The impact of coverage on Twitter on the public reaction

A research to the impact of the coverage of Israel and Palestine on Twitter on the public reaction during the Israel-Palestine conflict in the summer of 2014.

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Introduction

In the summer of 2014 the conflict between Israel and Palestine got a revival. According to Israel, Palestine had abducted three young Israeli men in June 2014. Israel was furious and began an operation to search the boys and opened the attack on Hamas, a Palestinian movement (The Guardian, 2014). The intensity of the conflict that followed, was at its peak in the months of June and July. During this conflict, communication by means of social media was very important for both actors. Especially Twitter was a convenient tool to communicate with the people and fight the information war. In this research the use of Twitter by Israel and Palestine and the influence of specific kind of tweets on the public reaction has been examined. The research question used for this research is as follows: *What impact has the coverage of Israel and Palestine on Twitter on the public reaction during the Israel-Palestine conflict in the summer of 2014?*

Social relevance

In the past years social media has become more important in the lives of people. People can communicate with each other from all around the world. Twitter is one of the many forms of social media. It became a very popular medium and more and more people began to use it for different manners. One way to use Twitter is as a tool to communicate with the world what you are doing. Besides this it is also a tool for companies, governments, political leaders and public authorities to communicate and promote their ideas. With Twitter it is possible to reach all kinds of people throughout the entire world. It seems as though the modern society is very busy with Twitter as it became an important medium. These new technologies may also be used in politics. When this happens, it is also called *digital diplomacy* (Holmes, 2014). Digital diplomacy is a very important phenomena when it comes to the use of digital technologies in politics. It is therefore the umbrella concept for this research. The concept itself will be discussed later on in the literature review.

The importance of the new technologies and social media is visible in a conflict like the Israel-Palestine war. As we will see later on in the research design, Caldwell, Murphy & Menning (2009) explain in their article why Twitter is so important during this conflict. Both actors sent their tweets into the world with a goal. In this research we will look at two different goals, namely threatening the other actor and winning the hearts and minds of the people. Because Twitter is so widely used and an important tool for political actors during a conflict, it is relevant to look at the response of the people on the different kind of tweets. Do the tweets influence the reaction of the people? Do actors who are sending threatening messages and tweets that have to win people over more public reaction? In a time where social media and especially Twitter are so relevant in our modern world, these are questions of importance.

Scientific relevance

As stated above, Twitter became very popular in recent years (Liu, Kliman-Silver & Mislove, 2014, p. 305). That means that there is more attention for it, also form the scientific side. There has been a lot of research into the use of Twitter in different areas. For example in the business world as marketing tool (Thoring, 2011), in politics (Bruns & Burgess, 2011) and also in the Israel-Palestine conflict (Siapera, Hunt & Lynn, 2015). It therefore also seems as though within the scientific world there is more attention for the use of Twitter. However, in most studies Twitter is being investigated on its own without investigating the influence of the tweets on the reaction of people. Therefore this research is scientifically relevant, because we will look at the different types of tweets sent by Israel and Palestine and what impact they have on the reaction of the people. Because this research looks at the public reaction on specific types of tweets and not just the impact of Twitter, it is different from other investigations. This research can create scientific curiosity for the world of digital diplomacy. With the emerging importance of the use of social media in politics, it is relevant for other researchers to look into the different ways of executing digital diplomacy.

Structure

This research starts with a theoretical review. In this review we discuss why social media is used as a power tool and which concepts are crucial. Different kinds of literature that are relevant for this research and its consistency with this research will be discussed and compared with each other. This discussion will lead to two different hypotheses. After the theoretical review there will be discussed how the hypotheses must be interpreted and investigated on the basis of a research design. In this part the use of Twitter during the conflict between Israel and Palestine is discussed. Next, the data collection from different Twitter accounts is being explained in detail. With this data, the various dependent and independent variable(s) are examined and operationalized. The next step within this research is the analysis of the data that is collected. All the relevant information will be explained and described. After that, the findings that flow out of the analysis will be presented. In this section, hypotheses are tested and the outcome of the research is explained. This outcome is further discussed in the discussion section, with which this study concludes.

Theoretical review

Public diplomacy

The Internet has played, and is still playing, a very important role in the political world. Social practices are more digitalized, which also affected the political communication (Ausserhofer & Maireder, 2013, p. 291). These developments on the Internet and especially social media make sure that it is easy to publish information to a vast audience (Ausserhofer & Maireder, 2013, p. 292). With a connected population through various online networks, it is easier to coordinate the publics demands change (Clay, 2011, p. 29). A government will thus get more power when it controls the social media as it is an important and efficient tool to reach the people.

The developments in the digital world create a new possibility for state actors to gain more ''soft power''. *Soft power* is ''the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment'' (Nye, 2008, p. 94). Soft power is about attraction and achieving what you want through gentle means. The new technologies such as social networks on the Internet created a much more personal form of politics (Bennet, 2012, p. 22). This means that the government of a country is more able to reach the people in a more personal way. They can use digital communication tools to obtain information about the desires of the people. This is handy to adjust the policy to the wants of the people.

