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The strategy of Israeli digital diplomacy toward Arab peoples

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Israel's digital diplomacy has become a central component of its soft-power strategy, particularly through Arabic-language campaigns targeting Arab publics. However, persistent conflict and legitimacy deficits raise questions about the effectiveness of these efforts. This study examines how Israel constructs and disseminates strategic narratives through Arabic-language digital channels and whether these narratives contribute to reshaping regional perceptions. It is based on a qualitative content and discourse analysis of more than 500 publicly available posts published between 2010 and 2021 by Israel Speaks Arabic and related Ministry of Foreign Affairs platforms, systematically coded by platform, publication date, communicative format, and thematic focus, and analyzed using framing and dramaturgical approaches across peacetime, crisis, and normalization periods. The analysis identifies four dominant frames, shared values, religious coexistence, technological progress, and normalization, which vary according to political context but remain constrained by entrenched public distrust. Despite high levels of technological sophistication and engagement, Israel's digitally disseminated discourse frequently generates contestation rather than persuasion, giving rise to the "humanization paradox," whereby humanitarian messaging coexists with visible conflict and undermines credibility. The study refines soft-power theory by demonstrating that attraction without perceived justice is inherently unstable and proposes a conceptual framework linking digital diplomacy, legitimacy, and narrative power in asymmetric conflicts.

KEYWORDS

Arab publics, digital diplomacy, humanization paradox, Israel, Middle East, soft power, strategic narratives

1 Introduction

In the last 10 years, the world of diplomacy has gone through a major digital transformation which has changed the very foundation of state communication, influence, and legitimacy management in the public sphere across the globe. Diplomacy was mostly carried out in person by ambassadors and at large international meetings; today, it is practiced through algorithms and public participation where attention, credibility, and emotions are the political currency (Bjola and Holmes, 2015; Pamment, 2016). The scope of diplomatic actions via digital means has significantly increased, moving from mere social-media connection to the full usage of platform features, data analysis, and even storytelling processes in the foreign-policy decision-making (Hedling and Bremberg, 2021). The new communication space asserts that already made visible and controlling the narratives are the main battlegrounds in the geopolitical game and the audience's emotional attachment, which in Papacharissi (2015) view, online sociability comes to be referred to as affective publics.

In the realm of digital diplomacy, Israel has become the most advanced and skilled player from the technological point of view. The social media platforms are used by the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in the same manner as tools for persuasion, crisis management, and reputation restoration (Gilboa, 2020; Manor, 2023). The ministries and agencies involved want to go beyond mere issue communication and gradually transform Israel's international image from that of a conflict-ridden and war-torn country to that of a place rich in technology, democracy, and cultural tolerance (Azpíroz, 2023; Hallward and Biygautane, 2024). Israel's strategy reflects the merging of communication strategy and soft-power statecraft, trying to avoid dealing with traditional media channels, and attracting the foreign audiences directly through stories that resonate with their emotions (Hall, 2015; Roselle et al., 2014).

Despite a rapidly expanding literature on digital diplomacy and *Hasbara*, much scholarship remains oriented toward Western publics or broad image-management campaigns (Bjola and Pamment, 2022). Far less systematic attention has been devoted to how Israel's Arabic-language digital outreach constructs persuasive narratives for Arab publics audiences with deep historical, cultural, and emotional ties to the Arab–Israeli conflict (Shalash, 2023). While these publics represent both the most resistant and the most consequential audience for Israel's regional legitimacy, existing research often maps message content or institutional structures without interrogating the affective framings that underpin persuasion. Recent studies have begun to fill this gap, showing how narrative framing and humanitarian self-presentation are deployed to humanize Israel's image (Koa and Nassar, 2024; Azpíroz, 2023), yet they stop short of analyzing the fluctuating credibility of these narratives during episodes of conflict.

Building on this emerging scholarship, the present study asks:

What is the strategy of Israeli digital diplomacy toward Arab publics, and how does it operationalize soft power through Arabic-language online communication?

To address this question, the study explicitly differentiates between heterogeneous Arab publics such as Palestinians under occupation, Arab citizens of Israel, audiences in neighboring conflict states (Lebanon and Syria) and publics in post-normalization Gulf states, taking into account the political, emotional, and strategic contexts in which messages are designed and received.

