

**ANALYSING THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN  
THE UAE - ISRAEL NORMALIZATION  
AGREEMENT IN 2020: A GULF COOPERATION  
COUNCIL PERSPECTIVE**

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**UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA**

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**By**

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
EU	European Union
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
LAS	League of Arab States
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
TNC	Transitional National Council
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UN	United Nations

**MENGANALISIS PERANAN MEDIA SOSIAL DALAM PERJANJIAN  
NORMALISASI UAE – ISRAEL PADA 2020: PERSPEKTIF GULF  
COOPERATION COUNCIL**

**ABSTRAK**

Perjanjian normalisasi yang ditandatangani oleh Emiriah Arab Bersatu (UAE) dan Israel pada 13 Ogos 2020 merupakan satu pencapaian geopolitik yang penting dengan implikasi yang meluas. Walaupun pihak berkuasa Emiriah menggambarkan perjanjian ini sebagai langkah ke arah keamanan yang lebih erat, komen popular di media sosial menunjukkan pelbagai pandangan, daripada sokongan kuat hingga penolakan keras. Media sosial memainkan peranan penting dalam mewujudkan perbincangan mengenai perjanjian ini, sekali gus mempengaruhi persepsi awam dan naratif politik. Kajian ini mengkaji pengaruh media sosial dalam proses normalisasi UAE-Israel dengan menggunakan rangka kerja teori hubungan antarabangsa, teori penetapan agenda, penggunaan media sosial, penyertaan politik, dan model penyertaan politik melalui media sosial. Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif melalui temu bual separa berstruktur dengan 15 orang responden (tiga dari UAE dan dua belas dari Majlis Kerjasama Teluk Gulf), serta analisis sentimen terhadap hantaran di Twitter (X) dan Facebook dalam tempoh Ogos hingga Oktober 2020 menggunakan perisian NVIVO. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa media sosial mempunyai kesan terhadap sentimen masyarakat, yang memperkukuh pandangan pro dan anti normalisasi. Analisis sentimen mendapati bahawa persepsi yang dominan dalam kalangan masyarakat UAE adalah positif, mencerminkan keberkesanan mesej kerajaan dan strategi penglibatan orang awam. Kajian ini memberi manfaat kepada pembuat dasar, sarjana, dan pakar strategi komunikasi kerana ia mengasingkan mengikut

kategori serta mengukur perbincangan media sosial mengenai normalisasi UAE-Israel. Dapatan kajian ini menekankan keupayaan media sosial dalam membentuk naratif diplomatik serta kepentingan platform digital dalam mengawal persepsi awam terhadap dasar luar negara.

**ANALYSING THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE UAE - ISRAEL  
NORMALIZATION AGREEMENT IN 2020: A GULF COOPERATION  
COUNCIL PERSPECTIVE**

**ABSTRACT**

The normalization agreement signed by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Israel on August 13, 2020, was a momentous geopolitical milestone with far-reaching consequences. While Emirati authorities portrayed the agreement as a step toward warm peace, popular comments on social media indicated a wide range of views, from strong support to strident rejection. Social media was essential in creating conversation surrounding the accord, impacting public perception and political narratives. This study investigated the influence of social media in the UAE-Israel normalization process, utilizing international relations theory, agenda-setting theory, social media use, political participation, and social media political participation model as the theoretical framework. A qualitative study technique was used, including semi-structured interviews with 15 people (three from the UAE and twelve from the Gulf Cooperation Council) and sentiment analysis of Twitter (X) and Facebook postings from August to October 2020, all performed using NVIVO software. The data reveal that social media had a substantial impact on popular mood, increasing both pro- and anti-normalization views. Sentiment research found that the prevalent perception in the UAE was positive, indicating the efficacy of government messaging and public engagement methods. This study is useful for policymakers, scholars, and communication strategists since it categorizes and quantifies social media debate on UAE-Israel normalization. The findings emphasized social media's ability to shape

diplomatic narratives, as well as the relevance of digital platforms in regulating public perception of foreign policy choices.

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Israel have been working to improve their strained bilateral ties for several years, and in late 2020 they executed the Abraham Accords (Dagres, 2021). The significance of this deal, which has been praised as a major breakthrough in the quest for stabilization and prosperity in the Middle East, extends well beyond the region. Nevertheless, social media's impact on this accord has not been studied extensively. The purpose of this research is to provide a critical assessment of how social media contributed to the improvement of international ties between the UAE and Israel.

The normalization of ties with Israel can be seen as part of the UAE's soft power initiative it has been proactively pursuing in the past few years. In addition, the United Arab Emirates has dedicated considerable resources to fostering stability in the Middle East (MOFAIC, 2017). The UAE has been using social media to promote the image of itself as an advanced, contemporary nation dedicated to regional peace and security. Meanwhile, social media has indeed been employed as a means of organizing large groups of people. Twitter (X) and Facebook were employed to generate enthusiasm for the peace process in the United Arab Emirates. It has opened up channels of communication previously unavailable to the general public, allowing them to have a greater say in the political process.