In line with soft power there is the term public diplomacy. *Public diplomacy* means particularly that interactions take place with nongovernmental individuals and organisations (Nye, 2008, p. 101). Public diplomacy has three dimensions. The first one is daily communication, which involves explaining the context of domestic and foreign policy decisions (Nye, 2008, p. 101). It is about how a message is told to the domestic and foreign press. Especially the foreign press is important for public diplomacy. The second dimension is strategic communication, which develops a set of themes. It is like a campaign where various events and communications are planned to bring back central themes (Nye, 2008, p. 102). The last dimension is ''the development of lasting relationships with key individuals over many years through scholarships, exchanges, training, seminars, conferences, and access to media channels'' (Nye, 2008, p. 102).

Digital diplomacy

To understand what effect tweets sent by a government have on the public reaction, it is important to first understand what digital diplomacy means. This is important, because digital diplomacy is in fact what happens when different actors provide information through digital manners to reach the public. According to Holmes (2014), digital diplomacy has three main features. First, it refers to how actors engage with the audience in order to project a message. Second, it is about gathering and using information. Finally, digital diplomacy means that actors need data to monitor changes in the political

structure (Holmes, 2014, p. 14). Digital diplomacy is actually about gathering information and using information to engage with the people and to change the policy on the basis of this information.

Digital diplomacy is in line with the use of social media by political actors. With the use of social media, political actors can gather information and reach out to the people in an easy way. In this way, digital manners are used by governments to provide their policy. The connection of digital diplomacy and the use of social media becomes clear in an article of Wolfsfeld, Segev and Sheafer (2013). These writers state that it is easier for politicians and governments to provide information and project a message to the people with social media. Understanding the political environment is important to see how social media is used (Wolfsfeld, Segev & Sheafer, 2013, p. 119). Besides that, the use of social media increases when significant political events take place (Wolfsfeld, Segev & Sheafer, 2013, p. 120). Therefore it is important for this research to look at important events to get a better view of what the public reaction is on different kind of tweets.

Influence of the tone of the message
The previous section showed that social media is important for political actors to use digital diplomacy and gain soft power. It is now relevant to examine how political actors use social media and what kind of language they use in their messages on social media. In order to do so, this section looks into what the literature is saying about how people react on threats, negative messages, and positive messages that are supposed to win support.

In their article, Fridkin and Kenney (2004) examine the effectiveness of negative campaigning. They explain that there is an increase in negative commercials, because strategists believe negative campaigning works (Fridkin & Kenney, 2014, p. 571). With negative campaigns, people process and react immediately and most of the time unintentionally to the messages (Fridkin & Kenney, 2014, p. 571). Fridkin & Kenney (2014) state that negative information attracts more people than positive information does, when people are engaged in automatic processing (Fridkin & Kenney, 2014, p. 572). This statement also applies when there is far more positive information then negative information (Fridkin & Kenney, 2014, p. 572). No matter what the amount of the information is, according to Fridkin and Kenney (2014), people will always be more attracted to negative information. The reason why people are more attracted to negative information is that negative messages often carry clues about events that people should avoid (Fridkin & Kenney, 2014, p. 572).

Besides Fridkin and Kenny (2014), Jenny Lloyd (2007) also has written an article about negative messaging. She states that it is more popular for political actors to say what they do not stand for than telling the people what they do stand for (Lloyd,2007, p. 305). This is because negative campaigning is effective and it works (Lloyd, 2007, p. 305). Negative campaigning is defined by O'Shaughnesy (1999): ''it emphasises polarities, vilifications of enemies, and value conflicts, coupled with its need to create and sustain social discontent.'' Here we see that political actors can be negative about each

other to create social discontent. Negative campaigning, as defined by O'Shaugnesy (1999), is thus often used to make sure that people see the shortcomings of the opponent in a political campaign battle. With the advent of new technologies the medium of delivering the negative message as changed, but the idea of negative campaigning has existed for a long time (King & McConnell, 2003, p. 843). This negative messaging has more impact than positive messaging (Fridkin & Kenney, 2014; Lloyd, 2007). This statement is supported by an article by Haddock and Zana. They state that negative political advertising creates negative evaluations of the target and positive evaluations of the source (Haddock & Zana,1997, p. 207).

Besides the research within the political field, there is also research within the psychological field into the impact of negative messaging. Ito, Larsen, Smith and Cacioppo (1998) have done research into the impact of negative information on evaluations. The authors state that ''negative events result in a greater mobilization of an organism's physiological, cognitive, emotional, and social responses'' (Ito et al, 1998, p. 887). People will automatically evaluate events that have a negative impact on their lives consistent with automatic vigilance (Ito et al, 1998, p. 899). Besides the fact that negative information has a great impact on people, thoughts set by negative information are also less likely to change. A research by Richey, McClelleland & Shimkunas (1967, p. 325) shows that negative first impressions are more resistant to change than positive first impressions. People are more inclined to remember negative impressions than positive impressions.