It hypothesizes that Israel's Arabic-language discourse employs technologically sophisticated tools and emotionally charged frames to humanize its image; however, the credibility of these narratives fluctuates inversely with the intensity of on-ground conflict. The humanization paradox is the main concept of this research, which points to the fact that during military escalation, the sharing of humane values through words and terms loses ground and this situation is characterized by the duality of being able to display one's kindness and at the same time seeing all the structural violence and occupation that are still there.

1.1 From communication to algorithmic power

The digital turn in diplomacy is one of the major changes in modern statecraft. Digital diplomacy, or the managed use of digital platforms for foreign relations, has introduced various technologies into the international world such as communication, data analysis,

and algorithmic visibility (Bjola and Holmes, 2015; Manor, 2023; Pamment, 2016). More so, it is not the decision made by diplomatically, but rather the whole area of networked governance whereby nations fight for their claims, just like partners in the marriage contest getting the best and being more loved.

All this change is the result of a more profound power struggle in the international relations scene. According to the International Organization and the European Journal of International Relations, the power of the world can no longer be measured only in terms of military and economic capabilities but rather the modern-day reliance on information flow and relationships has taken their place (Farrell and Newman, 2019; Sending et al., 2015). Thus, digital diplomacy becomes the mainstay of soft power (Nye, 2004) because it enables the power of attraction and credibility to be executed even in the midst of an “invisible” world where visibility is controlled by algorithms and hence a scarce resource.

On the other hand, digital dependence has ushered in a new era of hierarchy regarding attention and control. Algorithmic infrastructures do give preference to certain actors and narratives turning the power to convince into a form of governance of visibility, which is why Bjola and Pamment (2022) and Tufekci (2015) have been vocal in their concerns about the risks involved. Influence is already less about moral arguments and more about the ability to control attention economies that are subjected to the logics of the platforms and to geopolitical interests.

The blending of digital diplomacy, soft power, and strategic narrative theory has become the focal point of the contemporary discourse (Nye, 2004; Miskimmon et al., 2014). Attraction is what soft power is based upon; strategic narratives articulate how that attraction is created through coherent storylines connecting identity, action, and legitimacy (Roselle et al., 2014). In the case of digital, legitimacy is not a trait but a performance: it has to be enacted, circulated, and emotionally enlarged.

Communication studies in politics indicate that the main driving force of this effect is emotion. In the view of Papacharissi (2015) the public affected by feelings such as empathy, outrage, pride and the like, which serve as the main (and sometimes only) sources of the engagement and the spread of ideas, is formed. That is why digital diplomacy is considered as an affecting economy where emotions are the main tools of diplomacy (Hall, 2015).

Israel's digital diplomacy is the perfect example of such a transition. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) via its various multilingual social media channels tells stories of modernity, humanitarianism, and cultural openness. But, as Gilboa (2020) and Manor (2023) point out, this is happening in an environment of constant conflict where credibility is very low and humanitarian claims are being constantly negated by the violence that is very visible. The challenge that Israel faces is not that of technology but rather the challenge of keeping emotional legitimacy in the middle of the discord between what is represented and what is real.

Researches regarding *Hasbara 2.0*, which is the digitalization of Israel's public relations, highlight that the communication technologies not only increase the state's power but also reinforce its position as the stronger party in a conflict (Aouragh, 2016; Kampf et al., 2015). According to Gilboa (2020), the political and public relations image of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) has transformed from the institution relying mainly on traditional means of communication to a “professional” digital one that interconnects national security, image management, and social-media engagement.

Such evolution can be observed in the trends published in *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy and Global Affairs*, where digital diplomacy is regarded as a hybrid activity that merges persuasion, surveillance, and strategic framing (Bjola and Pamment, 2022; Azpíroz, 2023). Besides, they also pointed to the one and the only viewpoint of Farrell and Newman (2019) who called these interconnected systems as the arrangements of “weaponized interdependence” where control of information is the method used instead of might. The situation in Israel falls right into this pattern where it is indeed dubbed “visibility management” and consists mainly of depicting the good side of the country, i.e., humanitarian aid and technological collaboration while, on the other hand, showing the sad side, i.e., occupation or military aggression is kept to a minimum.

In this sense, digital diplomacy is a soft-power securitization strategy: relatable stories lessen the moral implications of using forceful policy. Nonetheless, this tactic is very fragile by nature as every digital exposure not only illuminates the very contradictions that the tactic intends to conceal but also makes them louder.

