

(IN)FORMING CONFLICT PREVENTION,
RESPONSE AND RESOLUTION:



THE ROLE OF MEDIA
IN VIOLENT CONFLICT

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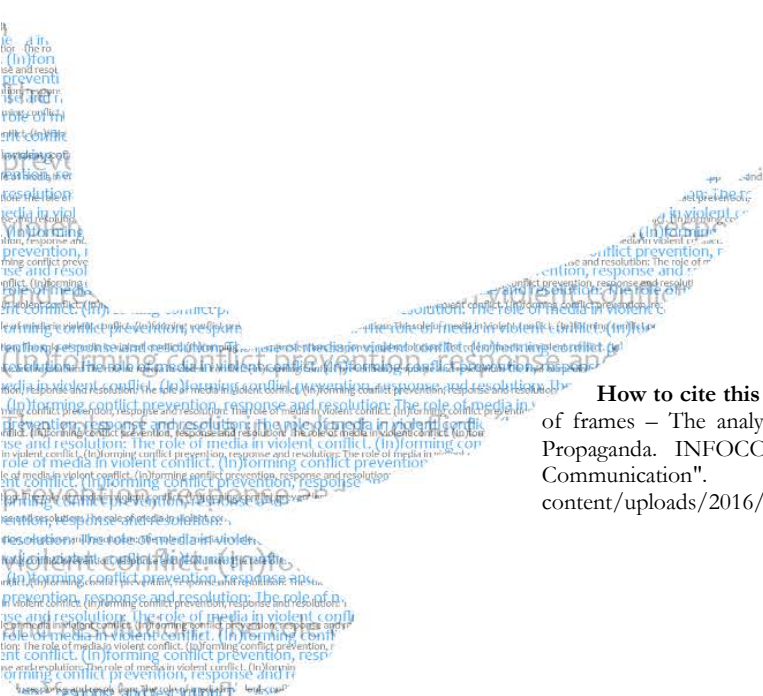


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Methodological Framework of WP6: Strategic Communication

Development, structure and context of frames – The analysis of verbal communication material
of strategic communicators in PR and Propaganda

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Methodological Framework of WP6: Strategic Communication

(EXECUTIVE SUMMARY)

Work Package six analyzes strategic communication as purposefully designed communicational advocacy that is distributed on the behalf of an organization or an institution. Our main research interests is the identification of semantic patterns in strategic content and their potential migration into other discourses – the media coverage, political debates and public discourses - and vice versa. Additionally, we seek to investigate strategic communication's potential impact on a conflict's dynamic and, consequently, it's potential for de-escalation. Finally, we also apply a gender sensitive approach and analyze the portrayal of gender in strategic communication.

To fulfill these objectives, we make use of an innovative multi-step content analytic approach. In a qualitative pilot-study we identified idiosyncrasies within the language used in strategic content. Our sample of strategic communication mainly consists of two groups of texts: (1) contents that simulate journalistic language and, thus, can be labeled PR and (2) messages that often use strongly connoted expressions and can be referred to as propaganda. Within our qualitative pilot study we created rules and guidelines for the identification of semantic patterns – frames, evidential claims and agendas for action – while taking the two groups of texts and its different use of language into account.

In our quantitative computer-based content analysis we will use an updated version of the AmCat program called JAmCat to identify frames, agendas for actions and evidential claims in a large corpus of texts. Our main research interest consists of five dimensions. First, (1) we will analyze strategic communication in different countries on a case-based perspective focusing on the content's idiosyncrasies in different conflict cases. In doing so, we will (2) analyze strategic communication's narrative in different conflict phases (for example escalation, de-escalation) and examine (3) the construction of similar ideas and semantic patterns over different conflicts, debates and the conflicts' time frames. We then will (4) compare the contents distributed by different groups of strategic actors. Here, we address the differing perspectives and communicative strategies of different strategic actors and the thus resulting differences within their distributed frames. A central aim of WP6 is a close cooperation with WPs 5, 7, and 8 to (5) examine the diffusion of strategic discourse on the same conflict into different debates – the media coverage, (other) strategic communication, political debates and social media – and thus to also investigate the functional roles of strategic communicators in the shaping of public discourse and their (different) success in enforcing/asserting their particular frames.

In our qualitative in-depth analysis, we will enrich the results with more details and provide additional context while focusing on key moments, actors and ideas in the discourses. In doing so we will combine information from the quantitative stage with relevant insight from other work packages also relating to the results of INFOCORE's interviewing groups and contextual information from the literature.

