



The “Ambassadorial” Journalist: Twitter as a Performative Platform for Ultra-Orthodox Journalists during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Baruch Shomron¹

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Abstract

Journalists can play a pivotal role in promoting a population’s security amid a health crisis such as a global pandemic. This role becomes of enhanced importance for marginalized populations as they face a compounded threat due to preexisting social inequalities and exclusion. This study focuses on the utilization of Twitter by ultra-Orthodox journalists during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic in Israel. The study applies a thematic analysis of 23,110 tweets from the 20 most popular ultra-Orthodox journalists on Twitter. Findings reveal that ultra-Orthodox journalists utilized Twitter in an “ambassadorial” role to advocate their community’s security through six strategies: (1) explaining the challenges endangering ultra-Orthodox Jews during COVID-19, (2) dispelling COVID-19 accusations directed against ultra-Orthodox Jews, (3) encouraging social distancing and health guidelines, (4) highlighting the social contributions of ultra-Orthodox Jews to the general public during the pandemic, (5) criticizing wrongdoers who violated the health guidelines, and (6) calling out acts of hatred and bigotry that have been directed toward ultra-Orthodox Jews. These findings reveal the professional ethos of ultra-Orthodox journalists and their aspiration to protect their community. Furthermore, these findings shed light on the vital role Twitter can play in journalistic work through inter-social interactivity and the enablement of capabilities, particularly the capability “to be secure.” Lastly, this study expands the understanding of the social media resource contributing to policymakers tasked with formulating its fair distribution in society in accordance with the capabilities approach and its objective of promoting well-being.

Keywords Capabilities approach · COVID-19 · Journalists · Security · Twitter · Ultra-Orthodox

✉ Baruch Shomron
bshomron@uni-mainz.de

¹ Department of Communication, Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Jakob-Welder-Weg 12, 55128 Mainz, Germany

Introduction

We apologize for reacting to the anti-ultra-Orthodox amalgamation. In the past, when the ultra-Orthodox were not on Twitter and people talked about them behind their backs, it was a lot more fun. We apologize for the discomfort (Twitter tweet: Arye Erlich, 6 April 2020, editor of the popular *Mishpacha* magazine and radio broadcaster at Reshet Bet)

Self-defense is an instinct. If you have not reacted instinctively to the incitement against your community then that is a sign that you do not feel a part of it, and the incitement is not directed at you (Twitter tweet: Avi Mimran, 6 April 2020, radio broadcaster at Kol Chai)

The COVID-19 pandemic has had devastating effects on the well-being of individuals. Affecting most aspects of life, including health, education, employment, personal finance, and more, the pandemic has disproportionately aggrieved the marginalized parts of society owing to preexisting social inequalities and exclusion (e.g., Hoofman and Secord 2021; Klingbail 2020; Kochhar 2020; Kumar et al. 2021; Sestanovic et al. 2021). For example, with the adoption of virtual learning due to the widespread closure of schools and quarantines, children from minority backgrounds experienced a lower quality of education relative to their peers (Hoofman and Secord 2021). Similar findings were reported in Israel concerning minority college students owing to a lack of access to information and communication technologies (Tehawkho and Haddad Haj-Yahya 2020). Prominent among the marginalized populations is the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community in Israel, which makes up 12.6% of the Israeli population (Cahaner and Malach 2020). This social–religious community is characterized by strict observance of Jewish-religious law, relative insulation from the modern world (Don-Yehiya 2005; Friedman 1991; Heilman 2000), and widespread poverty and inequality (Haron 2013; Kaley et al. 2021; National Insurance Institute of Israel 2017).

