
**DIGITAL WARFARE AND COMPUTATIONAL PROPAGANDA IN THE
ISRAELI-HAMAS WAR: AN ANALYSIS OF THE INFLUENCE OF PER-
CEPTION WARFARE ON CONFLICT DYNAMICS****Halmar Said Abdul Basir Polanunu**

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ABSTRACT

The prolonged conflict between Israel and Hamas has experienced significant escalation, particularly following the events of October 7, 2023. This escalation has shifted the confrontation from conventional warfare to digital battlegrounds, where both parties engage in cyber and narrative warfare. The increasing use of digital platforms highlights a new dimension of conflict: the battle for public opinion and international legitimacy. This study aims to analyze the role of propaganda warfare within the Israel-Hamas conflict through a qualitative approach and descriptive-analytical method. The research is framed using computational propaganda theory and digital diplomacy concepts, utilizing primary and secondary data sources critically assessed through literature review and digital media observation. The findings reveal that both Israel and Hamas systematically employ digital platforms to frame narratives that justify military actions, influence global opinion, and gain strategic advantage. Propaganda content is carefully curated to evoke international sympathy and mobilize political support. Social media, in particular, emerges as a powerful tool for operationalizing digital warfare tactics, shaping public perception, and sustaining momentum in the global discourse surrounding the conflict. The study concludes that digital propaganda has become a central strategy in modern asymmetric warfare. Its growing influence demands increased digital literacy and critical media analysis, especially in conflict zones. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of how contemporary conflicts evolve in the digital sphere and emphasizes the need for regulatory frameworks to address the misuse of digital platforms in international disputes.

**KEY-
WORDS***Israel-Hamas conflict, Cyber warfare, Propaganda warfare, Digital diplomacy, Public perception**This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International***Article Info:**

Submitted: 25-11-2024

Final Revised:
23-04-2025

Accepted: 26-04-2025

Published: 30-04-2025

How to cite:**E-ISSN:**Polanunu, H. S. A. B. (2025). Digital Warfare and Computational Propaganda in the Israeli-Hamas War: An Analysis of the Influence of Perception Warfare on Conflict Dynamics. *Journal Eduvest*. 5(4), 4400-4414
2775-3727

INTRODUCTION

The Israel-Hamas conflict continues to experience significant developments and has consistently become a conflict that captures the attention of all countries in the world. In its development, this conflict is centered on physical battles in the real world and narrative and discourse battles in the digital world. The war in the digital world and the propaganda fight significantly shape public perception and influence international support. The events on October 7, 2023 marked a crucial moment when Hamas launched a coordinated attack against Israel that had an unprecedented number of casualties and opened a new chapter in the development of this conflict escalation. In the aftermath of the event, Israel and Hamas intensively stepped up attacks to maintain each other's momentum of superiority, characterized by Israel focusing on targets in Gaza through air and ground operations while Hamas responded with rocket launches aimed at Israeli territory. In addition to the real-world battle, the author also highlights how both sides are starting to significantly expand the reach of the conflict in the digital world through mass media and social media. In particular, Israel uses these platforms to highlight the threat of Hamas attacks and their impact on civilians to build international sympathy and support for its actions. Meanwhile, Hamas tends to highlight the humanitarian impact of the Israeli attack on Gaza, which focuses on the plight of Palestinians, especially women and children, in order to influence the world's public view and gain international solidarity (Singer & Brooking, 2023).

