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Israeli public diplomacy toward the United States: a network and narrative approach

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ABSTRACT
Israel’s public diplomacy efforts in the U.S. are aimed at garnering American public support for Israeli foreign policy. This study aims to identify the networks of Israeli public diplomacy toward the United States. Using the theoretical frameworks of networked public diplomacy and strategic narrative, the authors try to understand how network strategy is used and information is circulated to create a strategic narrative. Therefore, the two methods of social network analysis and qualitative content analysis are applied to identify the networks of Israeli public diplomacy in the United States and the content produced by it. The study finds that in Israel’s public diplomacy model, the networking method stands in contrast to its government-oriented strategic narrative. Thus, new forms of communication are applied to conduct old strategies. The research identifies four types of actors who apply new public diplomacy techniques and dissects the strategic narrative they employ to affect the American public in the service of Israeli interests. Despite the effort to apply new forms of public diplomacy, strategic narrative production and dissemination remain highly governmental and closed, which is indicative of the persistence of old forms of public diplomacy.

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Introduction
This paper focuses on Israel’s hasbara or public diplomacy toward the United States. Hasbara is the Hebrew term for public diplomacy and propaganda meaning ‘explanation’ of policies. Hasbara has been alternatively translated as soft propaganda, public relations, government advocacy, and Israeli public diplomacy (Aouragh, 2016; Shenhav, Sheafer, & Gabay, 2010). It is ‘persuasive communication efforts’ of Israel for the improvement of its external image (Toledano & McKie, 2013). Hasbara does not mean accuracy in explanation; rather, it refers to a kind of strategic information warfare for the sake of the nation by defining issues for the media, delegitimizing critics’ arguments, and applying the best discourse by using social networks and the intelligentsia to perform the job (Freeman, 2012). With the help of the theoretical frameworks of networked public diplomacy and strategic narrative, this paper tries to understand how network strategy is used...
and information is circulated to create ‘credibility, identity, and a master narrative’ (Zaharna, 2009, p. 110) to frame Israel in a certain way.

Various works have been written on Israel’s public diplomacy. In fact Israel is the most studied area in the domain of public diplomacy following the United States (Appel, Assaf, Schmerz, & Ziv, 2008; Asmolov, 2010; Attias, 2012; Avraham, 2009; Dart, 2016; Gilboa, 2006; Gilboa & Shai, 2010; Hershkovitz, 2012; Katz, 2008; Navon, 2006; Shinar, 2009; Shore, 2010; Toledano & McKie, 2013). Some of the works analyze Israel’s public diplomacy to suggest reforms for better outcomes (Asmolov, 2010; Gilboa, 2006; Gilboa & Shai, 2010), others put forth a historical description of it (Cummings, 2016; Katz, 2008; Shore, 2010; Toledano & McKie, 2013), still others try to explain Israeli public diplomacy using models (Avranam, 2009) or combine the twin aims of providing a history and giving recommendations (Shore, 2010). While these works try to look at Israel’s public diplomacy from different perspectives, this study seeks to fill in the gaps by looking at Israel’s public diplomacy as a holistic phenomenon which entails actors, processes and outputs, consequently adopting a more complex attitude toward the subject. It aims to specify the synergy of players, output, and purpose which lead to model making.

In relation to actors, the literature mostly pertains to governmental actors in public diplomacy through the lens of diplomacy or budgetary aspects, neglecting the unofficial side and their connections. This is more crucial when new public diplomacy methods are being applied and non-governmental actors play beside governmental ones. These actors include individuals, non-governmental organizations, independent public diplomacy institutions (think-tanks), academic centers, government research units and government bodies (Izadi, 2009). Meanwhile, most of the literature that does try to identify nongovernmental actors commonly combines Israeli public diplomacy with the Israeli lobby in the United States and makes no distinction between the activities of Israeli organizations and individuals in the field of public diplomacy, and those of the pro-Israeli lobby in the United States. For example, Gilboa and Shai (2010), with their prescriptive look at the official history of Israel’s public diplomacy efforts, identify general actors including governmental and non-governmental ones. Non-governmental actors are both Israeli and American advocates with no distinction made between them and while they are mentioned, there is a greater emphasis on the role played by officials. The current paper will distinguish network actors and categorize them to obtain a clearer picture of Israel’s public diplomacy.

Output or narrative of Israel’s public diplomacy is neglected in most of the studies. This study wants to fill in this gap by connecting networks to narratives because of the crucial significance of narratives in the information age and because of the analytical potential that narratives provide. Narratives are the core content of networks, represent values and principles and hold the network together (Freedman, 2006). Besides, networks influence their members and others through their narrative by constructing meaning and discourse (Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, & Roselle, 2012). Studying the narrative of a public diplomacy network is to identify its ‘team spirit’; that unique sense of identity which bonds the members together and reinforces their sense of purpose and belonging (Zaharna, 2009). The originality of this study lies in combining network analysis with strategic narratives in an attempt to explain Israel’s public diplomacy toward the United States. Therefore it is neither critical of Israel’s public diplomacy, nor offers any advice.
to the institutions to try to improve it. Its approach is explanatory and analytical rather than prescriptive.