Out of these psychological researches it thus appears that people react stronger on negative information than on positive information. Combining the studies on the use of negative campaigns in politics and psychological studies on the topics, it seems a reasonable choice for political actors to share negative information.

In this research the influence of negative information is examined in the form of threatening tweets. Doing so, the impact of negative information in the form of a threatening tweet sent by the political actors in Israel and Palestine on the public reaction will be compared to the non-threatening tweets. In line with the theory above, it is expected that threatening tweets will thus have more impact on the public reaction than non-threatening tweets. Therefore, the first hypothesis is stated as followed:

H1: It is more likely that there is more public reaction on threatening tweets then on non-threatening tweets.

Besides the effect of threatening tweets on the public reaction, this research will also look at the effect of tweets that are supposed to win hearts and minds. Tweets that are supposed to win hearts and minds can be described as positive messages about the actor that formulates and sends the messages. The messages are supposed to reach the people and make them believe that the concerned actor acts in an appropriate manner. Bruter (2003) investigated the influence of positive messaging about Europe on

the public attitude towards Europe and the European identity. In his conclusion Bruter (2003) states that persistent good news on Europe, about its successes and achievements, modifies the perception of people about Europe and influences their likelihood of identifying themselves with Europe (Bruter, 2003, p. 1164). On the other hand when people are exposed to bad news about Europe, it's failures and threats, people are less likely to feel part of Europe and identify themselves as European (Bruter, 2003, p. 1164). The findings of the research of Bruter (2003) show that the European identity can vary over time because of the media communication and the exposure to symbols of European integration (Bruter, 2003, p. 1160). This communication consists mainly of messaging by political elites and institutions. These actors therefore can have a clear impact on the identity of the citizens (Bruter, 2003, p. 1160). For their own credibility and the possibility to weaken the opponents it is important for political actors to compete with each other about formulating a good narrative (Nye, 2010).

The importance of an good narrative is a good example of soft power and public diplomacy. It is a way of a government to obtain credibility and gain power through attraction and not by means of coercion. Obtaining credibility and legitimacy is very important when it comes to politics or warfare (Shaw, 2002, p. 349). The importance of winning hearts and minds is a traditional principle of counter-insurgency strategy (Egnell, 2010, p. 283). The idea of winning hearts and minds comes from a British general in the years 1952-1954 who stated that it is crucial to win the sympathy of the people in the country that is invaded (Egnell, 2010, p. 283). Winning hearts and minds became important for military operations. In his article Egnell states that ''military activity can only work in a support function to the civilian activities of political and economic reform''. The support of the people is necessary for the soldiers to do their jobs. This idea is originated in the physical warfare. However, nowadays we are dealing with a modern world and new technology where it is possible to reach a lot of people using just a computer. Gardels and Medavoy (2009) define the importance of the new era as ''the new space of power where images compete and ideas are contested; it is where hearts and minds are won or lost and legitimacy is established.'' The advanced technology has thus become an important tool to win hearts and minds (Gardels & Medavoy, 2009, p. 1).

Winning hearts and minds is a concept that comes from a military perception (Egnell, 2010). With this idea in mind and taking the development in technology into account, winning hearts and minds becomes a battle where one actor tries to tell a better story than the other actor and vice versa (Payne, 2009, p. 110). The goal is to craft credible and compelling narratives to the audiences (Payne, 2009, p. 110). The media is essential in the struggle of winning hearts and minds (Payne, 2009, p. 110). Winning hearts and minds is often done by spreading positive messages. As seen with the research of Bruter (2003), positive messages can have a clear impact on people's perceptions. Especially those messages that consist warranties of safety and freedom of harm, provide contentment, joy and love have an impact (Fredrickson, 1998, p. 312). It can therefore be concluded that positive messages have a positive influence on the perceptions of a human being towards the concept.

In this research the influence of tweets that are supposed to win the hearts and minds of their readers on the public reaction is investigated. Looking at other researches, it can be expected that there is a higher public reaction on tweets that are positive about the sender of the tweets. Therefore the second hypothesis is formulated as followed:

H2: It is more likely that there is more public reaction on tweets that are supposed to win hearts and minds compared to tweets that are not supposed to win hearts and minds.

Research design

Twitter in the Israel-Palestine conflict

Israel and Palestine both use social media, and especially Twitter, as a tool in the conflict between each other. The online communication forms play a big role in the strategy of the two actors. Both parties used online communication in the past with success in their own way (Mayfield, 2011, p.80). Within online communication Twitter is very important, because it is a widely used medium and therefore an easy way to reach a lot of people (Liu, Kliman-Silver & Mislove, 2014, p. 305). The importance of Twitter during the conflict between Israel and Palestine becomes clear in an article of Stegemann (2016) where he says ''The current conflict in Gaza is playing out on two fronts: one on the ground, spilling more and more blood with each passing day; the other glowing on television screens and flitting across Twitter feeds around the world''. Twitter is thus very important in this conflict and both actors are tweeting threatening messages as well as messages that show the good things they do. Therefore the conflict between Israel and Palestine is used as a case for this research.