Historically, Israel and Hamas have leveraged digital platforms to communicate their narratives since the mid-2000s. Hamas does this by creating websites and forums to disseminate information and propaganda aimed at gaining support and recruiting members. One manifestation of this is the launch of an online children's magazine titled "Al-Fateh," launched in 2002, which contains stories, poems, and other written content to promote the organization's ideology among younger audiences (Jacob, 2017). Meanwhile, Israel, which has advantages in terms of technology and infrastructure, is increasingly aware of the growing influence of digital media and has launched its official website and is more actively involved in digital forums to counteract misinformation and convey information through its point of view. The Israeli Foreign Ministry is also noted to continue to develop a comprehensive digital diplomacy strategy by utilizing social media platforms to communicate directly with global audiences. Furthermore, the Israeli government, through the National Library of Israel, has also initiated a digital initiative in the form of the Israeli Internet Archive (ארכיון האינטרנט הישראלי) as a forum to accommodate all digital publications and open wider access to information content that has been curated from an Israeli perspective (Shamir & Shikaki, 2010).

The author highlights the medium of the late 2000s that marked an important change and a new phase in the Israeli-Hamas conflict. Both sides began increasingly utilizing emerging social media platforms to disseminate information and shape narratives to gain global attention. Hamas is beginning to realize the potential of social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube to amplify the message it wants to convey. This is done by sharing videos, official statements, and the latest news to get international support and mobilize sympathizers. The author took one study in the Gaza conflict that occurred in 2008-2009 when Hamas used the YouTube platform to broadcast footage of rocket launches and military

operations with the aim of depicting their military strength and capabilities (Aouragh, 2018).

Israel responded to Hamas's increasingly intense approach in the digital world by adopting a proactive digital diplomacy approach through the creation of official social media accounts for its government and military. The Israel Defence Force (IDF) launched an official YouTube channel in 2008 that focuses on sharing videos of military operations, humanitarian efforts, and responses to allegations of military actions. The initiative aims to avoid the misperception desired by Israel, counter the Hamas narrative, provide transparency regarding military activities, and serve as a tactical and strategic communication measure (Caldwell & Menning, 2019).

The use of social media by Israel and Hamas continues to change the information landscape of the Israeli-Hamas conflict. Social media platforms characteristically facilitate disseminating information to a global audience, allowing Israel and Hamas to convey their narratives and influence international perception. The real-time nature of social media in accelerating the dissemination of information also makes it an important tool in modern asymmetric warfare. Through social media, both sides continue to develop varied propaganda tactics. Hamas created video content and graphics that glorified its resistance efforts with content highlighting civilian casualties, often dominated by women and children, with the aim of raising morale and attracting international sympathy. Meanwhile, Israel is using another digital strategy technique by sharing content that emphasizes its right to self-defense and highlights the threat posed by Hamas to Israel's stability in particular and the regional stability of the Middle East region in general. The battle of narratives and propaganda in the digital world created by both parties through social media channels affects the framing of the mass media and public perception. International media often report on the dynamics of the Israel-Hamas conflict by reflecting the narrative spread through social media that ultimately affects international public opinion and each country's foreign policy-making process that supports each side in international decisions (Peterson, 2014).

The development of the conflict after the events of October 7, 2024, marks a new beginning of the use of social media on a more significant scale than in previous periods of conflict between Israel and Hamas. The author specifically underlines the presence of this conflict in the digital world, which is shown by the increase in internet traffic, which also reflects how this conflict is not only discussed but also disseminated on various media and social media platforms. On October 7, there was a drastic increase in general internet usage in Israel just after the first reported attack at 03:30 Coordinated Universal Time (UTC) or 06:30 local time. Internet usage spiked again at around 03:35 UTC or 06:35 local time (Cloudflare Radar, 2023).



Figure 1. Traffic Internet Trend in Israel (Cloudefire)

The same pattern also occurs in the trend of internet use in the Palestinian territories. During the same period, internet usage in Israel and Palestine experienced a massive surge, and this trend was maintained for some time (Cloudflare Radar, 2023). This pattern of increasing internet use is consistent in similar situations, such as conflicts, because it is driven by community activities to access the internet to find the latest information developments through news, and talk about these conflicts on social media. In the dynamics of news media and social media, the pattern of information dissemination often occurs continuously, with both social media conversations that are driven by the framing of news in the news and media reports that are replicated by the development of conversations on social media. This reciprocal process shows how the two platforms influence each other in shaping public opinion and the image of the Israeli-Hamas conflict. (Sonnefeld, 2023)