At the same time, social media has been pointed out as a venue for disseminating disinformation and inciting violence (Gallo & Cho, 2021). Social media has the potential to be used to propagate disinformation and incite violence as the UAE and Israel work to normalize their formal ties. Therefore, the purpose of this research

is to investigate the manners in which these platforms have been deployed, as well as their possible effects on the ongoing peace talks.

This will be done by analyzing the sentiment of social media posts and keywords from platforms like Facebook and Twitter to see what kinds of trends emerge as people adjust to their new normal. Emotional attitudes conveyed in content from social media can be analyzed through a method known as “sentiment analysis” (Jindal & Aron, 2021). The vast amounts of posts, remarks, and evaluations made by individuals on social media can shed light on how those users and consumers perceive an event that has occurred. The favorable, unfavorable, or impartial tone of social media data can indeed be determined with the help of sentiment analysis. Furthermore, to better understand how social media has been used in this process, the research will also perform qualitative interviews with individuals in the UAE and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. An estimated 15 interviews with public users of Facebook and Twitter (X) (3 from the UAE and 12 from GCC) will be carried out. This study seeks to provide a comprehensive knowledge of the function that social media plays in the normalization of diplomatic relations between the UAE and Israel.

## **1.1 Background of the study**

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a country located in the southeast of the Arabian Peninsula. The late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the founding father and first president of the UAE, united the seven emirates in 1971, transforming the region into a prosperous and modern nation. His visionary leadership and commitment to development shaped the UAE into a global hub for culture, innovation, and diplomacy. UAE is a federation of seven emirates: Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman,

Umm Al Quwain, Fujairah, and Ras Al Khaimah. The UAE is a monarchy, with the President of the UAE serving as the head of state and the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi serving as the deputy head of state. The President and the Crown Prince are chosen from among the rulers of the seven emirates. The UAE's government is a constitutional federation with a President and Vice President, a Supreme Council of Rulers, and a Federal National Council. The history of UAE goes back centuries, as it was a British protectorate in the 19th century. In 1971, the UAE became an independent nation and has since developed into a modern and prosperous country. UAE's economy is heavily dependent on oil and gas, which has enabled the country to develop a strong infrastructure and become a leading center for trade and tourism in the region. The UAE is known for its oil wealth and modern infrastructure, and it is considered a developed country. It is also known for its efforts to promote a positive image of the Arab world and to play a leading role in regional and international affairs.

Israel, on the other hand, is a relatively young country, established in 1948 after the United Nations voted to partition Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states. Since then, Israel has gone through multiple conflicts with its neighboring Arab countries and has been involved in a long-standing dispute with the Palestinians over the territory and the rights of the Palestinian people (Ezugwu, 2023). Despite these challenges, Israel has developed into a developed country with a strong economy and advanced technology sector.

Historically, the relationship between UAE and Israel had been hostile, with the UAE, along with most of the Arab countries, recognizing the Palestinian cause and not recognizing the State of Israel (Baqai & Mehreen, 2021). The UAE and other Arab states have long insisted on a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a

precondition for normalizing relations with Israel. However, in recent years, there has been a shift in the region, with some Arab countries beginning to openly engage with Israel on various levels, including diplomacy and security.

In August 2020, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Israel announced that they had reached a historic agreement to normalize relations between the two countries. The agreement is formally known as the “Abraham Accords Peace Agreement: Treaty of peace, diplomatic relations and full normalization between the United Arab Emirates and the State of Israel.” This agreement, mediated by US President Donald Trump (Marcus, 2020), has culminated in decades of clandestine and progressively overt connections between the two countries, signed on Aug 13 2020 (Sorkin, 2021). “Abraham Accords” is a name given to a group of the first peace made between Israel and Arab countries under the auspices of the United States. The name was used for the first time in a joint statement by Israel and the United Arab Emirates. The agreements were attributed to Abraham, who is called the Father of the Prophets, and he is a religious figure who is greatly appreciated and respected in Judaism and Islam and is considered a prophet and messenger in both religions. The three, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, are called the Abrahamic religions. Under the agreement, the UAE and Israel agreed to establish full diplomatic relations, including the exchange of ambassadors and the opening of embassies. The accord also included cooperation in various areas, such as tourism, trade, and technology. Referred to as the “very historic moment,” UAE is the third Arab country to restore relations with Israel formally. Security cooperation, business contacts, tourism, direct flights, scientific collaboration, and other activities are likely to grow due to the agreement, but the ramifications for the rest of the region remain unknown.

Several important factors have been identified to account for this normalization of UAE- Israeli relations. First, the UAE has portrayed and defended normalization as a strategic incentive to prevent Israeli annexation of the West Bank. It also helps in containing the mutual interest in the Iranian threat. Also, there is a new influx of Emirati investment in Israeli companies working on creative ways to treat and test for the coronavirus; business partnerships are being drafted between Israeli startups and companies in the UAE. Accordingly, Israel is working on establishing direct flights from Tel Aviv to Dubai and Abu Dhabi. The agreement also highlighted the positive potential of the domino effect, inspiring other countries in the region to open up about their hidden links with Israel.