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Methodological Framework of WP6: Strategic Communication

Development, structure and context of frames – The analysis of verbal communication material of strategic communicators in PR and Propaganda

As outlined in the conceptual working papers (cf. Fröhlich, 2014a), part of INFOCORE's methodology is a content analysis that aims at examining the discourses on six conflicts within four different forms of communication that each forms a part-discourse – (1) political debates, (2) media coverage, (4) strategic communication and (5) social media – focusing on three different semantic constructs – frames, agendas for action, and evidential claims¹. Since all of the different forms of communication follow their own logic – semantic as well as discursive – it is necessary to create a methodology that accounts for the differences and still enables a high degree of comparability. INFOCORE's content analytic work packages (WP5-WP8; www.infocore.eu), thus, have developed an innovative multi-step approach for the analysis of conflict discourse. Applying that methodology, we will be able to accurately analyze each part-discourses and to identify the dynamic migration of semantic patterns between them.

Therefore, this paper aims at explaining how INFOCORE's content analytic approach is applied to examine *strategic communication* (PR, propaganda)² within each of the selected conflict cases. In doing so, we outline how the different phases of our methodology – the qualitative pilot-study, the quantitative computer based analysis and the qualitative in-depth analysis – take the unique peculiarities of strategic communication into account.

The paper will first briefly summarize the conceptual perspective and outline the main research interests for the analysis of strategic communication. Hereafter, we will explain the rules and guidelines for identifying and sampling relevant strategic communicators and their communication texts. Afterwards the overall methodological strategy will be portrayed. Therefore, we will first outline the qualitative pilot-study that was conducted to identify idiosyncrasies within the language of strategic communication and to create rules and guidelines for the identification of semantic patterns. Then, the automated content analysis and the strategy for analyzing the resulting data is introduced. Finally, we will describe the qualitative in-depth analysis that is meant to add further context to the different results.

Theoretical foundation and overall objectives

The main interest of WP6 is the phenomenon of *strategic communication* as a form of communication that is designed and disseminated by actors of the public sphere aiming at influencing the public debate. Following our conceptual framework, we define strategic communicators as advocates that speak to the media to insert a strategically designed message into the public discourse. According to this definition, every communicator that actively influences the public debate on our respective conflict cases is a strategic

¹ For a profound definition of these three constructs, see INFOCORE working paper “*Constructions of violent conflict in public discourse ...*” by Christian Baden (2014).

² For a differentiating definition of PR and propaganda see Fröhlich, 2014a, p. 4.

communicator – political actors, key members of the military, lobbyists, public relations practitioners, NGO spokespersons and social movement leaders. However, within the scope of our project we solely analyze *organizational* and *institutional* strategic communicators who represent the official standpoint of the whole organization, institution or (political) entity they belong to, and who speak in their name. In that narrower sense, strategic communicators represent the official perspective of an organization or corporation (e.g. spokesperson) or represent a political institution like a parliamentary fraction (e.g. fraction leader), a ministry (e.g. ministers or their official spokespersons), or a political committee (e.g. speaker of a parliamentary defense committee). Thus, organizational and institutional strategic communicators publicly distribute strategically constructed content on the behalf of the entity they belong to/represent or – in case of a public relation company - their client. Following these preliminary considerations, strategic communication then can be defined as (1) the non-spontaneous, planned³ and publicly spoken word of strategic communicators, (2) official press releases published/distributed by political entities, NGOs or other organizations and (3) statements posted on their official web page.

On the basis of its agnostic perspective (cf. Baden, 2014, p. 5), INFOCORE does not primarily evaluate discourse, but attempts to understand what meaning is constructed and why (Wetherell & Potter, 1988). As a result, the overall objective of WP6 is to define and to understand the key roles – both constructive and destructive – that strategic communication plays, under specific circumstances and depending on various contextual factors, in shaping the dynamic construction of meaning within (public) conflict discourse. In particular, WP6 analyzes whether and, if so, how different actors (including different genders of actors) succeed in strategically inserting their perspectives (evidential claims, frames, agendas for action) into the public discourse on violent conflict and war. In doing so, WP6 contributes within INFOCORE to the research of the dynamics and mutual diffusion of content(s) and therefore closely cooperates with the work packages WP7 (mass media), WP5 (social media), and WP8 (political debates – in parliament for example). All four WPs are focusing on three different semantic constructs – frames, agendas for action, and evidential claims.

Semantic construct 'frame(s)'

Following Baden (2010), WP6 acts on the assumption that frames are constructed purposefully to advocate specific understandings, evaluations, and courses of action in a competitive debate. Therefore, the framing approach provides an ideal theoretical framework for the analysis of strategic communication and is thus our main theoretical approach. Generally, frames can be identified deductively as a whole or inductively by measuring the constituents of a frame and grouping those with cluster analysis (cf. Matthes & Kohring, 2008). Since our approach is based on the question of how strategic frames influence frames in other

³ For the understanding of PR and strategic communication as 'planned' communication see for example Windahl et al., 2008. This understanding also includes any spoken word on the occasion of press conferences or other official press meetings/invitations (for example directly after a cabinet meeting outside of the cabinet meeting room) even if answers given to journalists' spontaneous questions at a press conference/meeting/invitation does not seem to 'planned' (in advance).

discourses, we rely on an inductive framing approach. As a result, we will be able to compare frames in different discourse on a more fine grain basis. Still, knowledge from deductive framing (e.g. Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000) can be applied in the qualitative in-depth analysis when looking at specific reoccurring frame structures.