When looking at the countries Israel and Palestine it seems that they are a good example of why information is essential for digital diplomacy. Siapera, Hunt and Lynn (2015) discuss the use of social media by Palestine. In their article, Siapera et al. (2015) state that Palestine uses social media, and in particular Twitter, as a tool to promote a narrative and share information (Siapera, Hunt & Lynn, 2015, p. 1300). Twitter is a convenient mean to create an identity for the Palestinians. For the Israelis social media became important at the end of 2008 when Israel started ''Operation Cast Lead''. In a report drawn up by the US army it is written that, at the end of 2008, Israel started with sharing information about the operation that was directed against the Palestinian terrorist organization Hamas (Caldwell, Murphy & Menning, 2009, p. 6). This operation, 'Operation Cast Lead' , was the sign of the use of social media as a tool to conduct war. Social media was used to inform and update the people about the war and the attacks of Israel against Palestine (Caldwell, Murphy & Menning, 2009, p. 7). For Israel and Palestine social media became an important tool to spread information and to deliver messages to the people. Therefore, both countries form a good example of digital diplomacy.

Twitter accounts

The accounts that are used in this study are the official Twitter account of the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) (*@IDFSpokesperson*) and the Twitter account of the Palestinian Information Centre (*@PalestineToday*). *@IDFSpokesperson* has 699,663 followers on Twitter and posted more than 16,000 tweets. This large number of tweets and followers has been achieved over the years as the account was already founded in 2009. The Twitter account of Palestine, *@PalestineToday*, has 220,678 followers and 51,347 tweets. These accounts are relevant because both accounts tweet about the conflict in the Gaza strip and have their own view and opinion on the conflict. They both send

threatening tweets and positive tweets that have to win the hearts and minds of the people. Besides that, both accounts are English and are well known news outlets.

Time period

The time period that is picked for this research is 1 June to 1 August 2014 and investigates the tweets that are sent by *@IDFSpokesperson* and *@PalestineToday* in this period. This period is important for the conflict between Israel and Palestine for two main reasons. The first one is that on 12 June 2014 three young Israeli men were missing and according to Israel it was an act of the Palestinian movement Hamas (The Guardian, 2014). The next day, the 13th of June, Israel launched a military operation to find the young men and arrested hundreds of Hamas members (The Guardian, 2014). During this operation Jewish extremists killed a Palestinian teenager upon which Hamas responded with rocket attacks in the Gaza strip (BBC News, 2014).

The second reason why this summer period is important for the conflict between Israel and Palestine is the launch of ''Operation Projective Edge'' on 8 July 2014. This was an Israeli operation which was performed in the Gaza strip (BBC, 2014). According to the United Nations (UN), during this operation 2,104 Palestinian died, including 1,462 civilians (BBC, 2014). Hamas responded to the attacks of Israel with mainly rocket attacks and ground combat forces (White, 2014, p. 10). Hamas was prepared to fight a war against Israel and was able to keep Israel under threat and disrupt day-to-day life (White, 2014, p. 10).

These two events, the kidnapping of the Israeli boys and the launch of Operation Projective Edge, had an huge impact on the conflict between Israel and Palestine. Both parties came under a big amount of pressure and the conflict reached a peak. For that reason this time period is a suitable period to investigate the influence of different types of tweets on the public reaction. This period is even more interesting to look at when taking into account that nine months before these events there were peace talks between the two countries, which clearly did not work (Guardian, 2014). It thus is likely that both countries will express their frustrations and Twitter is an easy tool to do so. Therefore this study looks at the tweets sent from twitter accounts from Israel and Palestine in the summer of 2014 to test the hypotheses.

Data collection

The required data for this research was found on the chosen Twitter accounts of Israel and Palestine. Twitter has the option to search for a certain period of time and by means of this option all tweets that were sent by *@IDFSpokesperson* and *@PalestineToday* in the period of the 1st of June until the 1st of August 2014 have been selected. For the account of *@IDFSpokesperson* this meant that there were 627 tweets and for the account of *@PalestineToday* 268 tweets. So, the collected data consisted of 895 tweets. With the help of an extension that is built for Google Chrome named *Web Scraper*, it is possible to ''scrape'' all the tweets and select every aspect of a tweet that you want to analyse like the

text, username and date. To investigate these tweets in a good way, it is important to get an adequate sample of all the tweets. Therefore out of all tweets, 150 tweets per account have been selected. This was done with the help of formulas in Excel. The first formula is ''=RAND()''. This function gives a random number between 0 and 1. After that the formula ''=LARGE(;ROW())'' has been used to give a high to low order of those numbers between 0 and 1. Lastly, the formula ''VLOOKUP()'' has been used. This formula is important, because it makes sure that there is no repetition of values in the sampling. After filling in the correct rows and columns in the formulas, a random selection of 150 tweets has been obtained for both the Israeli and Palestine account. This way of sampling is possible because every tweet has its own unique code. Therefore, after the sampling there were for both accounts 150 unique codes of every tweet.

