, finance, economy and development— is dependent on cyber space for their sound functioning. In their conclusions, the authors recommended integrating cyber warfare into the Israeli military strategy and building supercomputers that can defend the electronic space of the country, which requires changing the conception of the basic terms pertaining to Israeli security theory.

Fatafta (2011)²⁶ sought to identify the state of freedom of opinion and expression in Palestine as expressed in the ability of the Palestinian social movements to tap the new communication channels. Part of the author's effort was to find out how such movements have used social networks to openly express their views of the Palestinian political divide and the anguish under the Israeli occupation. The author used a sample of posts by some Palestinian groups on Facebook. Through analysis, the article suggested that the process of building awareness among young Palestinians has seen some changes, with the new media outlets espousing the doctrines of the Palestinian sociopolitical structure. Above, the article found, the new technologies have fostered the freedom of expression and given users a platform to loudly voice their concerns. However, such technologies have failed to nurture the notion of tolerance and accepting the other. The article concluded that the Palestinian electronic social networking efforts could not adequately take advantage of the global virtual networks to advocate the Palestinian cause, create global solidarity or even combat the Israeli propaganda.

Awad and Hasna (2010)²⁷ investigated the relationship between the 21st century media technologies and the Palestinian youth use of such technologies, particularly Facebook. The findings were a mixture of bleak and promising prospects: the young Palestinians use Facebook to meet social and political needs; they have failed to utilize the cyber space to genuinely create solidarity and the efforts they made were only sporadic; there is no responsible, authentic body that can manage social networks and guide the young people to use them in an effective and productive way. The authors also identified the Palestinian youth quest for individual identities— together with collective identities— in the cyber space.

Remarks on related studies

- The previous studies focused on two main aspects: electronic warfare from a technological

perspective and exploring the way the Palestinian young people use social networks for political and social communication.

- We could not find studies analyzing the Israeli social networks propaganda in terms of content, discourse, influence or role.

This is why the reader will notice that we have analyzed the findings of the Israeli research initiatives which all found that electronic warfare is a key player in the conflict. All related studies have reached one fact: Israeli's use of social networks is superior to its Palestinian counterpart.

Study Questions

- What are the themes/issues discussed on Ofajaa Adraei's Facebook page?
- What are the informational/communicative functions of Adraei's Facebook page?
- What is the goal of the messages posted on Adraei's Facebook page?
- Is Adraei's Facebook page seeking to establish channels of popular communication between the Israelis and the Palestinians, and thus bringing their views together? Or is it only a channel of perpetuating the political, military conflict?

Methodology

This study is a descriptive study that focuses on describing the nature and characteristics of a particular community, the position of a group or an individual, or the current status of a phenomenon or a set of events. This is typically done through obtaining accurate information and data (Leedy, and Ormrod, 2012). The study is also classified under 'Basic Research' which is, according to Patton, a form of qualitative research that attempts to answer the basic questions related to a phenomenon so as to understand it and describe it accordingly (Patton, 1990). The study utilized the Survey Method, which is arguably considered an organized scientific effort that helps in obtaining information on the phenomenon under question (Wimmer, and Dominick, 2010). Accordingly, the study surveyed the posts on Adraei's Facebook page during the period of the study sample. The researcher, then, used the Content Analysis Method (both quantitatively and qualitatively) to explore the quantitative content and its relevance to the communication process; and to draw out data that helps identify the quality of the posted content.

The Unity of theme and the unity of idea were taken as valid measurements that adequately

render accurate figures (Berger, 1998). However, the analysis only involves the theme; i.e., what was exactly posted on Adraei's Facebook page.

The study reviewed all posts on Adraei's Facebook page between August and September 2013. This page was used as a sample representing the population of the study. The researcher chose this page for two reasons: it is browsed by a huge number of the Palestinians and it is an Israeli official page.

Measuring validity and reliability

The study carefully identified the target items and accurately tested the analysis procedures so as to account for the adequacy of the results. To do so, the analysis framework was presented to a group of media scholars for verification. In order to check the reliability of the results, the researcher engaged another researcher who, using the Holsti's coefficient of reliability, applied the analysis framework to a random sample of 10 posts from the sample page. The Holsti's coefficient was 93%, suggesting a significant reliability. After collecting the data, the researcher analyzed it using a simple statistical analysis.