The agreement's benefits for the UAE are not the West Bank, security cooperation, or high-tech startups. Instead, it is the drive to achieve the objective of Abu Dhabi to enhance the image of UAE on Capitol Hill, which was tarnished in recent years by several issues, such as the role of Emiratis in the Saudi-led campaign in Yemen, a country experiencing the "the worst humanitarian crisis in the world" (Frisch, 2020). Accordingly, the agreement has also strengthened the UAE's position in Washington, providing its access to advanced security hardware and software, which the US was resistant to share earlier, encompassing the armed drones, cyber capabilities, F-35 fighter jets, as well as intelligence tools (Guzansky & Marshall, 2021).

Gulf studies centres had published through their Gulf Insights series that the UAE-Israel normalization will also contribute to Middle East peace. Yousef Al Otaiba, the UAE ambassador to the United States, issued a statement calling the accord "a success for diplomacy and the region. Both countries are anticipated to begin

exchanging embassies and ambassadors and cooperating in sectors including tourism, education, healthcare, trade, and security (Zweiri, 2020).

The UAE's normalization of relations with Israel makes it necessary to understand the normalization aspect and its implications. Normalization also refers to the social processes where different ideas and acts become accepted as 'normal' and 'natural' in daily life (Horwitz, Allan, 2016). In the words of Leonhardsen & Busch (2017), "it develops a level of trust that allows a normal relationship to resume".

The Emirati announcement of peace with Israel evoked great interest in public opinions through social media in the UAE and Twitter (X) and Facebook were flooded with different analyzes, positions, and opinions in which the roles of influencers, researchers and thinkers emerged in responding to those who welcomed or rejected them. According to a survey issued by the Israeli Ministry of Strategic Affairs, the majority of social media posts in the Arab world on the recent normalization accords between the UAE, Bahrain, and Israel were "negative." Eighty-one per cent of Arab social media users expressed "negative" feelings towards the "peace" accords, also known as the Abraham Accords, while 8% expressed "extremely unfavourable" feelings, and only 5% viewed them positively.

Similarly, the survey of The Times of Israel, a ministry-commissioned between mid-August and mid-September, found that over half of the comments published in the Arab world – 45 per cent – saw the Israeli-Emirati accord as a "betrayal." Twenty-seven per cent expressed sorrow for the UAE's connections with Israel, ten per cent said the arrangement was "hypocrisy," and five per cent believed Abu Dhabi bowed to US interests. "The deal's advantages in the areas of security (61 per cent), economic practicality (33 per cent), and the "whitening" of a de facto existing scenario (6 per cent) were highlighted by the minority in favour of normalization" (Abubakr, 2020).

Prior to the recent revolutions in the Arab, social media was referred to as marginal, elitist, and alternative, with minimal impact due to the insignificant penetration of internet users (Taki & Coretti, 2013). Social media was later brought to the forefront following the 2011 events in the Arab world, where many have credited weblogs, Twitter (X), and Facebook for facilitating this revolution (Moreno-Almeida & Banaji, 2019). However, during recent events, the role of social media has not been explored, where social media convergence has remained concentrated in the mainstream media and with actual street demonstrations. Furthermore, social media's role and significance during recent events across the Arab world have varied momentarily.

The social media role has substantially transitioned since the Abraham Accord Agreement was made public. Conclusively, the government of Egypt, Bahrain, Sudan, Morocco, and Jordan have hailed the deal (who have also normalized the relations with Israel), whereas the rest of the Arab countries were found to be silent. The unofficial Arabic impression was noticed across social media, where Arab users worldwide shared their conflicting perceptions of normalizing the UAE-Israel relationship (Mulki, 2020). Under various relevant hashtags, it was intensively tweeted by the people, and these were also found to be part of debates related to the agreement's impact on the cause of Palestine, which continues to remain a key concern across the Middle East.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Normalization of international relations has remained an important topic in the larger literature on conflict resolution, diplomacy, and international relations theory. Normalization has been investigated as a technique for restoring or furthering

international peace, collaboration, and mutual interests (Lemay-Hebert & Visoka, 2022). The Abraham Accords, signed in 2020, were a watershed moment in Middle Eastern geopolitics by permitting the normalization of diplomatic relations with Israel, the UAE, Bahrain, and, subsequently, Sudan and Morocco. These accords marked a change in the region's political dynamics, driven by shared economic, technical, and cultural interests (Guzansky & Marshall, 2020; Hitman & Kertcher, 2023). Despite substantial study on the relevance and geopolitical ramifications of normalization agreements (el-Nawawy & Elmasry, 2022; Traub et al., 2022), there are still gaps in understanding the socio-political mechanisms that underpin popular acceptance of such accords.

The broader literature on international relations offers useful theoretical frameworks for studying normalization. Neorealist ideas emphasized power balance, often citing challenges like Iran's regional dominance as a crucial element in developing coalitions (Traub et al., 2022). Alternatively, neoliberal policies emphasized economic interdependence and institutional cooperation, as seen by the Abraham Accords' focus on trade and technology agreements (Haus, 2010). These theoretical frameworks provided insights into state intentions but did not address the impact of public opinion moulded by media narratives and agenda-setting processes. As McCombs and Shaw (1972) stated in their agenda-setting theory, the media influenced public perception of government priorities. Social media, as a contemporary version of this idea, was critical in shaping narratives, encouraging political engagement, and influencing public conversation on delicate geopolitical topics.