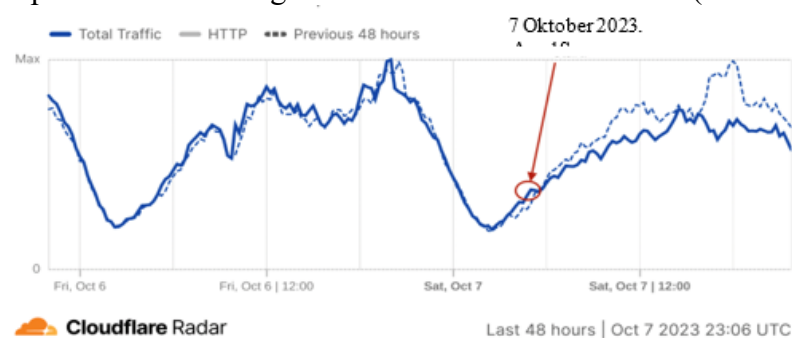


Figure 2. Traffic Internet Trend in Israel (Cloudefire)

This research will specifically analyze the narratives developing in the digital world, mainly through social media channels, initiated by key actors from each side in the Israeli-Hamas conflict. The author will identify the strategies and tactics used in the narrative fight and propaganda war in the context of the escalation of the conflict after the events of October 7, 2023, and examine how it affects international perceptions of conflict dynamics. In further context, a comprehensive analysis of this dimension of the perception battle can help understand the development of this conflict in a more holistic scope, especially related to how social media affects each party's efforts to justify actions and gain support.

Research by Zeitzoff (2017) emphasizes the importance of social media in mediating conflicts between states and non-state actors, including in the case of Israel and Palestine, by showing that emotional content, such as violent images, is more effective in mobilizing public support. Meanwhile, research by Aouragh and Chakravartty (2016) shows how digital technology has become an important tool in the Palestinian political struggle, but is still limited to the early phase of social media adoption.

This research is novel in the context of the increased intensity of social media use by both sides after the events of October 7, 2023, which has not been widely studied academically. By focusing on the latest digital narrative and propaganda strategies by state (Israel) and non-state (Hamas) actors, this research presents a new perspective on how armed conflict transforms into a global perception conflict through digital platforms. Another novelty is the analytical approach to the intensification of internet traffic and online activities as indicators of public participation and conflict escalation in the digital realm.

This research aims to analyze the narratives developed in the digital world, especially social media, by key actors in the Israel-Hamas conflict. The main focus is on the strategies and tactics used in the propaganda war after the October 7, 2023, conflict escalation, and their impact on international perceptions.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research methods are a series of methods or instruments used to obtain, test, and develop truth, so that the research can achieve a high level of accuracy, structure, and focus. This method consists of organized steps to collect, process, and analyze the data needed to answer a particular case study. The researcher will specifically use qualitative methods in analyzing digital warfare and computational propaganda in influencing public perception and image of the conflict in the Israeli-Hamas war. The data used in this study were collected based on secondary data through the search of various documents, scientific articles, academic manuscripts, and related study literature. All data that has gone through the curation process is then classified according to its respective subject matter for further data analysis.

The data analysis process is carried out to interpret and understand data compiled systematically and structured by providing relevant explanations. The data analysis used in this study is a qualitative analysis that aims to describe the data systematically, clearly, logically, and consistently. This approach is designed to ensure that the information presented does not overlap and is effective, making it easier to understand the process of comprehensively reviewing the analysis results.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The intensity of using social media as a digital strategy for Israel and Hamas to influence public perception and gain international support continues to increase as the conflict escalates after the events of October 7, 2023. The author will examine and elaborate on the tactics used by Israel and Hamas in creating narratives and launching propaganda through a case study approach and the chronological flow of the development of conflict dynamics.