1.2 Localizing soft power: the Arabic turn

Although Hasbara 2.0 research is illuminating the global communication system of Israel, its modification for Arab audiences which are the most resistant yet the most important for the regional legitimacy still remains unclear. Recent empirical studies (Shalash, 2023; Koa and Nassar, 2024) confirm that Arabic-speaking platforms like *Israel Speaks Arabic* make use of religious and cultural references together with humanitarian imagery to create an emotions-based vocabulary of mutual living and modernity. Hallward and Biygautane (2024) found out that these frames become stronger during conflict when the Ministry of Foreign Affairs tries to show military actions as moral restraint.

Nonetheless, these investigations are still mostly descriptive. They register the content of messages but do not consider how humanitarian narratives function within the larger scales of power and perception. The outcome is what this research names the humanization paradox—the combination of compassionate rhetoric with the persistence of structural violence. Arab audiences face a humanitarian front stage (Goffman, 1959) that conceals a coercive backstage, creating symbolic dissonance that weakens credibility.

Existing scholarship explains Israel’s digital sophistication but not the mechanisms through which culturally adapted humanitarian narratives mediate between persuasion and domination. No study has systematically examined how Arabic-language discourse performs soft power inside a securitized communicative field where empathy and control coexist.

This study addresses that gap by integrating soft-power theory (Nye, 2004), strategic-narrative analysis (Miskimmon et al., 2014), and critical perspectives on security and representation (Buzan, 1998; Said, 1978). It theorizes the *humanization paradox* as the structural condition of Israel’s digital diplomacy: the effort to humanize reproduces the visibility of domination. In doing so, it moves beyond message description to a critical account of how power, emotion, and representation intersect in Arabic-language digital outreach.

1.3 Performing humanity: a critical framework for digital diplomacy

It is evident that the proposed framework is grounded in Goffman (1959) theatrical model and considers Israeli digital diplomacy as a stage performance of humanitarianism, at the same time.

The front stage displays empathy and coexistence through soft power and strategic narrative (Nye, 2004; Miskimmon et al., 2014), while the backstage depicts the Israeli government’s real-life concerns of security and control. The friction between the two areas generates what can be called symbolic dissonance where the digital presence makes the humanitarian acts more noticeable but at the same time reveals the opposite and thus turns the whole thing into a performance rather than mere empathy. In a way, the criticism is more precise through the glasses of Postcolonial theory. Following Said (1978), one can argue that Israel’s Arabic outreach is an instance of digital Orientalism which is a way of representing that portrays the Arabs as being emotional and receiving Israel’s rationality and kindness. This imbalance not only makes the humanitarian dialogue an instrument of symbolic control but also creates “the ironic spectator” as conceived by Chouliaraki (2013), where the act of compassion is rendered as a mere spectacle that lacks accountability. Furthermore, critical security studies highlight the fact that the engagement with Arab publics is taking place in a securitized area of communication divided up and controlled by factors such as risk management and image stabilization (Buzan, 1998; Huysmans, 2011). The making of humanitarian narratives involves a double function: to present soft power and to lessen the threat to the reputation. To put it briefly, the digital diplomacy is viewed herein as both performance and governance a technology of visibility that aims at legitimation but at the same time very often makes its contradictions apparent. The framework puts forward a revised definition of soft power as being contingent and unstable: the relationship of attraction gets weakened when the visibility brings out the asymmetry. The paradox of humanization thus captures the digital persuasion’s limitations in untrustworthy contexts and at the same time reveals the interconnection between the sources of power, empathy, and control in the algorithmic age.

2 Methodology and research design

The research examines Israel’s Arabic digital diplomacy as one of the important cases (Gerring, 2007) of a planned communication strategy in the framework of a prolonged dispute. Israel is a perfect example of technologically advanced but very limited in terms of legitimacy diplomatic practice, an extreme but theoretically clarifying case for the understanding of how states in moral disputes use digital means for soft power projection (Sending et al., 2015). The insights drawn from this case are applicable to other players like Russia or China whose digital diplomacy is also balancing among persuasion, securitization, and narrative control. The scope covers 2010–2021, which includes the MFA’s digital communication institutionalization and the following acceleration after the Abraham Accords. During this period, Israel changed from early Hasbara 2.0 campaign to a worldwide model of networked statecraft fitted with real-time analytics and emotional storytelling (Manor, 2023; Bjola and Pamment, 2022). The primary source of the research consists of three Arabic language platforms: the Facebook page *Israel Speaks Arabic*, the Twitter/X account of IDF spokesperson Avichay Adraee, and the Arabic language section of the MFA’s official website. These platforms act as the backbone of Israeli digital diplomacy, through which Israel seeks to project a more human-like image and gain legitimacy (Shalash, 2023).