Media serves as a vital resource for individuals' well-being in a society, as it enables the realization of many capabilities (Couldry 2019; Garnham 1997; Hesmondhalgh 2017; Jacobson 2016; Kaushik and Lopez-Calva 2011; Schejter and Tirosh 2016; Shomron and Schejter 2021; Sen 2009). Capabilities refer to what people can do or be (Sen 2005), and the most important of the capabilities is “to be secure,” as it serves as the most basic human need to exist safely without threat (Nussbaum 2011). The capability “to be secure” is realized in the media through the advocacy of people's security, for instance by raising public awareness to internal and external threats (Shomron, 2021; Shomron and Schejter, 2021). In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the risks it poses to all aspects of life, including health and employment, and especially the enhanced risks it poses for marginalized populations, this study sets out to examine the role ultra-Orthodox journalists play with respect to their own community's security. Indeed, it has been suggested that journalists could be playing a pivotal role in society toward people's security during the COVID-19 pandemic (Lewis 2020).

This study focuses solely on Twitter owing to its increased popularity in journalistic activity in the past few years (Hedman 2020; Molyneux and Mourao 2019). The study includes all of the tweets of the 20 most popular ultra-Orthodox journalists on Twitter during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic in Israel (1 March to 16 August 2020). This chosen time period was characterized by elevated morbidity and mortality levels among the ultra-Orthodox community relative to the general population (Birenbaum-Carmeli and Chassida 2021; Muhsen et al. 2021; Saban et al. 2021). In all, 23,110 tweets were analyzed in this study through an inductive grounded theory qualitative content analysis (Ritchie et al. 2013).

This study contributes to scientific knowledge in three unique ways. First, it sheds light on ultra-Orthodox journalists' professional ethos, suggesting they not only preserve community values—as the literature suggests (Golan and Mishol-Shauli 2018; Wasserman and Gabel 2019)—but also protect their community from outside threats to life, rights, and a dignified existence. Second, this study contributes to understanding the vital role Twitter can play in journalistic work owing to its inter-social interactivity—pointing to a new type of connectedness and collaboration (Dogu 2020)—and its potential in enabling capabilities and particularly the capability "to be secure." Thus, social media such as Twitter can be more suitable for public persuasion and information owing to its unique affordances in comparison with traditional media venues (Gil de Zuniga et al. 2018). These affordances include, for example, the individual's ability to express and share information with large amounts of people, acts that are limited to the individual through traditional media venues (Gil de Zuniga et al. 2018). Indeed, this study contributes to the sociology of Israeli society and particularly the inter-social interactivity made possible through digital media between the ultra-Orthodox community and the general Israeli society. These two groups, who are often spatially separated and socially confrontational toward each other, have found Twitter as a performative platform, a space in which to interact and promote the community. For the ultra-Orthodox, a platform to voice their needs and circumstances, and for the general population, a platform to hear the voice of the disadvantaged. Third, this study expands the understanding of the social media resource, which can contribute to policymakers tasked with formulating its fair distribution in society in accordance with the capabilities approach and its goal of promoting well-being.

Indeed, while this study focuses solely on Twitter and on journalists from the ultra-Orthodox community, these three aforementioned aspects could plausibly be taking place in other communities around the world and on other social media platforms. Thus, this study illuminates the phenomenon of ambassadorial journalism as an important social tool for disadvantaged communities to better their life situations, particularly in times of need.

Literature Review

The first case of COVID-19 was identified in the city of Wuhan in December 2019 (John Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center 2020). In the following months, it spread throughout the world and was defined as a world pandemic by the World

Health Organization on 11 March 2020 (World Health Organization 2020a). COVID-19, or coronavirus, is a highly contagious respiratory disease that can cause severe illness. Prior to the emergency authorization of the first vaccines in December 2020 (Food and Drug Administration 2021), there were no approved treatments for the virus, and most efforts concentrated on promoting hygiene practices and physical distancing in an attempt to slow its spread (World Health Organization 2020b). On 9 April 2022, the John Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center reported that more than 497 million people were diagnosed with the disease worldwide, and of them, 6.1 million people had died (John Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center 2022).