The Israel Defense Force (IDF) and other Israeli stakeholders have been increasingly active in providing ongoing updates on military operations in the aftermath of October 7 by using a distinctive narrative character, namely an emphasis on precision strikes and efforts to minimize civilian casualties (Cortellesa, 2023). In addition, the narrative pattern built by Israel focuses on how the October 7, 2023, incident was one of the deadliest during this conflict. The emphasis on narrative is also aimed at amplifying the stories of civilian casualties when Hamas attacks occur, and then capitalized with various points of view so that they continue to be reported in the news media and discussed on social media.

The author also highlights the efforts of the Israeli government through the IDF to make a central character in reporting on the development of the Israeli-Hamas conflict through a military press officer named Masha Michelson. On November 19, 2023, Michelson directly documented the process of investigating the tunnels under the Al-Shifa hospital in Gaza, which is claimed to be one of the Hamas weapons storage sites. Michelson then uploaded his video on digital social media platforms through IDF accounts on X, TikTok, and Instagram, which are the main channels for the public to access information related to the dynamics of the

development of the Israel-Hamas conflict (Frei, 2023). On the other hand, Hamas has another tactical approach to building narratives and building images of the conflict by sharing posts dominated by visuals, both in the form of images and videos, that show the impact of Israeli attacks on civilians. This aims to attract sympathy and build an opinion that Israel targets powerless civilian groups such as women and children. In addition, the formation of the narrative by Hamas is also focused on justifying their actions because it is a legitimate act of resistance to the Israeli occupation that has been carried out for decades (Eric, 2023).

The penetration of Israel's and Hamas' digital strategies has its challenges. Israel, in particular, has the challenge of counter-narratives about how its military actions often cause civilian casualties. Hamas has made various efforts to capitalize on the momentum of attacks launched and the attacks received. The author analyzes that this reflects a new social media strategy intensified by Hamas with a pattern of narrative building to portray their military strength and capabilities through livecam uploads related to the war situation. On the one hand, Hamas seeks to continue its propaganda methods and narrative building as a mouthpiece for Palestinian suffering over the Israeli occupation while on the other hand, Palestine is trying to assert itself as a resistance group to be reckoned with in the Middle East after the October 7, 2023 attacks with demonstrations of force through posts on social media about the situation of the attack in real-time. (Donnie, 2023).

The author examines the decision-making process behind Hamas's shifting media strategy that leads to its efforts to prove to the world and the Palestinian people themselves that Hamas is a significant force in the resistance against Israel and helps it gain political bargaining power in the region. In this case, Hamas appears to be taking a new propaganda development approach in the era of social media that is increasingly reaching out to many global communities by forming a self-image as a strong resistance group. This step is manifested by Hamas uploading a video related to its military actions, which, in the perception of a battle of opinions, can be captured from two sides, namely how Hamas fighters heroically and patriotically continue to resist Israel or how they die as martyrs (Byman, 2023). Understanding the pattern of propaganda formation to shape public perception related to conflict dynamics must be comprehensively understood. For this reason, the author summarizes the position of each party in compiling propaganda and designing narratives based on tactical change patterns, as follows:

Table 1. Propaganda Tactics

Conflict Development	Israel Propaganda Pattern	Drafting the Israeli Narrative
Pre-7 October 2023 Conflict	Using the power of digital infrastructure by disseminating information related to Israel's efforts to minimize civilian casualties through social media propaganda on various platforms	The narrative centers on Israel's struggle to contain Hamas' aggression by continuing to carry out coordinated attacks and keeping the dynamics of the conflict from experiencing significant escalation and extending to regional conflicts
Post-October 7, 2023 Conflict	Promoting the use of news media and social media, creating figures to characterize journalists, and	The narrative focuses on Israel's position as a victim of Hamas' aggressiveness that has caused civilian casualties to fall, and justifies