Variables

The dependent variables in the research question are ''replies'', ''retweets'' and ''likes''. Twitter gives the opportunity to people to say what they want to say in 140 characters. Besides that, people can also like another tweet or reply to another tweet. It is also possible to retweet another tweet. In that case that particular tweet will come up on the timeline of the person who pressed 'retweet'. These three functions are the only way to react on a tweet. Therefore these variables are completely covering the concept of public reaction on Twitter. The three functions on Twitter will be used in this research to measure the public reaction on tweets send by *@IDFSpokesperson* and *@PalestineToday*. The more replies, retweets and likes, the higher the public reaction on a tweet. All three functions, retweets, replies and likes are count variables.

The independent variable for the research question is the coverage of Israel and Palestine on Twitter during the summer of 2014. As stated above, the coverage consists of the tweets that are sent by *@IDFSpokesperson* and *@PalestineToday* in the period from the 1st of June until the 1st of August 2014. The tweets are separated into two separate groups. The first group consists of tweets that have a threatening tone against the other actor. These are negative tweets and consist offensive texts, pictures or videos. The other group consists of tweets that are supposed to win the hearts and minds of the people. These tweets contain positive messages that want to win the people over and want them to support a certain actor. Both groups are dichotomous variables, because a tweet can be either a threatening or a non-threatening tweet. The same holds for tweets that are supposed to win the hearts and minds of people. A threatening tweet is indicated with a '1' and a non-threatening tweet is indicated with a '0'. The same process applies to tweets that are supposed to win the hearts and minds of people.

Threatening tweets

Every tweet that consists of a message about an attack that has happened or will happen, is marked as a threatening tweet. This is because in this way you show the enemy that you can be a threat or that

you will be a threat. On the other hand, the tweets that tweet about an attack committed by the enemy are also labelled as threatening tweets. This is because mentioning that the enemy has performed an attack is a way to show the people that the enemy is a threat. In this way you can show the world that the other party is guilty and a threat to the society: it builds a negative image around the other party. One example of such a tweet is: ''@*PalestineToday*: New Israeli aggression against Gaza: 17 killed, 106 injured in 24h http://gazatimes.blogspot.com/2014/07/new-israeli-aggression-against-gaza-17.html''. More examples of those threatening tweets can be found in the codebook (*please refer to the Appendix*).

Beside the tweets about the attacks, is there another category of threatening tweets. These tweets contain negative language about the other actor. When one actor acts wrongly according to the other actor and this is being put on Twitter, then it is labelled as a threatening tweet. The reason for this is that one actor then puts the other party in bad light and wants to show the people that its actions are not acceptable. This is provocation and can be a reason for the other actor to do the same thing. An example of such a tweet is: ''@*IDFSpokesperson*: Hamas does not exist for the people of Gaza; it abuses its people in order to exist. pic.twitter.com/Jwj00tYNeq''.

Tweets that win the hearts and minds
The second group consists of tweets that are supposed to win the hearts and the minds of people. These tweets contain positive messages about the sender of the tweet, Israel or Palestine. The tweets are sent to create goodwill and to gain some legitimacy of the people. Within the tweets send by *@IDFSpokesperson* and *@PalestineToday* there are four different types which have the function to win the people over. Examples of these types of tweets can be found in the codebook *(See the Appendix)*.

The first type of tweet is protection. The actors, in this case Israel and Palestine, then post messages on Twitter which shows that they do whatever they can to protect innocent civilians. They want to show the world that they act in a good way and in the interest of society. In times of war it is important to show that you want to protect your people, because everyone is scared. When you promise to protect civilians and show, for example in tweets, that you are capable in doing so, you can win the hearts and minds of the people.

The second type in this category consists of tweets that justify certain actions. Israel and Palestine are sometimes associated with war crimes or accused of attacking private buildings. To justify their actions, both actors use, among other things, Twitter. They send tweets that contain a message that explains why a certain attack is committed or an action has been taken. In this way the actors want to obtain legitimacy and support from the people. Therefore this type of messages is labelled as 'tweets that are supposed to win the hearts and minds of the people'.

The third type consists of tweets that are personal. These tweets contain a message to which people can relate to. Very often these messages are about specific persons who cannot live their lives normally because of the war. The goal of those kind of tweets is that people feel involved in the tragedy of the war. They can see by means of a tweet that there are people like them who have to go through horrible things. In this way an actor can respond to the feeling of the people and win people over to get support. A good example of this kind of tweet is a tweet from *@IDFSpokesperson* that says: ''It's evening now in #Israel, and the families of #EyalGiladNaftali are once again going to bed without them''

Tweets that are also covered by this category are tweets that contain a personal question for the people. A popular manner to do so is a tweet with #WWYD (what would you do) followed by a hard question or dilemma about a war situation. An example of such a question is: ''*@IDFSpokesperson*: This is Gilad, one of the 3 teens kidnapped by #Hamas terrorists. #WWYD if this were your child? #EyalGiladNaftalipic.twitter.com/35QMPY8jh2''