Discussion

Observing Ovijaa Adraei's Facebook page for 4 months (August-November 2013), the researcher found that the page admin is working around the clock. This is evident from the huge number of posts and effective interactions with emerging issues in the Israeli, Palestinian, Arab and international arenas. The researcher, however, noticed minimal interactions from the 150 thousand members and fans or those who visit the page without subscription.

The study analyzed 50 posts (comments, news, photos, videos, caricatures) during the four-month period and found that the posts focused on specific issues and themes:

First: Conflict Issues and Themes

The analysis revealed that the issues tackled during the four-month period were military and security (60%), social (32%), religious (18%), political (16%), human (16%) and cultural (media, art) (10%). (see Table 1)

Table 1. Conflict Issues and Themes

	The analysis revealed that the issues tackled during the four-month period were:	%
1	military and security	(60%)
2	social	(32%)

3	religious	(18%)
4	political	(16%)
5	human	(16%)
6	cultural /media/art	(10%)

- N does not equal 100%.

The results are stunning and paradoxical. It is normal that the military and security issues acquire the largest share of posts, since the page is administered by the Israeli Military spokesperson (typically involves news of military operations, drills, pictures of soldiers, etc). The large share of the social issues is, however, astonishing. It could be the case that Adraei and his aides are aware of the role played by the social networking, which drives them to reach out to the public on social occasions and holidays. It seems that they have realized that the message of the Israeli military can be conveyed and furthered through social issues.

This conclusion is attested by the most recurring themes within the military issues. In the military aspect, the 'military achievements' were the most prominent theme, accounting for 38% of the total posts on the military conflict. During the study period, the page was fraught with posts on these achievements, such as the latest submarine in the Israeli Navy, training on flying for long distances, refueling in the sky, planes bombing 'saboteurs' barracks in Gaza or southern Lebanon, etc. This is usually associated with social posts (accounting for 32% of total military posts), particularly holidays (Christian / Jewish / Islamic) congratulations. This is consistent with our previous findings about social issues, specifically those related to the Israeli military, such as the Chief of Staff of the Israeli Army visiting Bedouin and Druze communities to celebrate Ramadan in one of the army units, or congratulating Muslims on Eid al-Adha with pictures featuring flowers and soldiers marching in uniform.

Materials involving security or political warnings ranked third (with 24%), mostly oriented to the population in the Gaza Strip, as well as leaders of Hamas and Hezbollah, while others were general warnings with no specific target. Posts of denunciation and support came fourth and fifth, respectively (with 12% each). Posts on clashes ranked sixth (10%), while those responding to Hamas and Hezbollah posts ranked seventh, with 8%.

Second: Employing the media in the conflict

With regard to employing social networking for media purposes, our analysis suggests that Adraei Page posts seek different media purposes: broadcast news and information (44%); mobilization (32%); communicating with Palestinians (32 %); communicating the Israeli views

(18%); responding to counterpropaganda (10%); and promoting dialogue and debate (8%). (see Table 2).

Table 2. Employing the media in the conflict

	With regard to employing social networking for media purposes, our analysis suggests that Adraei Page posts seek different media purposes:	%
1	broadcast news and information	(44%)
2	mobilization	(32%)
3	communicating with Palestinians	(32 %)
4	communicating the Israeli views	(18%)
5	responding to counterpropaganda	(10%)
6	and promoting dialogue and debate	(8%)

- N does not equal 100%.

Remarkably, the news stories on Adraei's Page were neither traditional nor professional. One can hardly notice a full report or a complete news story. For example, there are posts on Israel's celebration of the anniversary of the Yom Kippur War; posts on changing the summer time to winter time using a song by Fairouz as a good gesture. Even the news stories about the military units were an attempt to network and connect with the public, usually through associating the news story with an event likable to the audience. This strategy drives us to conclude that the real intention of the page is not keeping the public updated with the military news; rather, it seeks to instill in the reader a humanitarian image of the Israel military (e.g. the Israeli army sends a medical delegation to the Philippines, Haiti, etc).

As for the 'mobilization' purpose, it is legitimate to ask "Who is this page mobilizing?" The majority of the Arabs who visit Adraei's Page come from Palestine, Egypt and Jordan, with 95% of them are hostile to the Israeli policies (as evidenced by their comments on various posts that have provocative content). Looking at the content of the posts, one finds it sickening— a discourse that is rather addressed to the Israeli Jews and pro-Israelis, but it is by no means the kind of discourse channeled to the other party of the conflict (i.e. Arabs). The page features pictures of soldiers in patrols and soldiers stationing and training at borders in a hostile demeanor, which explains the swearwords the page receives from Arab visitors.