To address Israel’s public diplomacy and to identify its model we need to understand both the actors that make the network and the content that makes the narrative. In line with these considerations, the following research questions are raised. Addressing these questions is important for gaining an insight into Israel’s public diplomacy actors, processes and outcomes.

RQ1: What is the structure of Israel’s unofficial/non-governmental public diplomacy toward the United States? Which individuals and non-state organizations are participating in its public diplomacy network?

RQ2: How are they connected to Israel?

RQ3: How are they connected to pro-Israeli organizations in the U.S.?

RQ4: Which individuals and organizations are more influential in the network of Israel’s public diplomacy?

RQ5: What is the content produced by this network? What terminology, images and media content are used by the network of Israel’s public diplomacy in the U.S.? What narrative is being promoted by this network?

RQ6: Is Israel’s public diplomacy toward the U.S. in line with network public diplomacy? How does Israel apply new public diplomacy to promote her strategic narrative?

The current paper considers network and narrative as interdependent and will study the complex multi-hub, multidimensional network of Israeli public diplomacy towards the United States; the final result of which is the promotion of a specific/a positive image of Israel in the country. It aims to understand how Israel uses various means of new public diplomacy to construct and project its strategic narratives for its interests in foreign policy, tourism, economics, etc. This research is done in two ways; firstly by identifying network members or public diplomacy actors of Israel and their connections (RQ1 to RQ4) and secondly by clarifying which narrative is being circulated within the network (RQ5). Finally the paper will analyse the whole process of Israel’s public diplomacy and depict the model (RQ6).

**Theoretical framework**

**Network approach to public diplomacy**

Public diplomacy is a kind of policy advocacy by state, sub-state and non-state actors (Anholt, 2008; Nye, 2004) to influence foreign publics (Frederick, 1993; Hoffman, Edward, & Murrow Center of Public, 1968; Malone, 1988) to extend interests and represent values (Nye, 2011; Sharp, 2005), to impact foreign affairs, to gain prominence in the world for small states, and to correct disturbing stereotypical images and perceptions (Melissen, 2005).

The difference between propaganda and public diplomacy is that the latter also listens to what people have to say. While public diplomacy is a two-way contact, the practitioner serves his own country’s interests and foreign policy goals (Melissen, 2005, p. 18). The new international and communicational environment has led to new theorizations of public
diplomacy called new public diplomacy. New concepts derived from marketing and network communication theory are used instead of propaganda rhetoric and the main aim of public diplomacy is relationship-building rather than top-down messaging (Cull, 2010).

In the network-oriented diplomacy of the twenty-first century, the network is made up of actors with shared interests and values that cooperate to promote a common narrative, making communication among actors important. It focuses on relationship-building with foreign publics and exchanging messages, and is influential because of networks and new communication technologies. The interactive aspect of message creation and the relational aspect of exchanges and networking (Iaydjiev, 2013; Zaharna, 2008) make strategic public diplomacy distinct from previous models.

Castells (2000) explained how all elements of society are organized around information networks that use new communication technologies. While he didn’t specifically look at public diplomacy, his ideas have important implications for how public diplomacy is implemented in a network society. Arquilla and Ronfeldt’s (1999) idea of ‘Noopolitik’ as a new approach to statecraft based on the primacy of ideas, values, laws, and ethics which work through soft power rather than hard power, was introduced much earlier than Castells. Their idea of ‘cyberwar’ (1993) and ‘netwar’ (1996) tried to explain war strategies of terrorists, criminals and ethno nationalists but they claimed that the approach is widely used by civil society activists as well.

Metzl (2001) proposed the idea of ‘network diplomacy’ and asserted that networks which are flexible and self-reconfiguring distribute power and ideas easier than traditional forms of communication (Zaharna, 2005). Dynamic networks take power away from the hierarchical structure of the state. Their vastness allows them to lobby governments more effectively and systematically. Their power lies in their ability to coordinate various actors rather than raising armies and the ability to communicate with an unlimited number of collaborators through the internet rather than national media channels. ‘As power today is as much about promoting ideas and norms of behavior as it is about projecting military might, the real struggle consists of projecting values, promoting interests, and ultimately setting the global agenda’ (Metzl, 2001, p. 78).

Looking at the relationship between the United States and her enemies, some scholars argue that networks could serve both as assets and liabilities (Freedman, 2006; Slaughter, 2009). Networks provide power against enemies but can also become their target. Here the ‘measure of power is connectedness’ (Slaughter, 2009, p. 94) while information networks and, more recently, culture, is the center of gravity in wars (Castells, 2007; Nye, 2011). ‘Network-centric’ and ‘culture-centric’ warfare are introduced and the concept of strategic narrative is identified as an analytical device. Irregular warfare which relies on information and cognition is ‘won or lost in the cognitive domain’ and public opinion (Freedman, 2006, p. 19). Superiority in the information landscape and in shaping perceptions replaces superiority in the physical environment, raising the significance of network public diplomacy.