Analysis

Analysing of the hypotheses

To test the two hypotheses an independent-samples T-test has been executed. This test is able to compare the dependent and independent variables (Argyrous, 2011, p. 359). In this case, the T-test will compare the public reaction (the replies, retweets and likes) with threatening or non-threatening tweets and tweets that will win the hearts and minds of the people or tweets that do not. The dependent variables are therefore the replies, retweets and likes. The independent variable is the coverage of tweets from Israel and Palestine on Twitter. This coverage is divided into tweets that are threatening or non-threatening tweets and tweets that are supposed to win hearts and minds or tweets that are not supposed to win hearts and minds. Two different tests were conducted: one to test the first hypotheses about the threatening tweets: *It is more likely that there is more public reaction on threatening tweets then on non-threatening tweets.* And another test to test the second hypotheses about tweets that have to win the hearts and minds of the people: *It is more likely that there is more public reaction on tweets that are supposed to win hearts and minds compared to tweets that are not supposed to win hearts and minds.* To test these hypotheses, all the 150 sampled tweets of each account were taken together.

Findings

Descriptives

As can be seen in *Table 1*, the tweets have been pooled into a total sample of 300 tweets. Out of these tweets, 150 tweets are from the Twitter account of the Israel Defence Forces (*@IDFSpokesperson*) and the other 150 tweets from a Twitter account of Palestine (*@PalestineToday*). The highest amount of replies on one tweet out of these 300 tweets is 557 and the mean is amount of replies lies at 41.18. The maximum amount of retweets and likes are 3728 and 1924 respectively. The mean of these two are respectively 241.01 and 105.81. To measure the public reaction these three different functions to react on a tweet have been taken into account.

Table 1. *Descriptives of the public reaction.*

	N	**Maximum**	**Mean**
Replies	300	557	41.18
Retweets	300	3728	241.01
Likes	300	1924	105.81

In *Table 2* and *3* the same statistics can be observed, but this time separated into the both countries Israel (*Table 2*) and Palestine (*Table 3*). Something that is noticeable is that the maximum amount of public reaction of the Twitter account of Israel is much higher than that of Palestine. Also the mean of public reaction is much higher for Israel than for Palestine.

Table 2.   *Descriptives of the public reaction on tweets send by the Israeli twitter account @IDFSpokesperson.*

	N	Maximum	Mean
Replies	150	557	81.23
Retweets	150	3728	464.57
Likes	150	1924	205.23

Table 3.   *Descriptives of the public reaction on tweets send by the Palestinian twitter account @PalestineToday.*

	N	Maximum	Mean
Replies	150	9	1.12
Retweets	150	130	17.46
Likes	150	83	6.4

Table 4.   *The public reaction on threatening tweets and tweets that have to win hearts and minds.*

	Threatening	Non-threatening		Hearts & Minds	No hearts & Minds	
	Mean	Mean	Significance	Mean	Mean	Significance
Replies	51.42	27.22	.000	44.69	39.02	.279
Retweets	291.98	171.58	.029	266.25	225.54	.262
Likes	127.77	75.91	.045	129.96	91.02	.019
N	173	127		114	186	

Hypothesis 1

Table 4 shows the result of the test that is done on the basis of the data collection. It can be observed that the means of all the three variables (replies, retweets and likes) of threatening tweets are higher than the means of the non-threatening tweets. On basis of just the means we cannot make a statement about the hypothesis. It is necessary to know whether the difference between the two means of each variable is significant (Argyrous, 2011, p. 313). Therefore it is necessary to look at the significance level. The significance level of the variable "replies" is 0.000. This means that there is support for the hypothesis when it comes to replies. With the significance level of 0.000 it can be said that it is likely that there are significantly more replies on threatening tweets than on non-threatening tweets, because the significance level is lower than the boundary of 0.05 (Argyrous, 2011, p. 314). If the significance level is below 0.05 then we can say with a minimum of 95% that the hypothesis can be supported (Bland & Altman, 1995, p. 170). If the significance level is higher than 0.05 than the chance is too big that the hypothesis is not correct.

When looking at the significance levels of the variables "retweets" (0.029) and "likes" (0.045), it can be observed that these values are also lower than 0.05. For those variables we also can say that they support the hypothesis. It is therefore likely that people will retweet or like a threatening tweet significantly more than a non-threatening tweet. Out of these results it can be stated that there is support for the first hypothesis: *It is more likely that there is more public reaction on threatening tweets then on non-threatening tweets.*

Hypothesis 2

In the right columns of *Table 4* the results of the independent-samples T-test on the comparison between the public reaction and the tweets that have to win hearts and minds can be found. When looking at the means of the variables replies, retweets and likes, it can be seen that the means of the dependent variables are higher for tweets that have to win hearts and minds than for tweets that do not win hearts and minds. This is the same effect that was visible with the threatening and non-threatening tweets. However, when looking at the significance levels of the variables, it can be observed that the levels of replies and retweets are larger than 0.05, namely 0.279 and 0.262 respectively. This means that the variables replies and retweets do not support the second hypothesis. It can thus not be stated with certainty that there are significantly more replies and retweets on tweets that have to win hearts and minds than on tweets that do not have to win hearts and minds.