Third: Propaganda Methods

The analysis found that Adraei's Page exploits a number of propaganda methods, namely creating a mental image (50%); selectivity (20%); using slogans (18%); profiling (14%); stirring up human natural instincts (14%); assertion rather than debate (10%); and repetition (5%). (see Table 3).

Table 3. Propaganda Methods

	The analysis found that Adraei's Page exploits a number of propaganda methods,	%
1	creating a mental image	(50%)
2	selectivity	(20%)
3	using slogans	(18%)
4	profiling	(14%)
5	stirring up human natural instincts	(14%)
6	assertion rather than debate	(10%)
7	repetition	(5%)

N does not equal 100%.

Through creating mental images, Adraei's Page tries to establish nomenclatures of the 'self' and the 'other,' so that by time these nomenclatures become well-established and immutable. The posts introduced the Israeli Military as one with forbearing attitudes, an army that is tolerant of diverse religions and always seeks peace. Israel, in turn, is a state that tries to maintain its own security, with a strong army that fights terrorism.

Under the selectivity method, the Page only highlights the positive sides of the Israeli army and security services. This behavior is associated with concealing the dark sides. Every operation the Israeli military performs (against alleged militants) is depicted as a security requirement that is necessary to protect the state. In doing so, the page stashes the damage such operations inflict on the Palestinian civilians (ironically the target audience of the Page).

The Adraei's Page uses slogans (heavily used in commercials and political propagandas) in a manipulative way. It creates carefully selected slogans (that can be detected directly or indirectly), such as 'communication and dialogue with the peace-lovers/need for peace,' 'the fight against terrorism and sabotage' , 'security for the citizens of the state,' and 'human, bulwark military.'

Profiling (arguably the most common method) is closely related to the Palestinians, the Lebanese and anyone who resists Israel or is at odds with it. The Adraei's Page presents only the views of the Israeli Jews. The repetition of profiling incidences often yields an automatic linkage to the implied intentions. For example, Hamas and Shiite Hezbollah (specifically leader Hassan Nasrallah) were profiled as terrorist organizations targeting the people of Israel and inconsiderate to the interests of ordinary citizens in both Lebanon and the Gaza Strip. When defining the enemy, the Page frequently says it is not the Palestinian people, but the terrorists, who the page introduces as groups who are indifferent to the needs of the Palestinian ordinary

people. For example, following the discovery of the Khan Younis tunnel in the Gaza Strip, the Page posted a video featuring Hamas using cement in building tunnels to attack the Israelis rather than sending the cement to Gaza citizens to build houses. In some cases, however, the posts did not identify the enemy, leaving the business open for interpretation.

The Page heavily stirs up human natural instincts. It depicts Israel as a state living in a tumultuous region where enemies are ready to seize it, particularly following the transformations and the sociopolitical unrest in the Arab region, and the emergence of radical groups and political Islam factions that do not recognize Israel as a state. The human natural instinct of survival thus entails preparedness and security measures that save the lives of the Israeli citizens.

In the 'assertion rather than debate' method, the Adraei's Page presents things as axioms (usually its own views of the events) and assumes that these axioms are not open for debate. In parallel, it avoids discussing the opposing view fearing it might gain ground among users. Adraei himself used to accuse persons or enemies without allowing others to question his judgments. By doing so, he sparked sharp criticism from Arab members- such criticisms were sometimes developed into severe swearwords.

Fourth: Addressing Issues of Conflict

The Page addressed issues of conflict in various ways: flexing muscles (50%); rapprochement (40%); exploiting the human dimension (28%); direct attack (16%); demonstrating the suffering of Palestinians and the Israelis (6%); and justification (4%) (see Table 4).

Table 4. Addressing Issues of Conflict

	The Page addressed issues of conflict in various ways:	%
1	flexing muscles	(50%)
2	rapprochement	(40%)
3	exploiting the human dimension	(28%)
4	direct attack	(16%)
5	demonstrating the suffering of Palestinians and the Israelis	(6%)
6	justification	(4%)

- N does not equal 100%.

The posts are meant to convey a message of how powerful (both morally and militarily) the Israelis are. Almost all posts portray the Israel military as an invincible army that protects the state. They also picture the Israeli society as one that tolerates diversity of cultures and races,

while the Israeli military is always ready to provide relief to countries hit by natural disasters. This method is presented together with well-thought rapprochement with the enemy (the Palestinians / Muslims / Arabs) through social courtesies (such as congratulations on holidays). This rapprochement is further supplemented by the human dimension (the intimate relationships between Israeli military units, on the one hand, and the relief works, on the other).