**Strategic narrative**

An important concept to consider about networks and public diplomacy is that of strategic narrative as an analytical tool for studying the content of networks. In essence, strategic
narratives are the glue that bind networks together. Narratives are ‘compelling storylines which can explain events convincingly and from which inferences can be drawn’ (Freedman, 2006, p. 22). They expose core values and principles and give credibility and legitimacy. Narratives can be used strategically to create or bring together identity groups and establish shared normative orientations (Arquilla & Ronfeldt, 2001). They can explain contemporary international politics and account for power and identity issues (Brown, 2013). From a theoretical standpoint, ‘strategic narrative’ is the story that a nation must tell itself and the world, to wage a war, or to maintain its competitive advantage in the international system (MR. Y., 2011). They can serve an ideological function in international relations to achieve desired outcomes. Narratives can orient the efforts of the stakeholders and influence the views of the public (Freedman, 2006).

Narratives are strategic because they ‘do not arise spontaneously but are deliberately constructed or reinforced out of the ideas and thoughts that are already current’ (Betz, 2008, p. 515). They hold networks together, create a sense of identity and belonging, and "communicate a sense of cause, purpose and mission” (Betz, 2008, p. 515; Freedman, 2006, pp. 22–23). Narratives are stories about human action created by elites including government leaders, security experts, consultants, professors, think tanks, institutes, and universities, among others; and they are communicated to the public through speeches, press conferences, official documents, journalistic reports, films and documentaries (Miskimmon et al., 2012, p. 5).

The concept of network is central to the strategic narrative because networks serve as conduits for transferring narratives or stories to publics: the network decides which narratives circulate and to what degree of significance. A country cannot construct an effective strategic narrative without being able to promote that narrative. So both the network and the narrative can enhance the effectiveness of public diplomacy. With its micro techniques a network can promote its intended strategic narrative at the macro level of international relations. Its purpose is ‘to mobilize political support by creating a narrative that would appeal to intended publics’ (Brown, 2013, p. 17).

Zaharna (2007) proposed that a network communication approach consists of three layers of analysis which are related to each other and whose aim is message exchange in public diplomacy initiatives: network structure, network synergy, and network strategy. Network structure is considered an efficient way of conveying messages and it can be analysed according to purpose of the network (political or apolitical), sponsors (and their direct or indirect sponsorship), time frame (temporary, long term or short term), communication objectives (to inform, influence, advocacy or generate awareness), and communication mode (mediated, interpersonal, etc.). The whole network structure is also analyzed by other parameters including density, network size, strength of ties, centralization, and diversity.

Network synergy is about expanding the network by strengthening internal relations and building external relationships which ultimately leads to more energy to exchange information. Network strategy is about using the network and exchanging information for a purpose. Narratives are created in collaboration with members of the network. Based on Zaharna’s theory of networked public diplomacy, credibility can be gained by circulation of the message and narrative in the network. So the more a narrative is circulated by the collaboration of members, the more credibility is gained. Some of the narratives are social-based or identity-based and they serve the network by appealing to the
members and by strengthening their ties to it. Others are task-based narratives which encompass the mission, or goal, of the network. Successful networks apply network methods and use network synergy and network strategy to create ‘credibility, identity and master narratives’ for persuasion (2007, p. 220).

Recent studies consider narratives or frames as independent variables which make meaning in strategic communication (Hayden, 2013). In this context, studying Israel’s network of public diplomacy towards the United States requires an understanding of the strategic narrative that is being reproduced by the various actors connected through a network for the promotion of Israel’s image in the United States. This narrative is based on the values, the culture and the history of Israel and the United States to create a sense of belonging and persuasion. It also involves identity politics, aiming to achieve political goals by targeting the American domestic population. Under this framework, narrative is prioritized over network because network becomes the mechanism for circulation of the narrative. Therefore, in addition to revealing the network of Israel’s public diplomacy, it requires methods that explore the strategic narrative circulating in the public diplomacy efforts of Israel towards the United States. Given the significance of a strategic reading of narratives in public diplomacy campaigns (Hayden, 2013), narrative analysis is also explored in this research.

**Methodology**

**Network analysis**

Social networks are created by links and relations among units (Wasserman & Faust, 1994) that work interdependently to channel resources among themselves. Social network analysis is used here as a method to trace the various ‘social connections between specific people and organizations’ (Domhoff, 1996, p. 13) in the nation under study. Social network analysis views actors and their actions as ‘interdependent rather than independent,’ and their relations are viewed as ‘channels for transfer of flow of resources which might be material or nonmaterial’ (Wasserman & Faust, 1994, p. 4).

Social Network Analysis is conducted in three steps. The first step is to understand who relates to whom by discerning the nodes and relations of the network. Members of the network must be identified through membership studies. The second step is to identify internal exchanges among members. The third step is to study external effects of the relations and their specific content on the external reality and social effects.