In the empirical corpus there are 512 Arabic posts published between 2010 and 2021. Each post was described by the platform, publication date, post title or headline, media format (text, image, video), and dominant thematic frame. This level of documentation is available at the item level to help transparency in decision-making as well as reproducibility of the sampling process.

The chosen dataset contains all the posts made on those platforms during 3 weeks representing different political contexts. A post-normalization period (September 2020), a crisis period during the Gaza war (May 2021), and a post-ceasefire peacetime period (July 2021) are the three two-week intervals. Intentionally, these periods were selected to capture narrative stability, acute conflict, and post-conflict recalibration, thereby allowing for systematic comparisons over various political and communicative conditions. The comparative design enables the study to observe how the framing strategies of Israel vary with the changing situations of stability and conflict. Therefore, a qualitative, interpretive content and discourse analysis has been performed, utilizing a hybrid coding framework that mixes deductive categories from soft-power and framing theory (Nye, 2004; Entman, 1993) with inductive themes discovered during pilot readings. The categories include frame type (shared values, coexistence, security justification), emotional valence, and use of multimedia. Before the analysis complete, a protocol of coding was developed which included the operational definitions of each frame, emotional valence indicator, and multimodal feature. Upon request, item lists and full codebooks can be reprinted and used for secondary research. The validity of the analysis was assured through intercoder cross-checking and triangulation with MFA policy reports and secondary literature (Gilboa, 2020; Hedling and Bremberg, 2021).

Reliability was assessed through cross-referencing a randomly selected subset of posts and by resolving discrepancies through iterative discussion to ensure consistency in analysis.

All data that were used in the research were available to the public, and the translations maintained the idiomatic and emotive nuances. The study combined methodology transparency with interpretive depth thus giving a new understanding to the old concepts of soft power, strategic narrative, and digital legitimacy via a verifiable foundation. It thus uncovers the dual role of Israel's Arabic-language online discourse as a persuasive tool and a place of conflict over its legitimacy where the legitimacy is challenged and renegotiated.

This paper participates in the debates that are continuing about the relationships between digital diplomacy, soft power and legitimacy in the context of conflicts. It illustrates with a case study of Israel's Arabic-language digital outreach that is methodologically very accurate and at the same time inventing the theoretical concept of the humanization paradox the apparently coexisting humanitarian self-presentation and structural violence in the communication of the state. Thus, it fuses strategic-narrative theory, political communication, and Middle Eastern studies, and at the same time, gives a detailed account of how online discourse is akin to a battlefield for persuasion. Besides being theoretical, the research also provides recommendations for the parties involved in the region as to how one can conduct digital diplomacy that is ethical, trustworthy and also considerate of the audience. The following parts of the paper explain the conceptual framework, present the methodology and results, and consider the wider implications for soft power and digital legitimacy in the Middle East.

3 Analysis

Israel's digital diplomacy in Arabic is a well-developed stage of Hasbara 2.0, a shift from a defensive information practice that was reactive to one that is a proactive narrative building (Manor, 2023). The Foreign Affairs Ministry is orchestrating its Arabic communications, particularly through Israel Speaks Arabic, employing four framing techniques, which are a combination of emotional impact and strategic messaging. Together these techniques create what Tegeback (2024) calls "discursive persuasion," where winning people's hearts through storytelling rather than through physical power is the approach.

3.1 The shared values frame

As shown in Table 1 the Shared Values frame revolves around moral fellowship between Israelis and Arabs which is achieved through empathy, coexistence, and even little bit of everyday life familiarity. Shalash (2023) points out that posts constantly celebrate Islamic holidays, congratulate Arab athletes, or offer condolences in case of regional crises. These actions represent what Ismail (2022) refers to as digital empathy diplomacy, whose main goal is to make Israel seem close and warm through feelings and familiarity.

An example from a 2021 post is: "To our brothers and sisters across the Arab world, we wish you a blessed month of peace and compassion." This kind of communication gives the impression of soft power through moral resonance as per Nye, yet, as Manor (2023) claims, it is also acting on the stage: the good-natured "front stage" hiding the views of a repressive policy. The Shared Values frame thus not only serves the purpose of outreach and image repair but also discloses the tension between empathy and credibility.