Conflict Development	Israel Propaganda Pattern	Drafting the Israeli Narrative
	sharing videos of the tense atmosphere when the attack is carried out	Israel's increasing the intensity of its attacks, as well as presents evidence of how Hamas has been a dangerous group

Table 2. Patterns of Propaganda and Suppression of Hamas Narratives (Data Processed from Various Sources)

Conflict Development	For Hamas propaganda	Preparation of the Hamas Narrative
Pre-7 October 2023 Conflict	Circulating visual posts related to the impact of Israeli attacks, depicting civilian suffering and casualties	The narrative is focused on the image of victims of atrocities and injustices in order to build international sympathy and mobilize support
Post-October 7, 2023 Conflict	Using <i>livecams</i> and live footage of the battlefield showing the action of the resistance	The narrative shifts toward heroism and strength, an attempt to assert Hamas as asserting itself as the dominant resistance movement in the Middle East, describing struggle and survivability, showing that Israel is weak and easily defeated

The shift in propaganda tactics and narrative building carried out by Israel can be analyzed through the framework of the digital diplomacy approach. The author refers to the definition of digital diplomacy by Bjola and Holmes, which defines digital diplomacy as the use of digital tools, platforms, and channels by state actors and actors affiliated with state interests to achieve diplomatic goals, which include various things, including the management of international relations (Bjola & Holmes, 2015). In addition, the author adopts a more holistic definition of digital diplomacy, which strategically uses digital technology to increase autonomy, legitimacy, and capacity in managing competition in the digital era. This involves utilizing digital devices to communicate effectively with the global community and navigate the complexities of international relations in a digitally interconnected world (Bjola & Zaiotti, 2020).

The author will use the framework of the digital diplomacy definition approach and contextualize it in several relevant case studies, one of which is related to the polemic of Israel's claim statement that Hamas committed acts of terrorism that are synonymous with ISIS's tactics, including beheading babies and children. Chronologically, this began when the Israel Defense Force (IDF) stated to the media that the Hamas militant group had carried out the massacre of infants and children in a brutal manner typical of ISIS in Kfar Aza. This information then spread and spread with an extreme narrative that said that the Hamas group beheaded babies and children. Tal Heinrich then amplified this as the Spokesperson for Israeli Prime Minister (PM) Benjamin Netanyahu (Speri, 2023)

At this point, the Israeli government has made an effort to use digital media to achieve diplomatic goals in terms of managing international relations, especially to gain international support as well as to justify military action. The author highlights the extreme level of the use of digital diplomacy, considering that the steps

taken are quite controversial without first verifying. Various media outlets have since denied this incident, and it has never been confirmed. But the context of the digital vision of this action has proven to be achieved with far-reaching implications, including the President of the United States (US), Joe Biden, who made a press statement expressing his condemnation of Hamas's action of beheading babies and children. This has then been corrected by the Office of the President of the US White House, which has made various media revise the coverage and increased the intensity of social media conversations colored by anger and emotion. The keyword in this event is the implication, which turns out to be very significant, so that it makes the president of the country with the strongest military power amplify unverified messages through digital media channels (Kessler, 2023). This resonates on various media channels and continues to be the main discussion. The whole series boils down to one thing: the success of the Israeli government in rallying international support and gaining legitimacy from the military actions carried out. The increase in the intensity of Israeli military activities against Hamas also continues to increase after the massive spread of amplified infant and child beheading propaganda in digital space (Ferris, 2023).