Research on social media and political involvement has constantly underlined its dual function as a tool for mobilization and disinformation (Juris, 2016; Rogers &

Niederer, 2020). For example, social media influenced public involvement during the Arab Spring (Youmans & York, 2012) and the Black Lives Matter campaign (Mundt et al., 2018). However, the same platforms aided the propagation of misinformation and encouragement to violence, as proven by the Capitol Riots of 2021 (Barry et al., 2021; Feuer, 2022). These cases demonstrated social media's ability to amplify criticism, shape collective action, and impact political legitimacy. Applying these findings to the Middle Eastern environment, namely the Abraham Accords, was critical for understanding the relationship between normalization, public attitude, and social media dynamics.

Despite the growing dependence on social media for political speech and agenda building, little study has been conducted on its influence in affecting public opinion on normalization accords between Israel and Arab governments. Most research has focused on the geopolitical consequences of normalization (Frisch, 2020; Sorkin, 2021), historical patterns of Arab-Israeli relations (Ghariani, 2020), or the timing and negotiating procedures (el-Nawawy & Elmasry, 2022). While researchers such as Mulki (2020) have examined the social ramifications of normalization, the impact of social media in shaping public opinion has received little attention. Furthermore, survey data revealed different views on the Abraham Accords among Gulf residents, with just 19-25% of Saudis, Bahrainis, and UAE people expressing support (Kassin & Pollock, 2022). These findings underlined the complexities of public views, as well as the possible role of social media narratives in driving perceptions of normalization, as seen in the below figure 1.1.

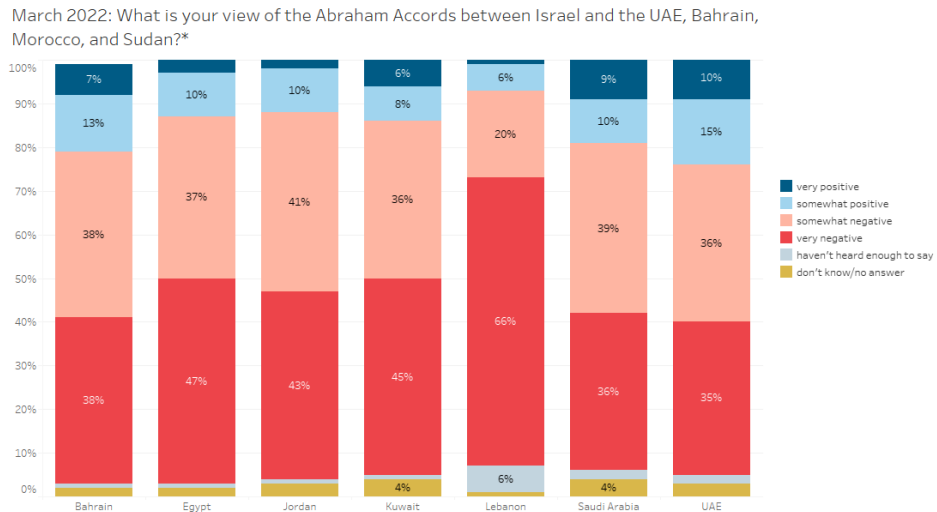


Figure 1.1 Perception of the Abraham Accords (Source: Kassin & Pollock, 2022)

This research sought to fill that gap by investigating how social media platforms affected public opinion and conversation around the UAE-Israel normalization. The study adopted social media political participation (SMPP) frameworks to examine how platforms promoted conversation, mobilized support or opposition, and created collective narratives. Furthermore, agenda-setting theory is used to evaluate the impact of social media in prioritizing certain topics and structuring normalization in the public domain. This study aimed to give a complete understanding of the interaction between state-level diplomacy and citizen involvement mediated via digital platforms by combining international relations theory and communication studies.

The research is significant for three main reasons. First, it added to the expanding corpus of research on the socio-political influence of social media in international relations, especially in the context of normalization treaties. Second, it filled a knowledge gap in the role of digital platforms in shaping public opinion on Middle Eastern diplomacy, with a particular emphasis on the normalization of relations between the UAE and Israel. Third, it provided practical insights into regulating public

opinion and minimizing the potentially destabilizing impacts of disinformation and polarization on national security. In addition to deepening theoretical knowledge, this research provided recommendations to policymakers to deal with the challenges of digital diplomacy in the age of social media's growing importance by examining these factors.

### **1.3 Research Aim**

The aim of this research is to comprehensively investigate the role of social media in promoting cultural understanding and better relations between the UAE and Israel, as well as providing new insights into the relatively unexplored topic of social media's impact on normalization between countries.

### **1.4 Objectives of the Research**

The study explores the role of social media in reflecting the different impressions raised from the normalization and tracking, collecting, and classifying the various views of the different ideologies regarding Emirati-Israeli normalization, defining the reasons for them and the predominant views.