In accordance with INFOCORE's perspective of 'frame' (cf. Baden, 2014; Baden & Stalpouskaya, 2015), we consider a frame as a specific combination of certain frame ingredients – actors, issues and evaluative standards – that are arranged in a certain coherent frame structure consisting of a concern definition, a causal chain, a future projection and an evaluation. This frame structure can be described as a specific arrangement of the existing frame ingredients expressing a relationship between them and, thus, fulfilling an argumentative function. Finally, a frame can also contain certain additional frame qualities like an epistemic status or a certain degree of interpretive depth. As a result, the used conceptualization of frames combines the (1) current state of art perspective of frames as semantic networks (Baden, 2010) with the (2) roots of framing research examining a frame's role in discourse as an argumentative interpretation – for example in the form of diagnostic, prognostic and motivational framing (cf. Snow & Benford, 1988; Benford & Snow, 2000; Entman, 1993; Matthes, 2007).

Strategic communication does not happen in empty space, but needs to be considered in relation to the existing definitions, interpretations and discourse. In the literature, the notion of frame alignment was introduced to address how strategic communicators' connect, adopt and accentuate different ideas and frames. Since we consider frame alignment to be an important messaging strategy of strategic communicators, it is not sufficient to merely identifying a frame's argumentative function. Instead, it is thereafter to analyze in more detail on whether we can detect any types of frame alignment. Following Snow et al. (1986), we investigate on four types of frame alignment: frame *bridging* ("linkage of (...) ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames"; p. 467), frame *amplification* ("clarification and invigoration of an interpretive frame that bears on a particular issue, problem, or set of events"; p. 469), frame *extension* ("elaborate goals and activities so as to encompass auxiliary interests not obviously associated with the movement in hopes of enlarging its adherent base"; p. 470), and frame *transformation* (the adjustment of an existing frame when this frame "may not resonate with, and on occasion may even appear antithetical to, conventional lifestyles or rituals and extant interpretive frames"; p. 473). With Snow et al. (1986), we differentiate between two types of frame transformation: domain-specific transformation and global interpretative transformation⁴ (p. 474-475). Although the latter are comparatively rare, processes of group radicalization (for example political or religious radicalization) are considered to be vivid examples for this type of frame transformation (cf. Della Porta, 1995). We are convinced that this differentiation is of particular interest for any analysis of strategic communication as part of public discourse on violent conflict

⁴ Although global interpretative frame transformations are comparatively rare, processes of group radicalization (for example political or religious radicalization) are considered to be vivid examples for this type of frame transformation (cf. Della Porta, 1995).

and war. However, due to the complex and not unified nature of frame alignment, we will mainly address this idea in the course of our qualitative in-depth analysis.

Semantic construct ‘agendas for action’

Agendas for action are prescriptive projections of the future that can either be explicated as demands or implicated as a portrayal of a current unsatisfying state. In doing so, they state what must be done or accomplished to ‘solve’ the problems driving the narrative (Baden, 2014, p. 2). The particular relevance of the (semantic) constructions of agendas for action within WP6 lies in their supposed particular function within/for strategic communication. In our sample⁵ this semantic construct played a central role indeed with nearly every text containing at least one agenda for action. Some shorter press releases often just consisted of an agenda for action in combination with an explanation of why the task should be carried out. We, thus, identified all possible semantic constructs that express agendas for action in all available languages and collected them in a small ontology.

Agendas for action, as a result, share some similarities with a frame’s prescriptive future prognosis – or prognostic framing (cf. Benford & Snow, 2000). Both are semantically equal in a way that they express that an action needs to be done. However, while a frame usually just contains one central remedy that is suggested as a solution to the main issue, a text can consist of several agendas for action that do not have to be related to the main frame applied in a text. Thus, by identifying, comparing and (if possible) contrasting agendas for action, one can map the role of demanded actions and solutions expressed in strategic communication. This, for example, enables the analysis of a strategic text that paraphrases an opponent’s agenda for action in order to disqualify it in the following.