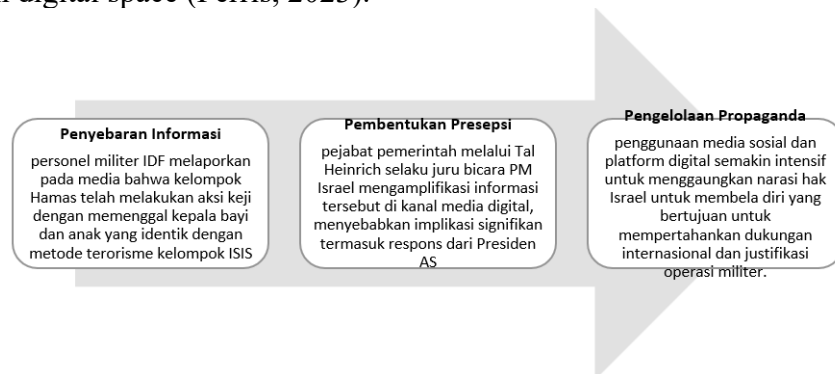


Figure 3. Analysis of the Flow of Israel's Digital Diplomacy in the Context of the Polemic of the Narrative of the Beheading of Babies by Hamas

The author will also analyze the Israeli government's digital strategy in building narratives in the battle of public perception related to the conflict with Hamas, especially in the polemic case study of the claim of beheadings of babies and children with a propaganda computational theory approach. In this theory, computational propaganda is defined as humans' use of algorithms, automation, and curation processes to deliberately distribute misleading information through social media networks that aim to manipulate public opinion and influence favorable outcomes in securing political interests. The implementation of this theory uses data analysis to reinforce certain narratives, create a false consensus, and suppress different viewpoints from a perception that is being constructed. This aims to build discourses and narratives to influence public perception, which often occurs without public awareness of an act of manipulation (Bjola & Manor, 2023). Based on this definition, computational propaganda theory can be an effective analytical tool to examine how misinformation, such as the polemic of the narrative of the beheading of babies by Hamas, spreads and affects public perception in conflict.

Through this research, the author will apply the computational theory of propaganda by identifying the origin, spread, and impact of the polemic narrative of baby beheading on social media and other digital platforms on the dynamics of the

Israel-Hamas conflict. Chronologically, the narrative related to the beheading of babies was first echoed by the Tel-Aviv, Israel-based media channel, i24News, through news media platforms and social media (Maad, 2024).



Figure 4. Initial Upload of the Polemic of the Narrative of Beheading of Babies by Hamas Group (X Platform, 2023)

At the beginning of this news, there was no specific use of a narrative that mentioned "beheading of babies and children". However, this issue is monitored to experience a significant spike in engagement, especially on platform X channels, which are characteristically the fastest media to get the latest information because of the hashtag features and supporting algorithms (Bisht, Singh & Signal, 2024). The author highlights one of the accounts that does not have a political affiliation but has a strong digital presence, as evidenced by the number of followers and personalities in the digital world, namely J.K. Rowling.



Figure 5. Initial Uploads of Influential Figures in the Digital World related to the Polemic of the Narrative of Beheading Babies (X Platform, 2023)

The digital activities carried out by J.K Rowling, whom the world community has widely known as a writer with famous works, are strengthened by a digital presence which is reflected through the number of 14.2 million followers on platform X, in disseminating unverified information is one of the manifestations of the

application of computational propaganda theory which states that the development of perception and the dissemination of narratives to influence public perception often occur without public awareness of an act of manipulation. In this case, the author highlights how J.K. Rowling and various other figures on social media channels respond and massively spread misinformation due to emotional impulses, narrative manipulation that focuses on framing an action that has not been verified to the extreme.

The dissemination of information on this social media channel was then echoed on news media platforms. The narrative that has been awakened has begun to directly mention the beheading of babies in several news headlines, such as The Times of Israel, Fox News, and The Jewish Chronicle. This proves how information spread on social media channels with certain algorithms, such as platform X, provides space to continue to be synthesized and amplified, even to primary news media channels. The author highlights how the spread of this unverified information occurs quickly and massively, even to the point of having high implications not only in the scope of the Israel-Hamas conflict domain but also to the world.