The significance level of the variable "likes" is different. Its significance level is 0.019 and thus lower than the boundary of 0.05. This means that this variable supports the second hypothesis. It can therefore be said that people significantly like tweets that have to win hearts and minds more than tweets that do not have to win hearts and minds.

Findings per country

Now that the data to test the hypotheses has been examined, it is also interesting to look into the data for both countries Israel and Palestine separately in order to see if there is another outcome than when both countries are combined. *Table 5* shows the outcomes of tweets send by Israel and in Table 6 those of Palestine are presented.

In Table 5 it can be seen that the significance levels for threatening and non-threatening tweets of the variables "replies", "retweets" and "likes" are higher than when the countries Israel and Palestine are combined. The significance levels are respectively 0.158, 0.769 and 0.743. If those numbers are compared to the significance levels of the countries combined, 0.000, 0.029 and 0.045, there clearly is a whole other outcome. In *Table 6* the same effect for the threatening and non-threatening tweets send by Palestine can be observed. For Palestine the significance levels for the variables "replies", "retweets" and "likes" are respectively 0.316, 0.877 and 0.103. For Israel and Palestine separately, the significance levels of the three dependent variables in relation to the independent variable differ from the significance levels when both countries are combined. How this is possible will be discussed in the discussion part later on.

In the rightmost columns of *Table 5* and *6* there are presented the significance levels for tweets that have to win hearts and minds sent by Israel (*Table 5*) and Palestine (*Table 6*) separately. Here, the same trend as the threatening and non-threatening tweets can be observed. The significance levels of the dependent variables "replies", "retweets" and "likes" differ again from the levels of the countries combined. Only the significance levels of the variable "likes" for both Israel (0.028) and Palestine (0.001) come close to the level of the countries combined (0.019). The reason why the results of the countries taken apart differ so much from the results of the countries combined, will be discussed in the discussion.

Table 5.   *The public reaction on threatening tweets and tweets that have to win hearts and minds of the Israeli twitteraccount @IDFSpokesperson.*

	Threatening	Non-threatening		Hearts & Minds	No hearts & Minds	
	Mean	Mean	Significance	Mean	Mean	Significance
Replies	87.99	65.922	.158	83.93	79.43	.408
Retweets	491.01	411.68	.769	488.17	448.83	.161
Likes	216.77	182.14	.743	238.83	182.82	.028
N	100	50		60	90	

Table 6.   *The public reaction on threatening tweets and tweets that have to win hearts and minds of the Palestinian twitteraccount @PalestineToday.*

	Threatening	Non-threatening		Hearts & Minds	No hearts & Minds	
	Mean	Mean	Significance	Mean	Mean	Significance
Replies	1.33	0.92	0.316	1.09	1.14	.755
Retweets	19.34	15.68	.877	19.69	16.21	.076
Likes	5.85	6.92	.103	8.98	4.95	.001
N	73	77		54	96	

Discussion

This research investigates the influence of threatening tweets and tweets that have to win the hearts and minds of the people on the public reaction. To do so we first set out a theoretical review. This review treated important concepts such as public diplomacy and digital diplomacy to explain the relevance of the use of Twitter in politics and especially in a conflict like the one between Israel and Palestine. Besides that, the review set out the two hypotheses. After the theoretical review, the research design was discussed. Here the choice for the time period from the 1st of June until the 1st of August 2014 and the usage of the Twitteraccounts *@IDFSpokesperson* and *@PalestineToday* has been justified. Also the data collection through the use of Web Scraper is explained and the variables ''threatening tweets'' and ''tweets that are supposed to win the hearts and minds of the people'' are justified. On the basis of this design and the data that is collected, the findings could be analysed and the hypotheses could be tested. In *Table 4* the significance levels of the independent variables became clear. The significance levels of the "replies", "retweets" and "likes" on threatening tweets were respectively 0.000, 0.029 and 0.045. With these numbers it can be stated that it is more likely that there is more public reaction on threatening tweets than on non-threatening tweets, because the significance levels were below the boundary level of 0.05. Therefore, the first hypothesis is supported. However, the difference between the reaction on tweets that have to win hearts and minds and tweets that do not have to win hearts and minds was not significant. Therefore, it cannot be said with certainty that there is more public reaction on tweets that have to win hearts and minds than on tweets that do not have to win hearts and minds.

After testing the data for both countries, Israel and Palestine combined, also a test has been done for the countries separately. In the results of these tests it became clear that the significance levels were very divergent. Most of the results for the countries taken separately were different from the results with the two countries combined. An explanation for the difference in significance levels, is that the amount of tweets is greater. Analysing the two countries together gives an amount of 300 tweets. Separately the amount of tweets for each country is 150. So, the amount of tweets is twice as much and therefore the significance level is more reliable. The significance level determines the value of the results. The reliability of this value increases when the sample that is taken, is bigger.