Semantic construct ‘evidential claims’

The last semantic construct which we examined in our qualitative pilot were *evidential claims*. Following the conceptual definition of evidential claims as “ontological claims about some aspect of the world, backed by some epistemic justification” (Baden, 2014, p. 7; see also van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983; Grice, 1975) one can easily identify a large number of claims per (strategic) text. However, we are mainly interested in claims “about specific key concerns driving the conflict, and in those claims presented as important, novel information for understanding specific histories, situations or scenarios, thus updating people’s conflict knowledge” (Baden, 2014, p. 6). As a result, we first identified conflict related issues for which evidential claims play an important role (e.g. the usage and existence of chemical weapons in the Syrian conflict). Additionally, we collected semantic and grammatical ways to express claims. Therefore, we distinguished statements, which imply that an information is certainly true or accepted from others that state that an information is uncertain. For that purpose we examined epistemic qualifications (e.g. likely, contested, and alleged) and their forms of expression in the text (Baden & Stalpouskaya, 2015). Combining these sources

⁵ For more details on sampling see section “Sampling” below.

of information we operationalized evidential claims for our quantitative analysis as a combination of the underlying semantic structure and the issues that are important for the discourses.

Conceptual framework and research questions

Since international quantitative and qualitative research has shown that public discourse and in particular media coverage on violent conflict and war tends to follow traditional social perception of gender roles (cf. Fröhlich, 2014b), WP6 applies a gender-sensitive perspective⁶ and acts on the assumption, that men are being often portrayed as active participants in war and conflict as fighters, aggressors, offenders and even promoters of war (Fröhlich, 2010). Women, on the other hand, often represent peace-loving, pacifistic characters that are resistant to violence. Additionally, women are often described as passive characters suffering from violence and being in need of protection. Feminist security studies criticize this differentiation as being a masculine, authoritarian idea, since the appeal for protection and/or shelter (of women and children) often strategically serves as a political and/or humanitarian justification for military intervention and war (cf. Tickner 1992, 2001; see also Fröhlich, 2015, in press). Consequently, the representation of gender in war and conflict related strategic communication is an integral part of our research interests. As a result, we take a gender sensitive perspective into account when focussing on strategic communication's contribution to the (1) *(possibly gendered) construction*, (2) *(possibly gendered) contestation* and (3) *(possibly gendered) dynamic* of conflict related discourses.

When focusing on (1) (possibly gendered) discourse *construction*, we analyze (1.1) the creation of concepts as descriptions and characterizations of conflict related actors and events, as well as their naming, gender and connected evaluative connotation and attributes. For the course of analyzing strategic content, the source of an evidential claim and its epistemic status – meaning the certainty of the presented information – is of great interest. For example, if a claim enters the media discourse and its original source is not mentioned it can be presented as a ‘general rumor’ or ‘common knowledge’ (depending on the epistemic status). If the source is mentioned, much of a claim's credibility and effectiveness depends on the communicators' (= source) status, credibility, gender, on how they present themselves or are presented (as experts for example), on how those authors justify ‘their’ claims etc. Therefore we first identify essential *formal* characteristics and attributes of the sources of agendas for action, frames and evidential claims in the respective texts. With the help of this information we will be able to analyze, if certain formal attributes of a strategic communicator influence his/her potential impact on the conflict discourse. Secondly, we analyze the *argumentative* characteristics, which the strategic communicators are using when offering their agendas for action, frames and evidential claims. For example: Do they explain how come they know something and if so, what are the concrete explanations (eye-witness, scientist, political expert, victim etc.). Or: Do those sources explain what legitimizes them to propose an agenda for action (for example their gender)? Or: Does the particular argumentative characteristic include “(a) general statements about the range or

⁶ For more details on INFOCORE's gender-sensitive perspective, see Fröhlich (2014b).

importance of a problem (base-rate information)”, or rather “(b) illustrative individual cases (exemplars) that are less valid but more vivid” (Brosius & Bathelt, 1994, p. 48; see also Zillmann et al., 1992, and Lefevere et al., 2012).

When we scrutinize (1.2) what events and facts are selected and presented as information (evidential claims) within strategic communication, we compare evidential claims of different strategic communicators to each other. In doing so, we are able to identifying conflict-typical, source-typical, gender-typical etc. selection biases of strategic content. Here, we also examine how facts (evidential claims) are qualified and warranted. In addition, we analyze the construction of conflict related discourses by (1.3) looking at presented interpretations of the social reality. The aim here is to point out how meaning is constructed within discourses. For this purpose we here will apply the framing approach briefly described above. Since our research strategy also addresses how strategic communication creates narratives, we finally analyze (1.4) how and for what purpose (gendered) identities, (gendered) values and (gendered) agendas for action are being created and disseminated within strategic content.