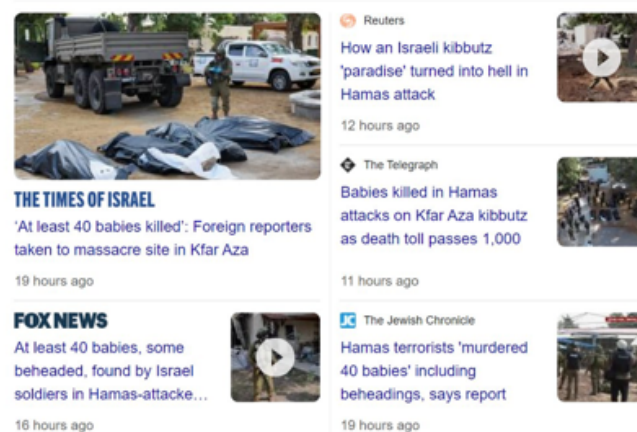


Figure 6. Initial Amplification of News Media related to the Polemic of the Narrative of Beheading Babies (Processed from Various Sources, 2023)

The Israeli government also plays a central role in the spread of the polemic of information about the beheadings of babies and children because the Spokesperson for the Israeli Prime Minister, Tal Heinrich, also amplified the same message through an official statement (Tenbarga, 2023). This official statement from a high-level Israeli official gained momentum on social media and news media, as reflected in CNN's X media account.



Figure 7. Amplification of News Media related to the Official Statement of the Government of Israel through the X Platform Channel (X Platform, 2023)

The peak of the escalation of the spread of the propaganda narrative of the beheading of babies by the Hamas group occurred when the President of the United States (US), Joe Biden, also amplified the same message. In a statement and official forum in front of the Jewish community at the White House, US President Joe Biden stated that he did not expect to see and confirm reports of beheadings of babies and children. This was then quickly clarified by the White House Presidential Office through the Washington Post media by saying that President Joe Biden and other US administration officials have not yet had images or heard independently confirmed reports related to the narrative of the beheading of babies and children by Hamas (Glenn, 2023).

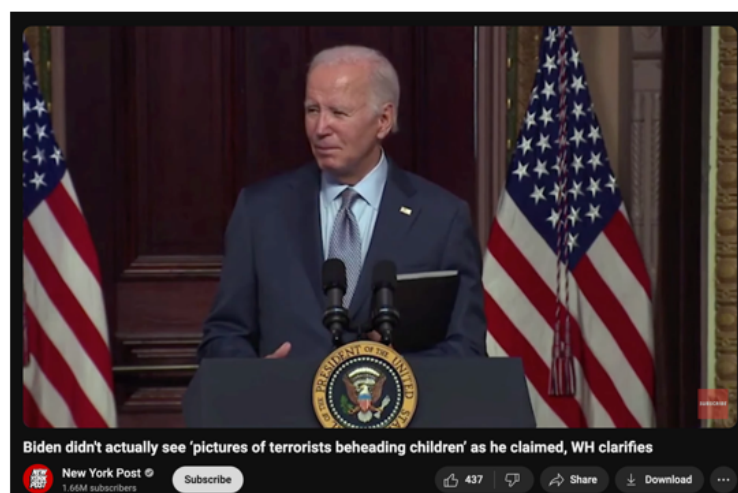


Figure 8. Official Statement of the President of the United States regarding the Narrative of Beheading by Hamas (New York Post, 2023)

A contextual and holistic understanding of the chronological flow of how the narrative of the beheading of babies and children by the Hamas group is

systematically disseminated through social media channels can be explained through computational propaganda theory. Algorithmic amplification on social media channels that prioritize engagement, such as platform X, as explained, has its characteristics in encouraging the rapid and massive dissemination of information, which can significantly strengthen sensational or emotionally charged narratives (Bisht, Singh & Signal, 2024). In the context of this study, keywords and hashtags related to extreme atrocities such as "beheadings of babies and children" gained high momentum because they were supported by algorithms due to the high engagement and intensity of conversations from users, further pushing the narrative to become a trending topic and exponentially increasing the reach of the audience from its media channels. This has had significant real implications until large influential and high-profile accounts echo it without them realizing that the information has not been verified. The context of narrative building and perception battles in computational propaganda focuses on trying to provoke a strong emotional response that can ignore critical thinking and lead to the rapid belief and dissemination of information without verification. Narratives related to the beheading of babies and children are effective in this case because they touch the main emotions in the form of anger and horror, so that various parties are moved to share and engage with the narrative.