The operational definition of Israeli public diplomacy network in the United States employed in this study is as follows: all the individuals, NGOs, groups, etc., that have initiated and conducted a specific policy or program that intends to promote Israel’s brand or position in the country from 2001 to 2015. Here, to distinguish Israel’s network of public diplomacy from the American network of Israeli advocacy known as the pro-Israeli lobby, the study only investigates what originates from Israel. These Israeli organizations, however, may be connected to the U.S. government or American organizations. These connections are also studied.

To study the network of Israeli public diplomacy, we should give an overview of its structure, in its constituent parts and as a whole. To identify a comprehensive list of Israeli NGOs and participants, an archival method was used to track individuals and
organizations’ information on the internet. In this type of data collection records of interaction between actors are taken from journal articles, newspapers, political interactions, etc. (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). To this end, information was obtained from websites of organizations, news websites which reported on our network members, and documents available on the net. The researcher found websites and news of events related to Israel’s public diplomacy to identify the names of actors including NGOs and individuals participating in activities. All of the connections are documented, but only the results are mentioned in the paper with some specific examples to support conclusions.

**Qualitative content analysis**

To address question 5, qualitative content analysis was used to categorize and analyze media content. For this study, the sample consisted of data produced by Israeli public diplomacy organizations including books, pamphlets, movies, posters, web pages, and social network pages until the end of 2017. Content was chosen based on its ability to best express the strategic narrative circulating Israel’s network of public diplomacy in the United States. For this part every text is read and categorized based on prior codes and new codes which appear. This results in category formation. Subsequently, the relationship between categories, their frequency, findings, and their relation with the study’s research questions are examined. Themes that express the underlying meaning or latent content of the text are formed by grouping two or more categories together. All these were conducted with the help of NVivo 10 qualitative analysis software. To connect content analysis findings to narrative analysis we should consider how network members arrange themes to build narratives or how they combine them to make a story. Hence the narrative analysis results of the network of Israel’s public diplomacy and its function can answer the sixth question on Israel’s model of public diplomacy and its strategic narrative.

**Results**

**Social network analysis results**

This part addresses the first four research questions. Four types of actors were identified as active in Israel’s public diplomacy in the United States: 17 Israeli governmental bodies, 20 Israeli NGOs, 8 Israeli think tanks, and 24 American pro-Israeli advocacy groups. These are just the main actors excluding individuals and programs. The full network identified 162 main individuals who are funders or coordinators of the network plus 75 programs conducted in the network through actors. Network actors are of two types: Firstly, those who play the funding role in the network and cooperate with other members, and secondly, those who solely play the cooperation role. If we make a graph of the network, those nodes at the center and near the center are the funders and coordinators, and those who are at the periphery are from the second group who perform a job in the network without expanding it.

Analysis of the network reveals Israel’s public diplomacy dependence on American counterparts who are active in the same field in American pro-Israeli organizations. American contribution to the network happens via the following:
Channelling donations and funding to Israel: For example, most Israeli NGOs and think tanks have an ‘American Friends of’ connection whose purpose is to channel money raised in the U.S. to them. Hillel, Jewish Federations of North America and Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations have the most connections with the Israeli network of public diplomacy, with Hillel operating as the funnel organization in most sub-networks.

Facilitating and participating in programs’ implementation through activities such as holding conferences in the United States and Israel, inviting Israeli officials and individuals as speakers on campuses or in other gatherings, sending American students to Israel for visits to be future ambassadors, and for exchange programs.

Board members in American pro-Israeli organizations, who also serve in Israeli NGOs and think tanks (Gilboa, 2016).

Meanwhile, the Israeli contribution to the American side is through training and sending emissaries to participate in events in North America; preparing information, bulletins, posters, etc.; and doing the executive job of tours and fellowships.

Israel’s public diplomacy is also heavily dependent on Israeli governmental bodies such as ministries, Israel Defense Forces (IDF), and universities. They directly or indirectly sponsor and fund programs and participate in the implementation of projects and events. Israel’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs works directly in various fields with the universities, public diplomacy organizations and think tanks through the establishment of brand management teams, signing contracts with branding firms, and giving the necessary information to the links in the programs which involve the public. The ministry works indirectly in this regard by facilitating the public diplomacy activities of other organizations. These activities include preparing manuals for framing spokespersons’ speeches on Israel, cooperating with NGOs in sending lecturers who serve at the ministry, sponsoring exhibitions and conferences, training students at workshops in cooperation with universities and NGOs, sponsoring NGO projects, providing information to NGOs for publicity purposes, etc. Most of the activity is conducted indirectly to make public diplomacy efforts seem more domestic and public oriented.

Social network analysis and application of measures revealed that the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya, Israel’s Foreign Ministry, and IDF were among the top nodes with the highest degree of centrality, between-ness centrality and closeness centrality, which means that they have the highest number of connections, higher importance in the network and closer proximity to every other node, effectively making them hubs in the operation. Key members of the network are those who are connected to the government, mainly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who coordinate the network procedure and flow of the narrative. Israeli ambassador Ido Aharoni, along with Elias Buchwald, Boaz Mourad, Lee Dranikoff, Fern Oppenheim, Senior Foreign Affairs Advisor to the President of Israel David Saranga, the director of the public affairs division at the Foreign Ministry Amir Gissin, etc. participate in the branding process by connecting individuals and organizations (Handwerker, 2005; Shore, 2010).