The propaganda messages circulated through the Adraei's Page have several purposes, particularly rapprochement with the Palestinians/Arabs (40%); national support mobilization (40%); demoralizing the Palestinians (28%); fragmenting the target community (16%); inciting against the Palestinians (16%); and irony and sarcasm (12%). (see Table 5)

Table 5. Israeli propaganda purposes

	The propaganda messages circulated through the Adraei's Page have several purposes,	%
1	rapprochement with the Palestinians/Arabs	(40%)
2	national support mobilization	(40%)
3	demoralizing the Palestinians	(28%)
4	fragmenting the target community	(16%)
5	inciting against the Palestinians	(16%)
6	irony and sarcasm	(12%)

- N does not equal 100%.

Ostensibly, the Page seeks to maintain a positive, two-side communication between the Israelis and the Palestinians/Arabs. As we noted earlier, Adraei stated the goal behind his page saying "I personally call the Arab public to communicate with me through my page. The number of Arab users on social networks has doubled. This is a new window through which wind of change is blowing." However, such a window will never be productive as long as it only adopts the discourse of the Israeli military establishment. It is certainly the form of communication that is typically tailor-made to fit with the mentality of the Israelis, but not the Palestinians. This probably explains why the posts receive violent backward motions, often in the form of sharp criticism and swearwords (especially that most of the members are Palestinians or Arabs). This might impel us to ask a couple of questions: Has the Page achieved the goals it was designed to achieve, knowing that the majority of users are not pro-Israel? Are there other goals different from the stated ones? We might here tend to argue that Adraei and his aides would think of the mismatch between the members' views and those contained in the Page posts as an opportunity to maintain communication with the Palestinians and Arabs, knowing in advance that the

content of the posts would always be provocative and, in turn, attract comments from Palestinians/Arabs, ultimately keeping the channels of communication open.

Obviously, the page did not raise any issue for discussion and exchange of views; rather it presents one point of view, and turns a blind eye to the angry comments by the members. It has never raised an issue on the relationship between the parties to the conflict. In-depth scrutiny of the page (no matter the volume of social content) reveals the mentality that created such a page– unquestionably that of a security person who always issues orders and expects full obedience from the soldiers. Adraei posts the military viewpoint and he expects others to read it without allowing them to question or discuss these views. Even when members express opposing views, the admin never responds (some posts might receive hundreds or even thousands of comments), though Adraei has always reiterated that he responds to all messages in the inbox provided they are free of pejoratives.

The analysis has so far shown that Adraei's Page is an instrument of managing the conflict. It is by no means a channel of communication, dialogue or debate. The posts, as well as the counter comments, involve intense language, fear appealing messages and intolerance of the other. Interestingly, the admin is always tolerant of swearwords– which might be a policy that seeks to expose the Palestinians and their hatred to the state of Israel. Ultimately, Adraei is keen to maintain relationships with a larger category of the Palestinian young people, who are enthusiasts, emotional and patriotic.

Conclusion

Adraei's Page has undoubtedly attracted high traffic. For the Palestinians, Israel's Military spokesperson is a comic character as well as a renowned media figure. He instigates insults, irony and sarcasm from Palestinians each time he posts a material on the page.

His page seeks to achieve a set of goals, most prominently depicting the Israeli military as humane in an attempt to change the stereotypical image of the Israeli army and its brutal practices against the Palestinian civilians. The page is also intended to portray an army that is always invincible, strong and capable of defending the state.

On the other hand, the page tries to intimidate and demoralize the Palestinians, but at the same time it seeks rapprochement with them. In addition, the page divided the Palestinians into two groups: terrorist and peaceful, a classification consistent with the Israeli policy of splitting

Palestine geographically into two separate parts: The West Bank as a peaceful community that negotiates with Israel, and the Gaza Strip as a stronghold of terrorists. This profiling ironically applies to Arab countries: terrorist versus non-terrorist.

The Page also does not involve content that maintains real communication or enriches debate on issues of conflict. Rather, it focuses on military and security issues; broadcasts news on military achievements; flexes Israel's muscles; and creates slogans for the army and the Israeli state. On the other hand, it seeks rapprochement with the Palestinians / Arabs through establishing what seems to be a model of social relations that aims to create a mental image of Israel and profile enemies as terrorists that Israel shows zero tolerance for.