3.2 The religious, cultural, and normalization frame

Religion and culture serve as symbolic bridges for persuasion. Posts often quote Qur'anic verses "We made you nations and tribes that you may know one another" or reference shared prophets and traditions. Shalash (2023) identifies this as Israel's attempt to embed itself in the region's moral vocabulary, while Ismail (2022) sees it as a strategy to "re-sacralize" Israel's image within Middle Eastern identity politics.

A 2020 post stated: "Jerusalem, home to prophets of peace, reminds us that our faiths teach compassion, not hatred." Such appeals harness religious sentiment but also risk backlash; Oreqat and AlBadri (2023) shows that many Arabs perceive them as instrumental

TABLE 1 The shared values frame: analytical summary.

Theoretical link	Observed expression	Analytical insight
Soft Power (Nye; Tegeback, 2024)	Emphasis on empathy, coexistence	Attraction through moral resonance
Framing (Shalash, 2023)	Ramadan greetings, disaster condolences	Construction of shared moral identity
Dramaturgy (Manor, 2023)	Humanitarian imagery	Front-stage benevolence vs. backstage coercion

appropriations. For Tegeback (2024), this reveals the fragility of “narrative legitimacy” credibility that must be constantly performed. The Religious and Cultural frame thus oscillates between intimacy and suspicion, exemplifying the limits of cultural persuasion.

After the Abraham Accords, Israel’s digital diplomacy adopted an integrative tone, projecting regional coexistence through imagery of partnership and modernity. Posts highlight Emirati or Bahraini tourists in Jerusalem, joint ventures, and interfaith events. Shalash (2023) terms this *performative normalization*: digital staging of peace through lifestyle symbols.

As shown in Table 2 a post from 2021 proclaimed: “Arab innovators walk the streets of Tel Aviv, building the future together.” According to Ismail (2022), these visuals reframe normalization as shared modernity; Tegeback (2024) interprets them as *strategic reassurance* cultural harmony masking geopolitical tension. From Manor (2023) dramaturgical perspective, such optimism conceals backstage insecurity the absence of Palestinian reconciliation. The Integration and Normalization frame therefore encapsulates the *humanization paradox*: warmth projected amid unresolved injustice.

3.3 The science, technology, and humanization paradox frame

This frame highlights the innovation economy of Israel as a moral and practical resource. Posts written in Arabic express happiness for the research done on water, medicine, and agriculture being done together, and they also depict the progress as a benefit for all. Shalash (2023) reports that such content is the main one during times of peace and that it is the rebranding of Israel as an innovation hub and not a conflict zone.

A post from 2019 read: “the scientists from Israel and the Arab world are working together to make the desert habitable.” Tegeback (2024) considers this as techno-soft power where the source of power is the ability of the innovator to create and deliver the needed products or services. Oreqat and AlBadri (2023) however, cautions that the innovation rhetoric conveys the message of moral superiority and progress as justification. Therefore, the Science and Technology frame attracts but also reinforces hierarchy, modernity in the case of Israel and vis-a-vis Arab publics as the receivers.

Through different frames, there is a consensus on the humanization paradox (Manor, 2023): the use of humanitarian rhetoric exists alongside visible oppression. Tegeback (2024) describes it as the crisis of performance credibility, the more compassion is communicated online, the more contradictions become apparent during the conflict.

TABLE 2 Integration and normalization frame: communicative characteristics.

Communicative device	Purpose	Theoretical reference
Lifestyle and travel imagery	Depict peace dividends	Ismail (2022)
Cross-national influencer visits	Visualize cooperation	Shalash (2023)
Optimistic tone (“New Middle East”)	Emotional normalization	Tegeback (2024)
Absence of conflict markers	Dramaturgical concealment	Manor (2023)

For example, the posts showing sadness for the loss of Gaza’s civilians in May 2021 coincided with airstrikes shown on television and furthermore, while an aid announcement (Ismail, 2022) was made there were conflicting reports about the mobility being restricted. The attempt to “fight hatred with knowledge” (Shalash, 2023) was countered by online campaigns. In each case, the humanitarian front stage was colliding with the coercive backstage realities. The outcome is a passing feeling of empathy but an enduring feeling of mistrust as the legitimacy is dissolved in the spotlight of visibility.