The connection between public diplomacy and nation branding is obvious here. The official section acts as coordinator and one of the main narrative makers through the information it possesses and the public actors convey them through branding techniques which seem to be less governmental. The programs invite the American participants to become
members of the branding team of Israeli public diplomacy and circulate the intended narrative.

Individuals’ contributions to Israel’s public diplomacy comes in three forms. A group of them give financial support; another group provides informational support as speakers and information providers and another takes part in organizational management of groups. For example Sheldon Adelson is of the first group, Alan Dershowitz of the second, and Natan Sharansky of the third.

Considering the programs conducted by the network of Israeli public diplomacy, the strategies of Israel are revealed to be of two types:

(1) Those that focus on representing the non-conflict face of Israel by showcasing and introducing its technological advancements, humanitarian activities, tourism, etc.
(2) Those that bring or send out students and scholars to be narrators of modern Israel in their home country.

The first strategy is mostly followed by Israeli individuals, groups and organizations that are active inside the target country (in this case the United States), while the second is conducted more by individuals and organizations inside Israel with the help of the government and the Israeli ministries, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defense. As an example, Fern Oppenheim belongs to the first group. As a child of a Holocaust survivor, she manages marketing firms inside the U.S. providing consultation services to American pro-Israeli organizations (Alpert, 2012). As an example for the second group, the Asper Institute for New Media Diplomacy at the Sammy Ofer School of Communications of the IDC Herzliya in Israel is particularly established for the study and application of new media technologies such as social networks, blogs, marketing campaigns and radio for diplomacy purposes and to convey the Israeli narrative.

Qualitative content analysis results

This part is to address the fifth question about the narrative produced by the network of Israeli public diplomacy and helps to answer the sixth question relating to the strategic narrative. The coding and analysis of Israel-related public diplomacy documents targeting the American public through the above-mentioned public diplomacy network resulted in

Table 1. Main categories and sub-categories of themes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Pushing positivity (Development, start-up nation, pro-peace, etc.)</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Palestinians (Discredit Palestinian leaderships, Demonize Hamas, showing Israeli sympathy for Palestinians, otherizing Palestinians etc.)</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Jewish identity (Reference to historical themes, Tikkun Olam, etc.)</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Threats to Israel (Terrorism, Anti-Semitism, Iran threat, etc.)</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Politics &amp; Conflict (Conflicts, Showing Israel’s contrast with Arab countries, Anti-BDS, etc.)</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Israel (Culture, landscape, society, tourism, etc.)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Avoid conflict and religion</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Shared values with the U.S. (as U.S. ally)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Neutralizing negativity (Justification of occupation and terrorism, blame shifting, self-defense)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Humanize Life in Israel and Rhetorical Question</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the identification of 10 main categories listed in Table 1. We have drastically condensed and summarized the list into major categories highlighting some major sub-themes. The number of sources, the number of references that conveyed the theme, and the percentage of coverage are listed in front of each theme. Themes categorized and coded in Table 1 are arranged together in a certain manner to produce narratives by the network members elaborated in the previous section. Network public diplomacy does not begin with a message independent of the network, rather it focuses first on creating the relational aspects of an effective network and then members collaborate to create a story (Zaharna, Arsenault, & Fisher, 2013).

The overall analysis of themes reveals that certain themes appear in mixed forms in various instances, or that some themes follow others in a pattern. For example, the themes that reveal adversity into advantage, development, start-up nation, health, environment and living standards of Israel come together on many occasions (Senor & Singer, 2011; Shore & Kopping, 2011); the pro-peace theme referring to Israel comes with themes that discredit the Palestinian leadership or those which demonize Hamas (StandWithUs, 2016); the uninhabited land theme denoting non-occupation comes with the theme of development and agriculture (Senor & Singer, 2011; Shore & Kopping, 2011; Start-up Nation, n.d.); the homeland theme is mixed with the family theme (Kopping, 2014; Senor & Singer, 2011); the anti-terrorism theme accompanies many others including themes that are anti-Iran, demonize Hamas, and the themes about necessity of self-defense on the part of Israel (Yohay, 2009); Israel as pro-peace comes with pro-democracy, freedom, gender equality and gay rights themes (StandWithUs, 2015a); Iran, Hamas and Hezbollah themes always come with the theme of threats and terrorism (Lipman, 2016); the U.S. ally theme comes with pushing positivity themes about Israel such as pro-peace, pro-democracy, and pro-human rights (StandWithUs, 2015b); Themes that neutralize negativity are almost always finished by a rhetorical question theme; Themes that show empathy for Palestinians are associated with themes which discredit Palestinian leadership and demonize Hamas (Stephens, 2003).