The objectives of this research are expected to:

1. To analyze the role of social media as a medium of communication in shaping the UAE-Israel normalization process.
2. To explore the methods and strategies employed through social media during the UAE-Israel normalization.
3. To understand social media sentiment in the context of the UAE-Israel normalization.

### **1.5 Research Questions**

The following questions arise from the above:

1. What specific roles did social media play in facilitating the UAE-Israel normalization process?
2. What methods and strategies were employed through social media during the UAE-Israel normalization?
3. In what ways did social media sentiment influence public opinion and diplomatic outcomes during the UAE-Israel normalization?

## **1.6 Scope of the Study**

The study targets the population of the Middle East and especially the UAE during the period of the UAE-Israel normalization, analyzing their social media postings on various platforms such as Twitter (X) and Facebook. People across these platforms have shared mixed opinions regarding normalization, the analysis of which is within the aims of this study (Kassin & Pollock, 2022). UAE was selected as the ideal scope to conduct the study as it has the highest rate of social media engagement in the world, wherein it is the only country where the social media engagement rate has exceeded 100% (TDRA, 2022).

The social media platform that would be mainly targeted includes Twitter (X) and Facebook. This is because Twitter has been identified as the major platform for deriving more insightful results. Such as Al-Agha and Abu-Dahrooj (2019) performed multi-level analyses of political sentiments via the use of Twitter data. Also, Swiss politicians demonstrated that analysis of Facebook and Twitter (X) data makes it possible to predict the success of Swiss politicians (Kaiser et al., 2021). Facebook is selected because there are many pages and groups on Facebook that discuss this topic, and one can find them by searching for keywords related to the topic or by looking at pages and groups that focus on Middle Eastern politics and current events. Additionally, the research might also find relevant information by looking at the official pages and accounts of government leaders, news organizations, and think tanks that focus on the region. Furthermore, the analysis of Arabic Tweets showed terroristic

behaviour characteristics detection could be held with the same data (Alhalabi et al., 2021). The participation in the study would be made by the individuals from the UAE and GCC for the interviews and the social media posts on Twitter (X) and Facebook from August to October 2020. This would help analyze the perspective of the general public, with regard to the normalization. Thus, overall, the scope of the study is Twitter (X) and Facebook posts and hashtags in the UAE during the UAE-Israel normalization (August – October 2020). The evaluation of posts on Twitter (X) and Facebook will be evaluated using sentiment analysis.

In addition to using sentiment analysis, the study will also adopt a qualitative method, wherein interviews with key social media experts will be carried out to validate further the findings of the study as well as to deepen the understanding of the role of social media in the UAE-Israel normalization.

There are several limitations that are present in the present research. The study may have a small sample size, which might also restrict how broadly applicable the results are. If the sample size is insufficient, it may not be broadly representative, and the outcomes may well not apply to a larger population. Additionally, the individuals chosen or the data gathered may have been biased. A study may not be indicative of the populace at large, for instance, if it only analyzes the posts of a select few users or organizations on social media.

The study's timeline may be its third potential limitation. The research may not capture the long-term impacts of the normalization process following the normalization because it only examined social media messages from a limited time frame during the normalization process (i.e., from August 2020 to October 2020). Finally, the cultural norms between the UAE and Israel, which might also influence

how social networks are employed and construed in each country, could have been overlooked in the study.

### **1.7 Significance of the Study**

The Israeli -UAE normalization is one of the most debatable subjects nowadays. According to Susan Saurel, a writer at Essay on Time, “social media is a strong revolution that has revolutionized our lives all around; it has changed the way we socialize, operate our enterprises, engage in political affairs, establish professions, and set job recruitments.” Saurel provides insight into the areas of our society that have been profoundly impacted (Media update, 2020). From here comes the significance of this study; the social media’s role in one of the most important political, social and diplomatic issues – the UAE- Israeli normalization. This study will explain the public opinions on normalization through social media and give details to the facts beyond the relationship between both aspects; social media and normalization.

Social media can be a valuable tool for understanding public opinion on the normalization of relations between the two countries. By analyzing social media posts and comments, researchers can gain a better understanding of the attitudes and perceptions of citizens in the UAE and the GCC towards the normalization process. It would also provide insights into the emotions and sentiments of people towards the normalization process, which are important to understand the complexity of the topic, how it is perceived by the public, also on how public opinion is shaped and influenced, as well as for identifying any potential challenges or issues that may arise. Overall, understanding social media in the context of the normalization of UAE and Israel’s relationship can be important as it can provide insight into public opinion, emotions

and sentiment, key drivers of public opinion, a key source of information, and a platform for monitoring and measuring the impact of the normalization.

This study will enlighten those interested and willing to understand the facts about the importance and role of social media in Emirati-Israeli normalization. Ignoring such an important role will uncover many important issues about the facts that escalate between social media users and the course of a bilateral agreement. Therefore, what is not known about this study problem and must be known is that social media has an overwhelming orientation and a clear impact on normalization in terms of influencing public opinion.