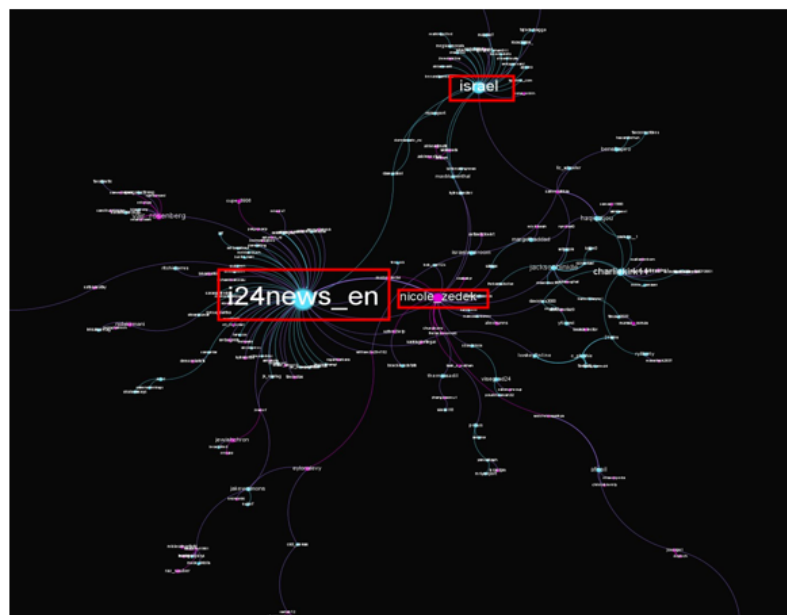


Figure 9. Social Network Analysis Narrative of Beheading of Babies and Children (X, 2023)

Identifying the beginning of the development of this narrative to affect public perception can be done by conducting a Social Network Analysis. This analysis found a pattern of information dissemination initiated by an Israel-based media, i24 News, which was then amplified by a journalist named Nicole Zedeck through the X social media channel until it was further resonated in various major news media. Social media accounts of influential figures to official statements of other state officials in a fast and massive time (Swann, 2023).

CONCLUSION

This research underscores a critical transformation in the Israel-Hamas conflict, where the arena of warfare has expanded beyond physical confrontations into the digital domain. The findings reveal that both Israel and Hamas have systematically employed social media and other digital platforms not only to convey information but to strategically shape global narratives, influence public perception, and gain international legitimacy. The October 7, 2023, incident marks a pivotal point in the digital escalation, with both actors intensifying propaganda and psychological operations. The shift in Hamas' narrative—from victimization to resistance heroism—and Israel's tactical framing of its military actions as acts of self-defense exemplify the evolving strategies in narrative warfare. By applying computational propaganda theory, this study highlights how algorithm-driven platforms prioritize emotionally charged and sensational content, thus accelerating the dissemination of unverified or misleading narratives. One prominent case was the viral spread of the beheading claim, which gained rapid traction on social media due to high emotional engagement, despite lacking verification.

Future studies should delve deeper into the role of artificial intelligence and bot activity in amplifying conflict-related narratives. Comparative studies across regional conflicts could also reveal how digital propaganda is evolving globally, offering insight into best practices for countering misinformation in conflict zones. Additionally, interdisciplinary approaches combining international relations, media studies, and computational analysis would enrich understanding of modern hybrid warfare tactics in the digital age.

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