When focusing on (2) the (possibly gendered) *contestation* of conflict related discourses, we analyze how strategic communication *contests* existing (gendered) constructions of the social reality. With recourse to the four semantic constructs briefly described above (1.2-1.4), we want to examine how existing interpretations and assumption about a conflict are being contested and, thus, possibly modified or changed. An existing statement can be contested either by giving it an unlikely epistemic status or by evaluating it negatively within the strategic communication message. Additionally, if the contested statement is not mentioned in the message, one needs to compare the used semantic patterns to the existing discourse and see if the discourse was contested and changed hereafter.

When finally analyzing (3) the (possibly gendered) *dynamic(s)* of conflict related discourses, we focus on the construction of new semantic patterns and the contestation of existing ones. In doing so, we will be able to determine the degree and the speed (time series) of the *dynamic* migration of concepts, frames, evidential claims and agendas for action between the different part-discourses (strategic communication, political debates, media coverage, social media). This will shed light on the particular role and function of strategic communication within the processes of *transformation, radicalization, polarization, consensus formation and the establishment and erosion of widely accepted meaning*. Here, the conceptual framework of WP6 comes full circle with the theoretical concept of ‘frame alignment’ (see above) and particularly with the theoretical concept of domain-specific and global interpretative frame transformation.

On the basis of WP’s theoretical foundation and conceptual framework outlined here, our main research questions are as follows:

- RQ1: What concepts, frames, evidential claims and agendas for action (= communication’s narrative) are advocated by the different strategic communicators in the different conflicts, different countries and different phases of the conflict (for example escalation, de-escalation, post-conflict)?
- RQ2: Do those advocated concepts, frames, evidential claims and agendas for action differ between...

different types of strategic communication/texts,
 different types of strategic communicators (particular identity, standing, characteristic etc.),
 different types of conflicts,
 different conflict phases,
 different countries etc.

and if so, how exactly do they?

RQ3: How are (gendered) identities and (gendered) values being constructed and disseminated within strategic content?

RQ4: How do different/particular strategic communicators construct their (gendered) concepts, frames, evidential claims, agendas for action (as commonly acceptable/in everybody's interest, as very specific; as a silent minority's opinion etc.) and does the communicator's gender play a role? For example, how do they justify 'their' claims, what are the argumentative characteristics they use when communicating their agendas, how are facts (evidential claims) qualified and warranted etc.?

RQ5: How do different/particular strategic communicators present themselves (as expert, advocacy, voice of reason, concerned citizens, diplomat, victim, eye-witness etc.) and does the communicator's gender play a part/make a difference?

RQ6: How do (if at all) strategic communication contests existing (gendered) constructions of the social reality and does the communicator's gender play a part/make a difference?

RQ7: What conflict-typical, source-typical, gender-typical, country-typical etc. selection biases of strategic content can be identified when comparing evidential claims of different strategic communicators to each other.

RQ8: How is gender (men and women) represented and portrayed within strategic communication (strategic instrumentization, annihilation, glorification, stereotypization, neutralization etc.)?

In the light of the final results of INFOCORE's other WPs, WP6 has the following additional research questions, which however can only be executed in a second step when the respectively relevant results are available from the respective WPs:

RQ9: Which concepts, frames, evidential claims and agendas for action used in the media coverage, political debates and/or the social media are received by strategic communicators and (possibly) influence their conflict perceptions and discourses? [In close cooperation with WP5, WP7 and WP8]

RQ10: Which kind of strategically distributed information (concepts, frames, evidential claims and agendas for action) is taken up, contextualized, elaborated, and disseminated by the media (success) and which is not (failure)? [In close cooperation with WP7] [In close cooperation with WP7]

RQ11: What differences (if at all) can we detect between the successful and the not so successful groups of strategic communication (differences in semantic concepts, style of presentation, specific kinds of frames or framing strategies/alignments, evaluative quality of argumentation, emotive qualities,

degree of persuasion (PR or propaganda), type/credibility of source etc.? [In close cooperation with WP7]

RQ12: What strategically distributed information (concepts, frames, evidential claims and agendas for action) is received by key media audiences (the public and political actors) and influences their conflict perceptions and discourses? [In close cooperation with WP3, WP2 and WP8]

RQ13: What influence does strategic communication have on the dynamics of conflict related discourses of key media audiences (public and political actors)? [In close cooperation with WP3, WP2 and WP8]

RQ14: What exactly determines the role of strategic communication for the evolution of concepts, frames, evidential claims and agendas for action within news content, general political debate and public discourse (for example contextual factors like news environment, actual content dynamics, actual event dynamics etc.) [In close cooperation with WP5, WP7 and WP8]

RQ15: Which contextual factors (e.g. conflict type and phase, characteristics of the strategic communicator, cultural influences like media system, political system etc.) haven an impact on the migration of semantic patterns from strategic communication to other discourses and vice versa? [In close cooperation with WP5, WP7 and WP8]

In the light of the results of *all* of INFOCORE's WPs, WP6 has the following research question, which will be executed during the very final stage of the whole project when all results from all WPs are available:

RQ16: What influence (degree and speed) does strategic communication haven on the dynamic(s) of conflict related public discourse (construction of new semantic patterns, contestation of existing ones)?