This research is important to society because it intends to foster closer ties and intercultural communication between two countries, presumably fostering stabilization and peace in the Middle East. The research is significant for the United Arab Emirates and Israel because it may shed light on ways in which they can use social media to improve their ties. By offering insightful information about how social media affects the normalization procedure, the research can also benefit the international policy of both nations. By delving into the understudied area of social media's role in normalization and offering a framework for future research in this area, this study also adds to the methodology and theory.

## **1.8 Operational and Conceptual Definitions**

- **Normalization:** Normalization in international relations refers to the process by which two or more states restore or establish formal diplomatic, economic, and cultural ties following a period of tension or conflict (Horwitz, 2016). In this study, normalization specifically refers to the establishment of diplomatic and cooperative relations between the UAE and Israel following the Abraham Accords.
- **Social Media:** Social media encompasses digital platforms that enable users to create, share, and interact with content, including text, images, and videos, in real time (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). For this research, social media refers to platforms such as Twitter (X) and Facebook,

where individuals express opinions, share news, and engage in discussions regarding the UAE-Israel normalization.

- **Sentiment Analysis:** Sentiment analysis is a natural language processing technique used to determine the emotional tone of text-based content, categorizing it as positive, negative, or neutral (Jindal & Aron, 2021). In this study, sentiment analysis is applied to social media posts related to UAE-Israel normalization to identify prevailing public attitudes and perceptions.
- **Public Opinion:** Public opinion refers to the collective attitudes and beliefs of individuals within a society concerning political, social, or economic issues (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). For this study, public opinion is assessed through the analysis of social media discussions, surveys, and interviews regarding the UAE-Israel normalization.
- **Digital Diplomacy:** Digital diplomacy is the use of digital tools, particularly social media, by governments and policymakers to engage with foreign audiences and influence international relations (Bjola & Holmes, 2015). In this research, digital diplomacy refers to the UAE's strategic use of social media to shape perceptions and foster support for its normalization with Israel.

## **1.9 Chapter Summary**

Normalization is the process of imposing, restoring or maintaining normalcy through the use of novel terms and techniques, such as Harmony, Security, Protection, and Organization. The Abraham Accords and the normalization of diplomatic relations between the UAE and Israel are primarily the results of a neoliberal policy that emphasized economic, cultural, and technological cooperation. However, there have been differing opinions about the agreement in the region, which could affect the policy's success. The ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine only makes matters worse. In light of this, the role of social media as an instrument for mass mobilization, spreading false information, and inciting hatred must be considered. Thus, it is necessary to evaluate critically the role that social media has played in the normalization of relations between the UAE and Israel.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The chapter focuses on synthesizing the information concerning the determined study area. “Since the focused area related to the social media role and its effect on the normalization of the UAE and Israel relations, different aspects outlining this area have been studied.” Primarily, “the researcher is inclined to synthesize the information most appropriately so that findings from various studies can be accumulated together.” Thus, following the analysis, this research discusses the gap it helps bridge. In the chapter, terms such as concept, approach, and theory are used. A concept is a general thought or basic building block that describes a certain part of reality. An approach is a way to deal with or look into a problem, which usually involves combining ideas from different areas of study. A theory is a systematic collection of ideas that explains and predicts phenomena by connecting and organizing disparate concepts into a cohesive framework.

#### **2.1 Arab region's external relations with the US, USSR/Russia, China, and EU**

The league’s objectives in 1945 were to adjudicate disputes amongst its members or between them and third parties, as well as to coordinate and strengthen its members’ artistic, political, economic, and social agendas (Dhabi, 2016). On April 13, 1950, parties to an agreement on economic cooperation and cooperative defense agreed to coordinate their military defense actions (Karaganov & Suslov, 2018).

Early on, the Arab League’s main priorities were social, economic, and cultural initiatives. In 1959, it served as the venue for the inaugural Arab Petroleum Congress, and in 1964, it established the Arab League Educational, Cultural, and Scientific

Organization (ALECSO) (Mekky, 2015). Similarly, this league was awarded the PLO observer status in 1964 despite Jordan's concerns about the representation of all Palestinians. This league received full membership in 1976. Under Mahmoud Riad's leadership—the third Secretary-General— political activity increased (1972–79). On the other hand, the league was undermined by internal conflicts over political issues, particularly those involving Israel and the Palestinians. (Dhabi, 2016). The other members of the Arab League decided to suspend Egypt's membership and move the league's headquarters from Cairo to Tunis after Egypt signed a peace agreement with Israel on March 26, 1979. In 1989, Egypt was again accepted to the Arab League, and in 1990, the league's headquarters were moved to Cairo (Wichhart, 2019).

A significant rift developed in the league due to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and the following involvement of numerous Western nations, particularly the United States, at Saudi Arabia's request, in removing the Iraqis from Kuwait. Other examples are Saudi Arabia, Syria, Egypt, Qatar, Morocco, Kuwait, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Djibouti, Lebanon, and Somalia. All the nations above supported the deployment of foreign forces in Saudi Arabia, and all except the final three participated militarily in some way, albeit in a relatively limited way. Late in 2010 and early in 2011, a wave of widespread protests that came to be known as the Arab Spring occurred in numerous Middle Eastern and North African nations, prompting the Arab League to make some quick adjustments throughout the whole Arab world (Wichhart, 2019).