These patterns are either to enforce the effect of the intended themes or to make a new meaning. For example, the combination of themes that show adversity to advantage, development, and start-up nation enforce the positive meaning of all other themes used. The mixture of terrorism with Iran and Iran-backed Hamas, on the other hand, intensifies the negative aspects of Iran as a threat leading the audience to feel the urgency imbedded in the theme. On the other hand, finishing the blame shifting theme with a rhetorical question indicates the need for the audience’s support (Yohay, 2009).

The qualitative content analysis also reveals that the emphasis on some themes operates to disguise unsavory policies or realities. These themes can be called disguising themes, meaning that they conceal certain realities. For instance pointing out the condition of Arab Israelis as beneficiaries of freedom, citizenship and democracy in Israel without mentioning other aspects that they are facing in their life, such as unemployment and discrimination, conceals contrary facts (World Union of Jewish Students, 2002); claiming that the separation wall has minimized terrorist attacks disguises the fact that it has deprived Palestinians of access to their homes and farmlands; enforcing the pro-peace narrative disguises the repetitive wars and the small- and full-scale conflicts with Palestinians (Yohay, 2009); or accentuating the pro-human rights theme conceals the human rights violations conducted by Israeli soldiers and citizens (StandWithUs, 2015b). Framings such as Israel’s
respect for diversity in its democracy, promoted in the Israeli public diplomacy network, are controversial topics in reality. For example, the narrative promotes that Israel encourages immigration of all groups, including Ethiopian and Yemeni immigrants not mentioning their social class differences and conditions of life in Israeli society and the policy of their inclusion in the immigration flow to increase the Jewish population vis à vis the Arabs (Cohen et al., 2016). Islam and Muslims are represented through the lens of works by anti-Islam authorities such as Bernard Lewis (Fallaci, 2002; Lewis, 2002).

Some terms are used instead of others to decrease possible negative reactions to controversial Israeli policies. For example, ‘land demand’ is used instead of ‘right to return to land’ in order to inhibit the activation of the view that Israelis violate Palestinians’ rights similar to the apartheid system of South Africa which would in turn violate the democratic and peaceful themes. Or the theme of ‘uninhabited land’, suggesting that Israel is transforming Palestinian lands from a barren wasteland into a modern country, which disguises Israel’s occupation and displacement policies. This theme tries to convey that Palestine is simply a name for an unpopulated, barren land which was transformed by Israeli Jews whose ancestors had lived there many thousands of years ago.

Narrative with positive valence prevails in Israeli public diplomacy toward the United States with nearly 40% of the themes promoting a positive image of Israel among the American public. Themes about Palestinians follow in frequency, but this time with negative valence prevailing (more than 70%). Taken overall, Palestinian-related sub-themes and their coverage are almost always negative. Only four percent of the coverage reflects Palestinian hardship with another 25% conveying positive themes aimed at showing Israel’s sympathy for Palestinians, most likely aimed at gaining the support of the American left.

Of all the themes, 12.2% focus on the promotion of Jewish identity and Zionism given the fact that the American Jewish population acts as an important targeted public at the intersection of the two countries. Of significance is the role of American Jews in the election of supportive American officials, support for Israel, participation in pro-Israeli advocacy, their influence on Israel’s economy, and their effort in channeling philanthropic money into Israel. Also important are the growing critical views toward Israel among young American Jews. Thus, the American Jewish population is a major target of Israel’s public diplomacy narrative.

The large American Jewish population acts as the main Israeli branding force in the United States, and it is also the main focus of Israel in improving its image in the world. Though not all American Jews might be politically active, they benefit from the strong Israeli lobby in Washington helping them with connecting funding sources to branding organizations and bringing their cause to the political level, which is connected to power. As sub-themes show, the effort to win American Jews’ support for Israel is made by references to history and archeology, claims about the indigenous presence of Jews in Israel, reference to the Bible, and stressing the Hebrew language and Jewish culture and traditions. These themes enforce the identity and social-based narratives of the network.

Finally, although overall Israeli public diplomacy policy rests on avoiding conflict and focusing on political debates that raise Israel’s positive features, 6.5% of the themes are related to threats and another 6.5% to conflict. Conflict themes also appear as byproducts of other themes such as Palestinians, neutralizing negativity, humanizing life in Israel and
rhetorical questions which highlight that politics and conflict are inescapable themes in Israeli public diplomacy.

**Discussion**

Israel’s public diplomacy tries to get away from hierarchical, central and traditional public diplomacy in which government is the gatekeeper and instead applies new public diplomacy methods of network and free flow of information by non-governmental agencies engaging more actors in message exchange. With new media technology and the high speed of information exchange, new initiatives are more readily implemented with less need for organizational action. New branding techniques involving increasing numbers of players who might be informed or not informed about public diplomacy techniques are used for the same end. Programs which are conducted by Israel’s public diplomacy try to expand such members of the network. Peer-to-peer learning and people-to-people contact are generated by tourism programs, missions, student conferences, fellowships, exchange programs, and workshops for training ambassadors for Israel’s public diplomacy. New media techniques such as writing for websites, weblogs, social network pages, radio channels, and news briefings are employed for branding purposes. In this way Israel’s public diplomacy network has tried to reduce bureaucratic procedures of public diplomacy and speed up its processes. This has been achieved through expanding the number of actors active in the network and obtaining prepared models of operation so that the information and narrative can be disseminated through the expanded members in case of crises such as the 2009, 2012, and 2014 Israel-Gaza conflicts.