RQ17: Under what circumstances does this influence increase or decrease?

RQ18: What is the particular role and function of strategic communication within the processes of transformation, radicalization (hate speech for example), polarization, building/eroding consensus or widely accepted meaning etc. in public discourse on violent conflict and war?

RQ19: Which constructive/de-escalating and/or destructive/escalating key roles can strategic communication play in shaping the dynamics of conflicted related discourses?

RQ20: Do the overall findings of WP6 allow to define suitable strategies for the use of strategic communication within conflict prevention and resolution and if so what should they look like? For example, what contents and communicative strategies are suitable to construct ideas that link to what other groups believe and why?

Since it is the declared objective of WP6 to also develop *evidence-based strategies for communicating toward/ via media* in a manner suitable for assisting mediation and dialogue, reaching out to conflict parties, and combating escalatory content, we also address the following research questions in addition to the so far scholarly ones:

RQ21: Which communication strategies need to be applied as a tool for conflict prevention and resolution under which particular circumstances for what type and phase of conflict under the consideration of which external factors (media system, political system etc.)? ?

The processing of these research questions aims to provide profound knowledge and thoughtful strategies for the improvement and implementation of external communication policies to the EU policy makers.

Sampling

Following the conceptual definitions outlined above, our main interests are institutional and organizational strategic communicators who have a potential influence on the public discourse of the conflict cases. We thus identified a list of potential strategic communicators with the help of INFOCORE's respective country and conflict leaders.⁷ This list contains all names of institutional and organizational strategic communicators with a certain relevance within the respective discourse and a relevant amount of communication output. Thus, the choice of venues considered here follows a qualitative, partly theory-informed logic that seeks to represent a wide variance of expressed opinions (Baden & Stalpouskaya, 2015).

WP6's sample of potential communicators mainly consists of political entities like parties, political or military institutions/organizations/networks, NGOs, think tanks and social movement actors (self-dedicated to peace keeping/building, security & defense policy, humanitarian issues and/or representing ethnic or religious groups (that are affected by the respective conflicts) as well as their respective leaders and spokespersons; our sample also includes strategic communicators in the field of military and paramilitary / terrorism (if relevant for the particular conflict); finally, we also consider PR firms/single public relation practitioners/consultants officially representing the above listed groups of communicators. The list of potential strategic communicators consists at present of more than 300 actors. Still, the data set will be enriched with the help of WP7 that analyzes the media content. Here, we will look for strategic actors that have been quoted by the media and that are not of our sample so far.

After identifying our sample of strategic communicators, we collected relevant strategic content distributed by these actors. Therefore we looked for any form of organizational and institutional strategic communication as (1) planned (not by accident/spontaneously) and publicly spoken word of strategic communicators and (2) official press releases published/distributed by strategic communicators as well as (3) statements or other forms of publications posted on their official web page. Within this sample of material, we used a key term search consisting of different potential signal words to identify the texts for our analysis. This key search term was developed by our respective conflict leaders in collaboration with

⁷ INFOCORE's particular three conflict areas and six conflict cases as well as the countries of the relevant international environment within the EU are defined at <http://www.infocore.eu/study/>. Some of INFOCORE's PIs in their function as 'country leaders' or 'conflict leaders' provided the consortium with insider information on the particular conflicts (history/phases of conflict, most relevant actors, most relevant strategic communicators etc.) and the particular countries of the relevant international environment (Media system, journalism tradition, most important newspapers etc.).

Christian Baden. It consists of relevant actors, places, actions, events and ideas that suggest that a text is talking about a specific conflict.

It is noteworthy that the communicational output of the different actors differed greatly. After identifying our sample of strategic communication, we will perform a range of data cleanup procedures removing doubles and irrelevant texts out of our sample. To date our sample consists of about 70,000 text published in 8 different languages stemming from NGOs, political entities, social movements, think tanks and other strategic communicators.

Time range

INFOCORE analyzes the conflict discourse on six conflict cases. Therefore we also need to determine a time frame for our content analysis. Here we follow three main considerations: (1) the time range includes recent time periods in order to closely link the results from the content analysis group with those from the interviewing group. This is due to the fact that interviews can most adequately map recent events. (2) Additionally, we include different phases of each conflict that resemble escalation and de-escalation as well as their build-ups. (3) Finally, we selected similar periods of the different conflicts in terms of political, social and other contexts. By doing so, we ensure and strengthen possible comparisons between the different conflicts. As a result, we analyze the full years' coverage on the six conflicts in selected venues inside the conflict areas as well as in Germany, France, the UK and the EU for the following time periods:

Conflict	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Israel-Palestine									
Syria									
Macedonia									
Kosovo									
Burundi									
DRC									

Source: Baden & Stalpouskaya, 2015: p. 9.