In Israel, the first case of COVID-19 was diagnosed on 27 February 2020 (Birenbaum-Carmeli and Chassida 2021), culminating in 3,987,834 cases and 10,559 deaths by 9 April 2022 (Israel Ministry of Health 2022). Similar to other countries, the Israeli government has encouraged personal hygiene practices and physical distancing, implemented local lockdowns, and conducted mass testing in an attempt to slow down the spread of the virus (Israel Ministry of Health 2020a). Following the approval of vaccines in December 2020 (Food and Drug Administration 2021), Israel began vaccinating its population against the virus (Leshem and Wilder-Smith 2021), yet this study focuses on the first months of the pandemic prior to the rollout of vaccines. During the time of the study, Israel experienced its first two waves of the pandemic, which were countered by general lockdowns and heightened health restrictions (Birenbaum-Carmeli and Chassida 2021), as well as cellphone tracking and local lockdowns (Maor et al., 2020). While both waves were eventually successfully curved, they resulted in 3260 excess deaths, representing a 6% increase in mortality in past years (Haklai et al. 2021). While preliminary studies have shown that ethnic and racial minorities worldwide had been disproportionately diagnosed with the virus (Dyer 2020; Tai et al. 2020), by September 2020 no such data had been formally released in Israel. However, a moral panic was experienced in Israel by the general public following unsubstantiated and anecdotal claims appearing in the national media by reporters and politicians who blamed the ultra-Orthodox communities for the prevalence of the virus in Israel (Shomron, in press). These claims were comprised of reports of multiple ultra-Orthodox communities deliberately ignoring government health regulations (Maor et al., 2020). While these anecdotal accusations were unsubstantiated by statistical data at the time of the study, studies published since have retrospectively revealed significantly higher levels of morbidity and mortality in the ultra-Orthodox community due to the COVID-19 virus (Birenbaum-Carmeli and Chassida 2021; Muhsen et al. 2021; Saban et al. 2021). Indeed, the Israeli government's preliminary response during the first months of the pandemic mostly ignored the minority communities including the ultra-Orthodox (Waitzberg et al. 2020). Moreover, only by September 2020, after the culmination of this study, had the Ministry of Health introduced a "traffic light" system representing the rate of infection in cities and towns (Israel Ministry of Health 2020b). However, while this system could reveal the levels of morbidity in predominant ultra-Orthodox cities, it could not contribute information regarding mixed cities such as Jerusalem, Beit Shemesh, and Ashdod, as it did not include inner-city breakdowns. This differentiation between what is known today and what was known at the time is

vital to this study, as it contextualizes the ambassadorial role of the ultra-Orthodox journalists on Twitter in the first months of the pandemic.

In addition to the coronavirus causing death and severe illness, it has also been disruptive in other areas of life, including employment, education, and personal finances (e.g., Hoofman and Secord 2021; Klingbail 2020; Kochhar 2020; Kumar et al. 2021; Sestanovic et al. 2021). For example, 24 million people were laid off in the USA in the first months of the pandemic (Kochhar 2020), and similarly, 1.3 million people were laid off in Israel (Arlosoroff 2020). In both countries, the majority of those laid off were non-educated, low-skilled, and low-salaried employees typically from marginalized populations (Klingbail 2020; Kochhar 2020). Therefore, the marginalization and inequalities that endured before the pandemic escalated during it for the weakest parts of society.

The ultra-Orthodox community (Haredim) is one of the most disadvantaged segments of Israeli society. This community accounts for 12.6% of the Israeli population and consists of approximately 1.2 million people (Cahaner and Malach 2020). As a marginalized community, the ultra-Orthodox community suffers widespread discrimination, systemic exclusion, and inequalities in all aspects of life (Haron 2013; Kalev et al. 2021). For example, close to half of the ultra-Orthodox population fall below the poverty line (National Insurance Institute of Israel 2017). These inequalities are also influenced by cultural and religious factors owing to theological beliefs that subjugate men to the study of holy scripture and women to the raising of children (Berman 2000; Stadler 2002). This has led to lower employment levels in the community relative to the general population: 68% versus 88.1%, markedly noticed with men (55.2% versus 90.8%) relative to women (81.3% versus 85.7%) (Bank of Israel, 2021). Moreover, these theological beliefs have also affected the characteristics of employment, such as the age of entering the workforce and the chosen professions (Berman 2000; Stadler 2002), thus leading to fewer employment opportunities and lower incomes (Kalev et al. 2021).