After a while, some posts were retrieved or modified, which restricted the temporal accuracy of the research. The data were checked through internet archives and secondary documents when it was feasible. The process of coding required interpretative judgment and the engagement metrics used are still far from accurate indicators of persuasion (Ismail, 2022). As Oreqat and AlBadri (2023) pointed out, the strong mistrust among Arabs will not easily allow the receiving of the message to be considered as its acceptance. However, one can still feel the above-mentioned constraints, the drawing of frames over time depicts the use of digital diplomacy in Israel’s strategy to turn the power of military might into symbolic capital.

4 Mechanisms and implications

Israel’s digital diplomacy is manifested through a combination of technological coordination and narrative engineering. Manor (2023) refers to this as a networked performance of persuasion, which is backed by inter-ministerial and volunteer cooperation. Ismail (2022) singles out its rhetorical proficiency the capability of switching among humanitarian, religious, and technological discourses.

The three frames together form a soft-power system: Shared Values create the moral connection; Religious and Cultural appeals call forth the symbolic relationship; Integration and Normalization exhibit the peace dividends; and Science and Technology project mastery. But, as Tegeback (2024) contends, flexibility cannot equal in the credibility battle. Social media transparency uncovers contradictions faster than they can be reinterpreted. Oreqat and AlBadri (2023) called this the visibility paradox: “the more Israel communicates, the more it discloses.”

The analysis of Israel’s Arabic-language digital diplomacy strategy proves to be revealing in terms of three interlinked mechanisms. The first one is the continuing contradiction between the power of institutions and the weakness of morality, which clearly indicates that the gap in legitimacy between Israel and the Arabs cannot only be managed by technological sophistication, coordination, and control of the message (Manor, 2023; Ismail, 2022). The second one is the adaptability of framing which plays the role of crisis management, allowing the changes of narratives that might reduce the reputation risk yet do not change the audiences’ perceptions (Shalash, 2023). The last one is the nature of soft power being conditional, as attraction becomes a less powerful tool when there is no impression of justice, which indicates that persuasion without moral credibility is still being restricted by the structure in which it operates (Tegeback, 2024).

The figure presented illustrates the cyclical scenario where to the extent technology infrastructure supports the framing strategies and

content localization, soft power projection and credibility gaps are the outcomes. The synergy between tech interactivity and narrative performance results in the humanization paradox, the perpetual conflict of empathy and exposure (Figure 1).

The effectiveness of Israeli Arabic digital diplomacy reveals the limitations of the soft power emerging through algorithms. The decision of instituting and specialized framing leads to a strategy that draws much attention but is not convincing at all. The whole process can be described as a parade rather than a dialogue: a circle of projection, contestation, and reframing that keeps presence but not trust. In the end, digital sophistication turns out to be the same as being exposed and being exposed leads to being contradicted. In that interconnected universe, you cannot program legitimacy and empathy will not be a robot's job.

5 Findings and discussion

5.1 Reassessing digital diplomacy and refining soft-power theory

This research validates the notion that despite Israel's Arabic digital diplomacy being technologically sophisticated and institutionally coordinated, it still suffers from a deep-seated dualism between the performance level and the legitimacy level. The study, taking into account Manor (2023) interpretation of Hasbara 2.0, indicates a three-step transformation from the defense of justification (2010–2015) where the push was on the Israel segment of the world, to expanding and segmenting (2016–2019), and finally to post-normalization projection (2020–2021). The main themes throughout were values, religious coexistence, integration, and technological progress, which systematically rebranded Israel as enlightened, cooperative, and modern.

In contrast, Tegeback (2024) and Oreqat and AlBadri (2023) state that this soft-power narrative of discourse is to a certain extent diminished owing to the ideological differences. Digital diplomacy acts as stage for huge and glamorous show where things like human rights arguments are hard to sustain because of the clear instance of force behind them. This results in a symbolic dissonance or a

perceptual gap between the moral messaging and policy consequences that the paper identifies as one of the main limitations of the strategy.

These results present a contrary position regarding the techno-optimistic perspective held by digital diplomacy literature. Israel's technology excellence provides high visibility and participation on the "Israel Speaks Arabic" platform, however, as Shalash (2023) reports, these areas become places of participation war, not echo chambers. The audience uses sarcasm, religious counter-discourse, and memes to engage and shifts the comments section into the fight for resistance. This leads to a situation where communicative abundance exists along with a scarcity of credibility; that is, every message of peace produces counter-narratives of occupation.