Meanwhile programs are coordinated and funded by certain network members who belong to the government, Israeli NGOs, or pro-Israeli American organizations but act as private bodies; thus aiming to increase the appearance of objectivity and non-state activity. This is especially the case with programs that target university and college campuses. Increasing connections with university-sponsored programs, especially those geared toward youth, were influential in the acceleration of public diplomacy initiatives because youth are more likely to participate in social networks and information sharing via the internet.

To give an overview of the structure of the network of Israeli public diplomacy, some elements of the network can be studied based on sponsor participants, purpose, time frame, and communication mode. Israeli NGOs and think tanks, Israeli governmental agencies, Israeli and American individuals, and American pro-Israel advocacy groups are the key sponsor participants in Israel’s public diplomacy network vis a vis the United States. In most cases, governmental actors participate indirectly in the network and conduct their activities under the guise of NGOs which are connected to the government by at least one link.

As mentioned in the network analysis section, Israeli advocacy forces are in charge of making stories out of the material provided by the official (Hoffman, 2013; Silverstein, 2009). Identifying internet battlegrounds in different languages, sending comments/posts/votes in the listed links, using material prepared by the IDF and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, writing letters to authors and editors, identifying oneself as a local resident, and making friends or joining the activity are suggested by Israeli officials
(Silverstein, 2009) as activities to be conducted during crises to buy time for Israel’s army to accomplish its operations. Parallel activities are carried out by the network’s American coordinators and funders.

In terms of the network’s purpose, key participants’ goals show that it is a ‘policy-oriented network’ in which state and non-state actors participate to achieve political goals. Although non-political issues such as science, technology, environment, history, and religion are raised in the narrative and convey an apolitical sense, they serve the goal of distributing a controlled narrative and information as intended by the Israeli government and pursue a strong political goal, which is the creation of a favorable image of Israel among the American public and their eventual support for Israeli foreign policy (Katz, 2008; Pfeffer, 2008; Shore, 2010; StandWithUS, 2013; Washington Times, 2006; Ynet, 2006; Zaum, 2013, etc.). Each organization of the network adopts various tactics to reach the same goal. Some are identity-oriented (such as Taglit-Birthright Israel, Masa Israel Journey or Jewish Agency for Israel); some are task-oriented (such as Brand Management Team); others are education-oriented (such as Hasbara Fellowships) and others employ a combination of different tactics (such as Stand with Us). Taken together they make up the whole network of public diplomacy. In addition, indirect sponsorship of the government and pro-Israeli advocacy groups in the network of Israel’s public diplomacy helps build trust on the part of the American audience.

Getting an overview of the network based on time frame is important from a public diplomacy perspective compared to the network perspective. Some of the organizations in our network seek image promotion or message dissemination which is a short term process, and some of them seek relationship building and enlarging the network by attracting more people and organizations which is more long term. Both tracks are more or less equally pursued by the network.

The communication mode employed by members is another feature of a network’s overview which is related to the communication purpose (Zaharna et al., 2013). Members exchange information both through interpersonal and mediated communication based on their communication purpose. Mediated communication is used by online connections, movies and exhibitions and activities for generating awareness and enlarging the network. Meanwhile, interpersonal connections are common in the conduct of initiatives such as tours, conferences, etc. and are effective in changing attitudes and behaviors and strengthening network ties.

**Whole network structure**

Density, network size, strength of ties, centralization, and diversity are the parameters to be considered when discussing whole network structure. The network under study here is a semi-dense and cohesive network and member connections seem to be firm. Dense networks tend to group-think and close-knit which inhibits the use of diverse perspectives for problem solving (Zaharna et al., 2013). This is also connected to the network strategy and the process of narrative production discussed below. Networks which are closed, central and non-diverse tend to promote a controlled narrative.

In size, the network is large and expanding because Israel’s public diplomacy policy is about expanding relations to extensively disseminate the message; yet, network expansion is occurring among a similar audience and/or similar members. Network members are
Israel’s supporters and the network is hardly a receiver of opposing views because message promotion is very controlled.

Tie strength varies in the network. It is stronger among central members who make up the network’s core. On the other hand, ties among members of an organization or participants of an initiative are weak and temporary, and they may have occurred just because of a particular event. So the central network of key members renders better analysis. Ties between these members are based on shared thinking and ideology. Network members with stronger ties have better access to information and financial resources which results in the continuation of public diplomacy activities while weakly tied members are utilized more as transmitters of messages and information. For example, to receive program fees, youth participating in the initiatives are obligated to convey Israel’s message and be active in social networks for a certain amount of time after enjoying tours and fellowships. Central members are more active in coordination jobs because of their monetary access while less central members participate in innovative projects and new ways of marketing.