This heterogeneous community is divided into three main factions: Hasidic, Litvak, and Sephardi, who in turn comprise many independent subgroups (Don-Yehiya 2005). Each of the factions makes up roughly a third of the ultra-Orthodox population, though different polls have shown an approximate deviation of 5% (Sofer-Forman and Kaliner-Kasir 2020). Both the Hasidic and the Litvak factions originate from nineteenth-century eastern Europe, prominently Poland, Hungary, and Lithuania. However, these two factions differ greatly from each other. The Hasidic faction, which aspires to the highest level of insulation from the modern world, is characterized by hundreds of independent sects, each led by a rabbinical leader, unique traditions and dress styles, and a general theological outlook that emphasizes piety and the individual's spiritual experiences. The Litvak faction aspires to a more moderate level of insulation from the modern world, and is characterized by elitism, intellectualism, and a religious lifestyle that emphasizes rigorous religious learning. The Sephardi faction was formed in Israel during the twentieth century by individuals arriving from Muslim countries. While this faction practices unique religious traditions which differ from the two European factions, they largely adhere to the Litvak social-religious way of life, though they portray a larger level of openness to modern society (Lehmann and Siebzehner

2006; Leon 2016). Indeed, studies that have measured the attitudes of the different factions on contemporary issues such as higher education, employment, and social integration, regularly record results that correspond with the levels of openness–seclusion of the three factions (Sofer-Forman and Kaliner-Kasir 2020). This has also manifested regarding each faction’s approach to information and communication technologies (ICTs), chief among them Internet usage (Lopo and Malchi 2012). The attitudes of the three main subgroups regarding adherence to COVID-19 health guidelines also concurred with their aforementioned conservative–modern outlooks. Thus, the Sephardic community mostly adhered to the guidelines, the Hasidic community often disregarded them, and the Litvak community practiced a middle ground (Malchi et al. 2020).

Yet, despite inner-community differences, the main commonalities of the ultra-Orthodox community as a whole are their strict observance of Jewish law (Halacha) as well as a religious–cultural fundamentalist approach that has “successfully insulated themselves from the trends and realities of contemporary culture” (Heilman 2000, xvii). This insulation has manifested itself in all areas of life, including avoiding the consumption of any type of media from outside the community (Don-Yehiya 2005). Indeed, the ultra-Orthodox community has reacted to external developments such as technological advancements by complete avoidance or by negotiating a modified solution viewed as compatible with community norms. For instance, while 97% of ultra-Orthodox members own a cellular phone, 72% choose to own a “kosher phone.” A kosher phone is a phone that has been approved by a rabbinical committee following its modification to exclude Internet access and applications (Friedman 2020). This has also been the case regarding Internet connectivity in the community, with some members avoiding Internet connectivity altogether, and others negotiating a way of connectivity compatible with community norms. Thus, approximately half of ultra-Orthodox adults were not connected to the Internet in 2018, in comparison with only 11% among non-ultra-Orthodox Jews (Cahaner and Malach 2019). However, Internet connectivity in the ultra-Orthodox community has been rising steadily, from 28% in 2008 to 54% in 2019 (Cahaner and Malach 2020), reflecting inner-community change regarding this topic. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has served as a catalyst, leading to a 39% expansion in ultra-Orthodox Internet connectivity and raising the level of Internet connectivity to 66% in the ultra-Orthodox community in 2020 (Askaria 2021). While the percentage of connectivity is rising in the community, Internet connectivity is characterized by negotiated solutions compatible with community norms, such as the usage of web content filtering programs (Cahaner and Malach 2020). Approximately 25% of ultra-Orthodox individuals reported being active on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (Bezek 2020a). Moreover, of those connected to the Internet, 58% reported being active on social media during the COVID-19 pandemic (Israel Internet Association 2020), pointing to the growing centrality of the Internet and social media in the ultra-Orthodox community (David and Baden 2020). While Twitter is only sixth in popularity in Israel (Bezek 2020b), the platform’s general significance stems from its central role in disseminating news and information, as well as serving as the preferred social media platform for journalists, politicians, and social