Methodological Strategy

The overall methodological approach that is used to analyze the conflict discourses consists of (1) a qualitative pilot study, (2) a quantitative automated content analysis and (3) a qualitative in-depth analysis of the quantitative data output.

Qualitative pilot study

One of the main purposes of our qualitative pilot study is to identify *semantic concepts* that are used in the different discourses on the different conflict cases to describe important aspects of each conflict. By defining the meaning of important reoccurring semantic categories, we create the variables used in the following quantitative stage to analyzing semantic patterns of a higher order (Baden & Stalpouskaya, 2015).

Therefore the INFOCORE consortium examined a large text sample to develop the dictionary that is used to identify concepts. These concepts can be described as semantic word-clouds consisting of synonymously used expressions. To identify important concepts, we first (1) read the text sample, annotated words or word cluster carrying important meaning in each text and then extracted these from the sample. Afterwards (2) we mapped the identified terms onto semantic concepts with the help of abstraction – the identification of the relevant semantic core of the identified expression – and instantiation – the identification of other words that could express the same semantic core. This step was performed for a sample of texts taken from different outlets (e.g. social media, strategic communication or media coverage), different countries and in all languages used in the INFOCORE sample. It was, thus, performed by native speakers. As a consequence, (3) the different lists created by the INFOCORE consortium were merged and cross-checked for missing concepts. As a result, we identified all concepts that play at least a minor role within the texts and figured out all ways in which every concept can be expressed in the different languages used in the scope of the INFOCORE project (Baden & Stalpouskaya, 2015).

To be able to point out peculiarities of the language used in strategic content and how they affect the construction of frames, agendas for action and evidential claims, WP6 analyzed a sample of strategic communication material. Generally, the analyzed texts can be divided into two different groups. Most of the sources (1) consist of short sentences that are easily understandable and contain commonly used expressions. Since professional PR aims to simulate journalistic language and style in order to raise the chances of finding its way into the media coverage, we assume that these texts are built to be compatible with journalistic language and style. As a result, the dictionary and rules used to operationalize semantic patterns for the automated content analysis can be close to those used for the analysis of media coverage. Some other texts (2), however, contain not commonly known and often strongly connoted vocabulary like “heretic” or “extra-legal killings”. This group contains texts that can be labelled as propaganda in a more narrow sense and that are thus not intended to simulate journalistic language (cf. Hierbert, 2003; Jowett & O’Donnell, 2006). Those texts are often communicated either by NGOs that represent ethnic and religious groups or by one of the conflict parties. Consequently, in order to capture all important semantic patterns, the dictionary and rules were enriched by expressions and grammatical structures used in agendas for action, frames and evidential claims in this second group of texts. This does not mean that WP6 developed two separate dictionaries for the computer assisted automatic content analysis or that we will run the automatic content analysis with separate dictionaries on different texts. We will solely enrich the existing dictionary with concepts and expressions that are highly persuasive and propagandistic. This enriched dictionary can be used to recognize what kinds of texts we have (PR which is simulating journalism vs. sheer propaganda) by measuring concepts that can be attributed to both groups, e.g. calling a religious group by its name or referring to them as “infidel heretics”. With the help of the enriched dictionary of WP6 we can also test whether it is worth at all to differentiate between the two groups of text.

Quantitative automated analysis

In the quantitative phase we measure frames, agendas for action and evidential claims in a large corpus of strategic content. The results form the basis for the qualitative in-depth analysis that completes INFOCORE's content analytic strategy. Following Baden's (2010) semantic network theory of *frames*, we operationalized them as coherent and consistent patterns in the collocation of meaningful concepts. These concepts were identified in our qualitative pilot study and are, hereafter, measured within the large corpus of strategic communication. As a result, we inductively identify frames as a semantic network that consists of three or more related concepts. *Agendas for action* are semantic structures that can be measured as implicit or explicit directives and demands relating a current, unsatisfying state to a proposed solution. They, thus, need to be measured quantitatively as a combination of a suggested action and the speaker that promotes it. In the quantitative content analysis we first identify all possible agendas for action with the help of signifying expressions like - "it is necessary to" – and classify them later on based on theoretical knowledge and the qualitative in-depth analysis of our results. *Evidential claims* are measured automatically as a combination of proposition, relation quality and an epistemic status. However, as mentioned above, not all claims are being coded in the course of our content analysis, since we solely look for claims expressing potentially novel pieces of information inserted into the conflict discourse. Additionally, we are interested not in all claims but solely in claims stemming from conflict related areas such as military claims or claims that attribute guilt.