**Network synergy**

The network of Israel’s public diplomacy is expanded by strengthening internal relations and building external relationships. Strength in internal relations and network coherence are enhanced through frequent programs in the forms of travel, conferences, exhibitions, and fellowships, etc. This aspect is stronger among central actors who redefine and coordinate new initiatives. External relationship building is enhanced through activities that help expand the network. This is carried out locally in Israel’s public diplomacy network through similar organizations and globally by American organizations that share the same policy to increase the network’s impact and legitimacy. This aspect is facilitated by the presence of the Jewish diaspora in the United States.

U.S. university campuses are the site of most of Israeli network expansion activities. This is largely to combat the potential influence of anti-Israel activities at campuses which could decidedly change the course of young people’s attitudes toward Israel for the rest of their lives. Older cohorts, on the contrary, usually come across anti-Israel information only through the media which they could choose to ignore (Lidman, 2010).

The lack of diversity among sponsors of public diplomacy programs is another inhibiting factor in the eventual diversity of the whole network in terms of its composition and stakeholders. Eventually, diversity is found in activities and not in the mindset.

**Network strategy**

Another aspect of network analysis deals with network strategy or the informational dynamics of the network (Zaharna et al., 2013). This aspect is concerned with how strategic narrative is related to the network. From this point of view, there are task-based, social-based, and identity-based narratives. Task-based narrative, or the goal of the network in the case of the network under study, is the promotion of a favorable image of Israel among the American public, while identity based and social-based narratives are circulated within the network to attract and retain network members.
In new public diplomacy, narratives are created by the members and the process of creating the narrative is more important than the outcome (Iaydjiev, 2013). Yet members of the Israeli network are trapped in group thinking and share the same narrative. In other words, while Israel’s public diplomacy benefits from a dense network structure in expanding the network through new media tools such as social networking, it lags behind in the collaboration process which is harder than networking.

The best narrative to be able to circulate in the network and be effective is the one which is ‘authentic, compelling and attractive’ (Firestone & Dong, 2015). No matter what message is conveyed in the network, those narratives prevail that expose the underlying real messages and those which people have a role in their creation. Collaboration means that individuals not only connect and share information but also generate knowledge. In the case of Israel, individuals participate in publicizing information throughout the network, similar to propaganda methods. Efforts are mostly monological and focus on enlarging the network and enhancing connections with the goal of distributing a controlled narrative and information that corresponds with the American public’s narrative and values. This narrative style is more in line with old propaganda tactics especially when Israeli public diplomacy connections to the state for information collection and financial support are revealed. This type of public diplomacy is informing the public through monological narratives in digital format.

To conclude, Israel’s public diplomacy model entails two approaches: advocacy and relationship building. The first approach is informational and message oriented and involves the association of those who possess the information with those who are the network hubs. It is concerned with managing the flow of messages in the network which should be consistent with the intended narrative of Israel as a start-up nation in line with Western values such as democracy and development. The second approach is to enlarge the network of public diplomacy activists by creating connections between Israeli and pro-Israel American individuals, NGOs, and groups. This is done using synergy strategies of internal and external relationship building.

The present study’s social network analysis and qualitative content analysis reveals a contradiction in Israel’s public diplomacy. A network strategy, which is a product of the information age and a globalized era and is marked by the promise of openness of messaging and information flow, stands in contrast to Israel’s closed approach to strategic narrative (Hayden, 2013). The network system is locked to opposing opinions because of the power of the network in circulating the intended narrative. Whilst having the appearance of a participatory network, it is not open to ideas that are different to the official Israeli public diplomacy narrative. In fact, it is a network with more and more connections among like-minded nodes. In other words, while new public diplomacy is tried in form, it is negated in essence; the network strategy stands in contrast to its government-controlled, closed narratives. Social network data about network members’ ties to the Israeli government show the network is made up of actors who appear to be independent but in fact receive information and money from the government or from philanthropist supporters.

This approach contrasts with the increase in accelerated communications and social networking, and more critical attitudes toward Israel among younger people in the United States which make new public diplomacy methods a necessity for Israel.
It can be predicted that the controlled narrative can affect the network too and drive some members out. Based on network analysis conducted by looking at Israel’s public diplomacy network structure, network synergy, and network strategy, it is evident that the network is closed in terms of diversity of members and opinion and critical discussion because it is mainly a policy network aimed at justifying policies. New forms of communication are applied to conduct old public diplomacy whose aim is to convince the public to be supportive of Israeli governmental policies. The model is old public diplomacy in a new form. Figure 1 illustrates the model of Israel’s public diplomacy towards the United States in which network actors (government, NGOs and individuals) participate in promoting their intended narrative to the American public through public diplomacy techniques and programs and via their connections to pro-Israeli advocacy groups in the United States.

Israel applies this model of public diplomacy simultaneously with the American pro-Israeli lobby. Future studies should investigate the relationship between official Israeli public diplomacy and the activities of the American pro-Israeli lobby. It remains for studies to address the facilitating role of each for the other in creating a supportive public opinion environment in the United States.

**Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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