Finally, the findings suggest that, since the Adraei's Page blindly adopts the Israeli military discourse, posts are rather addressed to the Israeli Jews and pro-Israelis, but they by no means represent the kind of discourse channeled to the other party to the conflict (i.e. Arabs); hence the pejoratives and swearwords the page receives from Arab visitors. These visitors wrongly believe that Adraei's discourse seeks to reach a resolution to the conflict, exchange views and create a fruitful debate (while the real intention is managing the conflict). The posts of Adraei, thus, drive these enthusiastic, pro-Palestinian visitors to respond with sarcastic comments, which, in turn, triggers counter comments, thus creating another arena of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Recommendations

- To counteract the heavy traffic that Ofajaa Adraei has managed to drive to his Facebook Page, Palestinian official, civil and independent initiatives are very much needed. Pages in Arabic, Hebrew and English will do the job in the first phase.
- The Palestinians have yet to build social network pages that communicate their discourse. Such pages would adequately communicate the Palestinian account of the ongoing political and military events.
- Ofajaa Adraei's FB page has managed to influence the views of some Palestinian/Arab young audience. Awareness initiatives are thus urgently needed. The young people should be taught how to optimally and safely use the internet. They need to know how to approach such propaganda and even acquire the skills to provide answers and counteract the Israeli narrative.

- Accurate scientific research into the Israeli social network penetration does not exist. Therefore, research initiatives in Arabic, English and Hebrew are required.
- The Palestinians have strong human potentials. Investment in these human resources is therefore possible. Financial allocations would be needed to reach the best of the Palestinian educated youth with expertise in information technologies and multimedia. Social networking pages would be quite appropriate for communicating the Palestinian narrative in a set of ways that the Israeli youth can understand, and preferably in Hebrew.

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Footnotes

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الصراع الفلسطيني - الإسرائيلي في "المجال العام الافتراضي"

دراسة تحليلية للدعاية الإسرائيلية في شبكات التواصل الاجتماعي "فيس بوك نموذجاً"

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المخلص

ارتبط استخدام شبكة الإنترنت في فلسطين المحتلة وإسرائيل بالصراع السيلبي والعسكري اللذين في المنطقة منذ أكثر من 60 عاماً، وهو أمر جاء امتداداً للصراع في وسائل الإعلام التقليدية، لكن الصراع تعمق وأخذ أبعاداً جديدة على شبكات التواصل الاجتماعي، وعلى رأسها لشبكة الأكثر استخداماً في فلسطين، ممثلة بفيس بوك. وتركزت هذه الدراسة على معرفة طبيعة الدعاية الإسرائيلية الرسمية على شبكات التواصل الاجتماعي بصفتها إحدى أهم مناطق الحيز العام الافتراضي، ممثلة بصفحة لناطق الرسمي باسم ما يعرف بجيش النفاذ الإسرائيلي "أفيخي أرعي". واعتمدت الدراسة على المنهج الوصفي ومنهج المسح، واستخدم فيها أسلوب تحليلي للمضمون بشقيه؛ الكمي والكيفي. وتوصلت الدراسة إلى مجموعة من النتائج، من أبرزها أن هناك بروزاً للفضاء الأمني والعسكرية والفضاء الاجتماعي والدينية في الدعاية الإسرائيلية على صفحة "أرعي"، وأن الصفحة هدفت إلى نقل الأخبار والمعلومات والتعبئة والتواصل مع الفلسطيني، وأنها استخدمت أساليب دعائية مختلفة مثل: "تشكيل الصورة لدعائية" والاختيار والاشتهار في الشو، "إطلاق الشعارات". كما أنها استخدمت أساليب معالجة متنوعة مثل: "استعراض القوة"، والتعريف بالآخر الفلسطيني، و"الاستمالة الإنسانية"، وتبين أن الصفحة لعبت دوراً في إثارة الصراع، وأنها لم تكن وسيلة من وسائل الحوار والنقاش والتواصل، فهي تقدم وجهة نظر صهيونية، ولا تطرح القضايا بهدف النقاش، بل تلعب دوراً كبيراً في ألسنة الجيش الإسرائيلي، وفي العقل تخويف للفلسطيني وكسر إرادته.

الكلمات الدالة: إعلام جديد، دعاية سيلبية، صراع إسرائيلي فلسطيني، شبكات تواصل اجتماعي، فيس بوك، أفيخي أرعي.