The Arab League expelled Libya from the organization in February 2011 for its violent responses to the Libyan uprising. In March, it supported the implementation of a no-fly zone to protect Muammar al-opponents Qaddafi from some significant airstrikes by the leader's allies (Wichhart, 2019). After Qaddafi was removed from power, Libya's membership in the Arab League was restored in August under the

auspices of the TNC. As the Syrian revolt descended into violence, the Arab League and the Syrian government reached an agreement in November to end the 10-month-long campaign, 12 of which were directed at the country's peaceful demonstrators. Less than two weeks later, the Arab League decided to waive Syria's participation, citing information that its forces had continued to kill protestors in defiance of the agreement (Dhabi, 2016).

Rapid changes in the Middle East and the wider international atmosphere have developed great regional and international engagement as a crucial objective for the UAE, which is more than in the previous two decades (Beck, 2015). The subsequent UAE policy evolution has been characterized by shifting its stresses away from certain diplomatic solutions and the soft power that characterized Emirati diplomacy during the late "Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan's" reign and toward the contribution, action, and intervention. Today, UAE is depending more on "smart power"—a soft's balance and hard power—to advance its local interests and reduce the potential dangers to its people, security, growth, and economic achievement (Beck, 2015).

The invasion of Iraq of Kuwait on August 2, 1990, constituted a geopolitical aspect in which the US forced its military for global leadership. Continuing forward, the security and defense doctrines of the Arab Gulf countries begin to evolve (Dhabi, 2016). Following the Kuwait liberation, Iraq progressively began disengaging from the collective defense circle and regional influence linked with GCC. The region's bilateral contracts, alliances, and partnerships begin to dominate, compete with, and challenge the region's current multilateral institutions (Dhabi, 2016). This marked the Arab collective action's end, and a new era is beginning in regional and international alliances and ties. It signalled the beginning of a new age in Arab Gulf countries'

developing expenditures on defense, military imports, and foreign policy priorities (Dhabi, 2016).

During the twentieth century last decade, the US failed to develop an enduring regional security strategy that followed Kuwait's liberation. This objective remained elusive for so long in the event's aftermath of September 11 in the year 2011, when the war had begun on Washington's agenda as well as fundamentally influenced the regional as well as international landscape (Dhabi, 2016). Despite the tremendous American military capability and strength employed to destabilize Saddam Hussein's administration following the 2003 Iraq invasion, the primary realities within the region are still intact (Dhabi, 2016).

The Middle East is politically and ideologically split to the level where major power could ascend (regional or international). Moreover, competition in the regional external for multi-polarity acts and influences insurmountable impediments to hegemony in the Middle East (Al-Saidi & Haghirian, 2020). The invasion of Iraq intensified upheavals and cracks in the geopolitical structure of the Arab world. It opened up some newly developed strategic options for Iran and its Iraqi friends, and in the aftermath of the "Arab Spring," Tehran began influencing the Arab capitals such as Beirut, Baghdad, Damascus, and Sana'a. Several notable foreign policy debates prior to Barack Obama's presidency (2009–17), which occurred in the war's aftermath in Afghanistan and Iraq, were the practicality and prospects for United States hegemony and the deployment of US military forces abroad. All these became contentious issues. The public's dissatisfaction with "endless wars" prompted a reconsideration of the place of the Middle East in the American foreign policy theory and the potential of a new "pivot to Asia." At the time of Obama's two terms in office, a tectonic shift in

Middle Eastern geopolitics unfolded, which was compounded by a critical events series: (Al-Saidi & Haghirian, 2020)

In late 2010 and early 2011, during the Arab Spring that resulted from a power vacuum in the entire Middle East; the oil revolution, which is regarded as a game-changing shale in the entire US; Washington's pivot to Asia, and growing hostility toward China; the Islamic State's rise in Iraq and Syria, as well as the international coalition formed in order to combat it in the year 2014; the decline in the prices of oil to 2016 from 2014; as well as the nuclear deal was sabotaged (Ferziger & Bahgat, 2020). Following the inauguration of Donald J. Trump as President in January in the year 2017, Washington began executing a burden-sharing approach along with NATO allies and GCC strategic partners under the slogan "America First" (Ferziger & Bahgat, 2020).

This shift in tactics was terrible news for the Arab Gulf states, which found themselves on unfamiliar ground. The relationship between regional roles and economic strength; the developing alliance between the US and Gulf states (Dhabi, 2016); the growing threats posed by Iranian and global terrorism; the proliferating and the growing influence of non-state actors; as well as the several Arab countries' disintegration in the first -two decades of the existing century that all have had a significant influence on the features and geopolitics of the Middle East and international links (Dhabi, 2016).

## **2.2 The Arab region, history, relationship, and geopolitics**

It is vital to relate the study concentration on Israel and the Arab world and how their relationship has evolved. For example, what started as a Jewish–Arab struggle in and over Palestine in 1948 (Anderson, 2013) morphed into a broader

confrontation between Israel and the Arab nations (Al-Saidi & Haghirian, 2020). The violence worsened throughout the 1950s, culminating in the June 1967 battle. That fight yielded two fundamentally opposing outcomes. For starters, it gave Israel negotiating tools in peace talks with Countries in the Middle East that had lost land in the Six-Day Wars (Chunchao, 2021).