To measure these semantic patterns accordingly, (1) we analyze a large sample with the help of an auto-coding software that we developed based on the AmCat program (van Atteveldt, 2008). On top of the classic AmCAT package, our "JamCAT" environment (<http://jamcat.mscc.huji.ac.il/>) possesses enhanced parsing and stemming routines, several novel built-in tools for identifying specific kinds of semantic structures (notably, evidential claims, interpretative frames, and agendas for action), support for windowed search algorithms, and an enhanced storage format that can accommodate relational content formats, as is typical for social media data. Inside this tool, the specified conceptual contents are recognized based on the developed ontology (in the respective language), using the keyword- and disambiguation criteria. As a result of this step, every discourse text can be represented by a vector of recognized conceptual contents (for further details see Baden & Stalpouskaya, 2015). Additionally, (2) syntactic information – like headlines or paragraphs – are taken from the text to model the macro-syntactic structure of each text. With the help of these information and the application of a windowed algorithm – an algorithm that measures the word-distance of two concepts while also taking structural dimensions like paragraphs into account – we determine concept that occur within the syntactic context of another. Additionally, we look for potential agendas for action and evidential claims in combination with the concepts. Thus, every text can be expressed as a matrix of detected concepts and a list of potential evidential claims and agendas for action. Finally, (3) the matrices are aggregated and represented as a complex semantic network. These networks can be created by aggregating the data on the basis of different logics, for example by country, by type/group of communicator/source/author, by type and phase of conflict, by type of text (for example

strategic vs. non-strategic; PR vs. propaganda) etc. Thus, these networks represent one specific part of a discourse and are the foundation of further data analysis (Baden & Stalpouskaya, 2015).

In the quantitative stage, our research interest consists of six main dimensions. First, we apply a *case-based perspective* and analyze semantic networks in the strategic communication in the different conflicts. Second, in collaboration with the other content analysis groups we focus on the discourse on the same conflict in *different public debates* – media coverage, political debates, strategic communication and public debate (as represented by social media). Third, we focus on strategic communication in *different conflict phases*, analyze strategic communication's narratives in phases of escalation and de-escalation and perform a time series analysis. Fourth, we focus on the different strategic content distributed by *different groups of strategic actors* (for example: think tanks and political NGOs, humanitarian NGOs, political parties, professional PR firms, Military etc.) .Fifth, we measure the sources' essential *formal* characteristics and attributes as well as the *argumentative characteristics* (see section "Conceptual framework..." above) of their strategic communication and determine the potential impact these variables have on the success of strategic communication within conflict discourse. Finally, we compare the construction of *similar ideas* and *semantic patterns* over different conflicts, debates and the time frame of the conflicts. Consequently, we will aggregate the data to different semantic networks in order to account for all the above mentioned research interests.

Qualitative in-depth analysis

After having analyzed different semantic networks that represent different dynamics, key moments and part-discourses in the large sample, the qualitative stage's main purpose is to enrich those findings with more details and to possibly provide context for some of our outcomes. In doing so it combines information from the quantitative stage with relevant insight from other work packages also relating to the results of INFOCORE's interviewing groups and contextual information from the literature. Due to the large size of our quantitative sample, it is necessary to develop a strategy for a selective qualitative analysis in order to determine key events, actors and contents.

Therefore, we first identify key moment and analyze the debate as well as the most important strategic input around these moments. From a perspective of strategic communication, a key moment in our sample arises when new frames, evidential claims or agendas for action come up within the strategic content and migrate into other discourses afterwards. Here a qualitative research strategy might be able to identify, why these new semantic patterns were distributed and why they affected other part discourses. Finally, comparing many of these situations over different conflict and in different phases of each conflict, can advance theory building and help to understand the dynamics of conflict discourses.

Another strategy in our qualitative in-depth analysis will focus on key actors that are either very successful or very unsuccessful in shaping the conflict discourse at a given time. Here, the qualitative perspective might point out which factors affected the actors' success and in how far actors' characteristics, the content of their strategic input and other variables determine success in strategic communication.

Finally, the last strategy of our qualitative analysis focuses on key patterns or key semantic constructs – influential frames, agendas for action and evidential claims – that were identified in the quantitative stage. These patterns were communicated by strategic communicators and afterwards vastly influenced other discourses and their dynamics. Here, the qualitative analysis serves by adding further information about the specific pattern and, thus, demonstrate how the construct could play that critical role within the debate. Additionally, we might point out why the same semantic pattern did not play the same role in other moments of the same conflict or in another conflict. As a result, we might be able to identify key characteristics of successful frames, agendas for action and evidential claims in strategic communication dependent on the given conflict and the respective conflict phase.

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