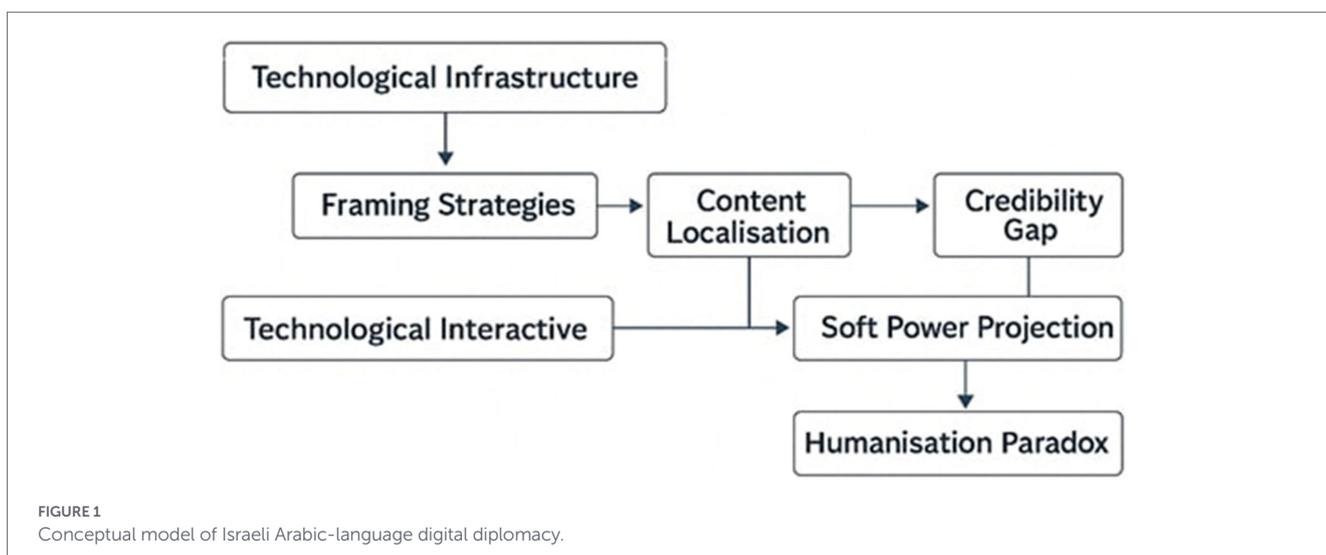
These dynamics are further contextualized in recent Palestinian and Israeli research, pointing out that Arabic-language digital diplomacy operates within a context of embedded mistrust inspired by lived experiences of occupation, military governance, and information asymmetry (Koa and Nassar, 2024; Shalash, 2023). These considerations point to that narrative effectiveness cannot be judged independently of structural power relations.

In the end, the non-coercive interaction improves again Nye's soft-power model by showing the main premise that attraction depends on fairness as perceived. In long-lasting unequal conflicts, being over the others in technology cannot make up for the lack of legitimacy. Israel's virtual diplomacy, although very advanced, still discloses in the end that the method could not triumphed in the battle against the essence of the matter.

5.2 Global context, comparative insights, and narrative sovereignty

The epistemic foundation of this analysis is enhanced by consulting recent regional literature published over the last 5 years, which places Israeli digital diplomacy within broader Middle Eastern debates about media power, normalization, and narrative resistance (Azpíroz, 2023; Hallward and Biygautane, 2024).

Properly placing these discoveries among wider international trends accentuates their everywhere importance. Farrell and Newman (2019) maintain that, governments more and more utilize interdependence and they along with others do it by means of digital networks



as a place for coercive influence. Israel's digital diplomacy is a good example of this hybridization of soft and sharp power: an endeavor to pull through technology while at the same time controlling the narratives that endanger its legitimacy.

Israel's model within the present-day crisis of liberals' losing faith illustrates the loss of the communicative trust which Hall (2015) links to emotional diplomacy: the careful management of euphoria to keep the moral high ground. Judeo-Christian would be dominating over the rest of the world. What comes up is a politics of narrative sovereignty the conflict to impose one's interpretation in a media oversaturated environment. But as Azpíroz (2023) points out, in the regional digital diplomacy the opposite trend of mutual monitoring and imitation is gaining ground, thus suggesting that the control of the narrative is never total but always subject to renegotiation.