Despite the fact that the results of the countries combined are reasonable, because in the country-specific models are far fewer tweets, it is still interesting to look into the differences between the countries. It can be a set-up for other researches to look into different factors such as culture and into what can influence the tone of the tweet that is send by Israel and Palestine. This is also a reason why this research used the two countries. It can be an occasion to look deeper into the specific countries and their habits in the use of digital diplomacy.

In this research the research question *what impact the coverage of Israel and Palestine on Twitter has on the public reaction during the Israel-Palestine conflict in the summer of 2014?* has been answered. Within this question both the reaction on threatening tweets and tweets that are supposed to win the hearts and minds of the people have been analysed. From these analyses it can be concluded that threatening tweets have more impact on the public reaction than non-threatening tweets. Besides that, this research concludes that it cannot be assumed that there is more public reaction on tweets that have to win hearts and minds than on tweets that do not have to win hearts and minds.

Besides the fact that this research is a reason for follow-up research it is also relevant for the modern world we live in today. In this world digital diplomacy plays an important role, also as a tool during a conflict such as the one between Israel and Palestine. To understand our political leaders and the political system it is important these days to have knowledge of the new technologies as Twitter, because it is an important part of current political policy.

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Appendix

Codebook

- **Threatening Tweets –** Tweets are labelled as threatening or non-threatening tweets and coded by 1 (threatening) and 0 (non-threatening).
  - The first type within the category ''threatening tweets'' is mentioning an attack in a tweet. This could be an attack by the enemy or an attack by the notifying actor. Examples of this type of tweets are:
    - ''@IDFSpokesperson: Update: #IronDome intercepted the #Hamas rocket fired at Tel Aviv'' → Israel tweet about an attack of Hamas on an Israeli city.
    - ''@PalestineToday: New Israeli aggression against Gaza: 17 killed, 106 injured in 24h http://gazatimes.blogspot.com/2014/07/new-israeli-aggression-against-gaza-17.html'' → Palestine tweet about an attack of Israel on Gaza and reported the amount of victims.
  - The second type within the category ''threatening tweets'' is tweeting a negative message about the other actor. Examples of this type of tweets are:
    - ''@PalestineToday: 'Israel is wrong by any moral standard' – Robinson says, as US media pile uphttp://mondoweiss.net/2014/07/Israel-standard-robinson.html'' → Palestine put Israel in a bad light by accusing it of being immoral..
    - ''@IDFSpokesperson: Evidence: Hamas uses civilians as a human shield & stores long-range rockets in civilian neighborhoodspic.twitter.com/IGd7835Rfe'' → Israel report in a negative form about Palestine, because it accuses Palestine of using civilians in their war against Israel.
- **Tweets that are supposed to win the hearts and minds of the people –** Tweets are labelled as tweets that have to win hearts and minds and tweets that do not have to win hearts and minds. These are coded by 1 (winning hearts and minds) and 0 (do not win hearts and minds).
  - The first type within this category is protection. These are tweets that mention that the notifying actor is protecting its civilians. It shows that an actor handles in the right way. In this way the actor wants to create goodwill under the people. An example of such a tweet is:
    - ''@IDFSpokesperson: Our fighters on the front line know their mission is to protect the people of Israel. Nothing will stop them.pic.twitter.com/DZ4LCDbUIL''. → Israel promises that it will protect its inhabitants.
  - The second type within this category is justifying specific actions. Both actors act dangerously sometimes and they want to explain to the people why they do the things they do. In this way they can obtain legitimacy. An example is:

- o ''@IDFSpokesperson: Hamas terrorists use houses as command centers. We target them for a reason.pic.twitter.com/zFe5sNhgNM'' → Israel is being accused of targeting civilian accomodations and in this tweet Israel want to explain why they do so.
- ▪ The third type of tweets within this category is personal tweets. These are messages about specific civilians or contemporary situations which people will recognize. In this way the notifying actor tries to respond on the feelings of the people. An example of such a tweet is:
  - o ''@PalestineToday: A Family in Gaza Sifts Through the Rubble of Their Home — http://imeu.org — Readability http://www.readability.com/m?url=http%3A%2F%2Ffeedproxy.google.com%2F~r%2Fimeu%2F~3%2FdPOQADgzvyQ%2Fa-family-in-gaza-sifts-through-the-rubble-of-their-home'' → Palestine shows that there are families on their territory of whose houses are in rubble. A lot of people live in their own house and will know that it would be terrible if their house is in rubble, so they can level with this message. Palestine hopes in this way that people will show pity and therefore support the Palestinians.
  - o ''@IDFSpokesperson: This is Gilad, one of the 3 teens kidnapped by #Hamas terrorists. #WWYD if this were your child? #EyalGiladNaftalipic.twitter.com/35QMPY8jh2'' → Israel hopes that people will have sympathy for the search of Israel for the kidnapped boys. Israel makes it personal by asking the people what they would do when it was their child. In this way it comes closer to the people and so Israel hopes to get more reaction and support.