Most importantly, this resulted in the 1979 acceptance of the Israeli–Egyptian peace agreement. Secondly, it saddled Israel with the Occupied Territories, West Bank, and Gaza and the continued supervision of a sizable number of Palestinian people. The wider Arab–Israeli war was substantially compressed into the Israeli–Palestinian war in its current shape (Stoddard & Toltica, 2021). Two more paradoxical trends have shaped the Israeli–Arab environment recently. The re- entry of Iran and Turkey into the war in the Middle East has given it a significant Islamic component (Qader & Ihsan, 2020). However, Iran’s desire for regional influence and the escalation of Sunni–Shiite instability in the region have had a calming impact on the Arab and Muslim governments’ attitudes toward Israel.

Learning about the historical relationship is important and noteworthy given this research’s connection. Thus, United Arab Emirates was founded 23 years after Israel’s freedom and followed the regional and local upheavals that followed the 1967 Six-Day Wars (Miller & Verhoeven, 2020). The UAE, situated on the Gulf’s southern coast, is far from Israel. A straight and imminent war between both nations seems improbable in the foreseeable future. Dhabi (2016) acknowledges that the UAE has not actively participated in Israel’s conflicts, but the balancing of power at its founding impacted its policies and attitudes towards the Jewish state. Awareness of the relationship between the UAE and Israel involves an analysis of both nations’ geopolitical situations. (Miller & Verhoeven, 2020)

Israel's and the UAE's ties are frequently influenced by their respective political axes of strength. The Emirates and Israel are regarded as pro-American countries on the world stage. The United States and the UAE have robust connections (Kammel, 2019), founded on a cooperation agreement based on common diplomacy and political and financial relations. Therefore, Israel and the UAE have frequently taken conflicting viewpoints in terms of geographical strategy (Kammel, 2019).

The Emirates has supported the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council's (GCC) resolutions on Israel from its inception (Chunchao, 2021). As a participant in the Arab League, the UAE failed to acknowledge Israel's legitimacy and formally prevented Israelis from entering its land, in line with the Arab League's broader boycott of Israel. Being just a member of the GCC has slightly modified its aggressive stance, as the Gulf nations regard Israel as a regional actor who must be respected (Köse & Ulutaş, 2017)

Although GCC's inception in 1981, its member states have taken a strong stance against Israel's treatment of Palestinians while working to find an answer to the Israeli-Palestinian issue (Hemmer, 2018). In contrast to the UAE's repeated disapproval of Israel's Palestinian policies, the UAE has a long history of supporting global settlement efforts, and it regularly highlighted its participation in the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 (Initiated by Saudi Arabia) (Podeh, 2018). The Gulf governments, notably the UAE, see the conflict's conclusion as a cause of stability in the region and a means of eradicating extremist forces. The UAE and the rest of the GCC see a two-state settlement as crucial to ending the Israeli-Palestinian issue (Köse & Ulutaş, 2017). Israel's policies and activities in the West Bank and Gaza are now at the heart of the UAE's resistance to the country, which has since declined all attempts at establishing formal diplomatic ties. (Köse & Ulutaş, 2017)

Apart from its neighbors, Qatar and Oman, the UAE has never had an official Israeli embassy (Salem, 2015). While adopting Arab governments' general rhetoric, the Emirates practically maintains a somewhat flexible and autonomous attitude to Israel, as seen by its desire to keep ties low-key. This strategy includes, among many other things, awarding entry visas to Israelis with foreign citizenship (as well as holders of an Israeli residence permit through regional sponsoring), having received Israeli government leaders visiting its region, keeping multilateral diplomacy and stability ties (while attempting to keep them hidden), mutual trade decided to carry out "under the radar," and much more (Köse & Ulutaş, 2017).

Considering its cooperation with the Arab League's boycotting of Israel, the Emirates does not impose stringent limits on commerce with Israel and does not hinder the country from building new connections (Cammett & Salti, 2018). The UAE (along with the remaining GCC member nations) lifted limitations imposed by the Arab League's boycotting of Israel in 1994, which prohibited any economic dealings with Israeli enterprises or foreign firms (Naheem, 2017). The UAE generally permits non-Israeli Jews on its soil because it distinguishes between religious diversity and its political concerns with Israel. Palestinians in Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA) maintained contact with the UAE on different levels, although Palestinians under the PA's control find it simpler to enter the UAE, and many of them work there. The immigration of Saudi citizens into Israel is not prohibited by Israeli law, but it requires the Israeli state's agreement (Solima, 2021).

The level of collaboration between the Emirates and the State of Israel and its citizens has fluctuated throughout time and among industries (Cammett & Salti, 2018). Shortly after the death of prominent Hamas figure Mahmoud al-Mabhouh in a hotel in Dubai in January 2010, there was a notable example of such variation (Frisch, 2020).