When looking at it comparatively, Israel's strategy is closer to middle ground between Sweden's dialogic model of relational credibility (Pamment, 2016) and China's algorithmic coercion (Tufekci, 2015). Like Sweden, Israel is after normative appeal; like China, it banks upon technical precision and message control. Consequently, it is a high-tech yet legitimacy-constrained hybrid diplomacy. The unique affective narrative techniques of Israel, more often than not, transcend the boundary between empathy and instrumentality as opposed to Sweden's persuasion based on transparency.

This blending from a critical-theoretical viewpoint is seen as a reinforcement of the digital Orientalism logic (Alimardani and Elswah, 2021): the Arab public is seen by the power that be as an object to be persuaded, not as a subject to be engaged in a conversation. Israel's Arabic-language discourse reconstructs the region as an audience in need of moral correction, re-inscribing postcolonial hierarchies within digital spaces. Consequently, the technological interactivity hides a communication structure that is not symmetrical, and which gives the Israeli state the position of the narrator of regional modernity.

5.3 Reconceptualizing soft power and its ethical boundaries

The Israeli situation is a case in point for the argument that soft power is not a universal currency but rather capital that is dependent on the context. The context determines the credibility of the sender and the receiver's interpretive power. It is claimed by Tegeback (2024) that Israel's digital soft power is not based on any common ethical standards but on technological self-representation, which makes it precarious in times of conflict. To the use of the same words such as peace, coexistence and innovation, the paper calls it "narrative saturation," which is the condition of rhetorical weariness that takes away the benefits of persuasion.

Digital diplomacy should not be regarded as an outright tool for attracting attention but as a competing mode of communication that is inhibited by previous imbalances. The case of Israel is one where the constant symbolic discord between the peaceful portrayals and the military situations erodes persuasion power in the long term. Like Goffman (1959), the state's humanitarian "front stage" cannot completely conceal the coercive "backstage," and audiences, once they become aware of this dramatization, respond with skepticism instead of compassion.

Digital diplomacy may indeed become more of a spectacle than a humanitarian activity when empathy is considered a strategic tool instead of a core value. One of the main critiques of the situation was voiced by Chouliaraki (2013), who pointed to the moral positions being traded for the quickness of the esthetic as one of the main

characteristics of post-humanitarian communication; Israel's online discourse can be seen as a prominent instance of this clash. The image of the state as peaceful and caring may, in fact, be a mere demonstration of its legal rights—a morality exposed visually and, at the same time, unaccountable.

The ethical dilemmas are not solely Israel's concern, moreover. The emotions-driven perception states of the digital age are experiencing the same challenge in their diplomatic activities; thus, the challenge is to ensure that visibility does not equal lack of authenticity. The soft power of the future will demand not only creative storytelling but also righteousness, compassion, and openness. These structures are imperative and without them every technology-related skill simply brings an atmosphere of doubt.

6 Conclusion

According to the research, Israel's digital diplomacy in the Arabic language is very high-tech but is still hindered by a lack of credibility. The core of the discussion is the "humanization paradox": the virtual compassion and appealing to the human side could not overcome the bitter conditions of war and thus, a conflict of symbols which caused the loss of trust. Consequently, Israel's strategy is perceived as legitimate but in reality, it has not gained that status. Theoretically, the study has clarified Nye's idea of soft power by claiming that it is impossible to attract another party without their feeling of justice and also it has applied Goffman's idea of dramaturgy to the digital platform showing the humanitarian stories as a "front-stage" performance which obscures the coercive "back-stage" realities.

On the one hand, it provides a complete analysis of the Arabic digital framing of Israel, showing that digital statecraft operates not solely as a channel for communication but rather as a battleground for both power and resistance, thereby reinforcing the geopolitical disparities it seeks to eliminate. It is possible that future research will incorporate a comparative and experimental approach in order to examine the impact of the audience's reactions and the influence of algorithmic biases. Future research may extend this framework through comparative audience studies or experimental designs that examine differential reception across Arab sub-publics and platform algorithms. In the end, the research concludes that in situations of unequal conflicts, the power of digital diplomacy lies not in the technological connection but in the credibility, which is a quality that is deeply rooted in ethical and emotional sincerity and not just in the amplification of the narrative.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Author contributions

AS: Investigation, Visualization, Validation, Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Writing – review & editing, Data curation, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Project administration.

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Conflict of interest

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