activists (Hedman 2020; Molyneux and Mourao 2019; Rufai and Bunce 2020). This preference for Twitter has also been shared by Israeli journalists, with many of them highly active on the platform (Laor 2021; Tal and Baharir-Perl 2020).

Indeed, a rich abundance of sectoral media platforms exists in the ultra-Orthodox community, comprising radio stations, newspapers, and online news sites (Cohen 2017). However, it is vital to understand how journalists perceive their role as it shapes their journalistic practices and end-result media product (Her-mida and Mellado 2020). The main role of the ultra-Orthodox sectoral media outlets has customarily been to preserve community values (Wasserman and Gabel 2019), similar to other social agents in the ultra-Orthodox community (Feldman 2019). Concurring, ultra-Orthodox journalists' professional ethos has been to act as social agents who "safeguard and bolster the enclave" (Golan and Mishol-Shauli 2018, 317). Indeed, the media content of ultra-Orthodox mass media outlets differs substantially from that of mainstream Israeli media. For instance, the latter mostly avoids covering events and culture from outside the community (e.g., the secular world), yet when covered, these happenings are often contextualized as the negative outcomes of secularism or constructed as a threat to their community's beliefs and lifestyle (Golan and Mishol-Shauli 2018; Rashi 2011; Wasserman and Gabel 2019). While safeguarding the community (Golan 2013) might be more easily achieved inside institutional sectoral media created by and operating under the supervision of rabbinical authority (Cohen 2012), the Internet poses a much larger threat owing to its four unique characteristics: abundance, interactivity, mobility, and multimediality (Schejter and Tirosh 2016). Through the Internet and notably social media, every individual from the ultra-Orthodox community can potentially consume and create any content they desire and interact with any person they wish. While early Rabbinical policy was to ban Internet use altogether, it eventually conceded to allowing limited use on predefined sites and for specific "worthy" usage, such as professional objectives that cannot be achieved in the community (Cohen 2017). This approach has led to individual agency, in which each person in the community monitors their own media activities in accordance with community values (Barzilai-Nahon and Barzilai 2005; Lev-On and Lissitsa 2018; Neriya-Ben Shahar 2017, 2019). This personal agency could explain the high presence of ultra-Orthodox journalists on Twitter. As such, Twitter has become a vital platform for journalists to perform work routines, develop personal branding, and interact with sources, colleagues, and the public (Hedman 2020; Molyneux and Mourao 2019). Accordingly, it might be perceived as legitimate for ultra-Orthodox journalists to engage on Twitter for professional reasons, while other members of the community (the audience) might abstain from Twitter as it could be considered for them "antithetical to the values" of their community (Neriya-Ben Shahar 2020, 5).

How ultra-Orthodox journalists utilize social media in general, and Twitter in particular, has yet to be researched. This research lacuna holds special interest as their natural audience (ultra-Orthodox individuals) mostly abstains from social media. Thus, the above-mentioned reasons that motivate journalists from the general population might not be relevant in explaining the observed high activity levels of ultra-Orthodox journalists on Twitter. Thus, the following question was formulated:

RQ: How have ultra-Orthodox journalists utilized Twitter during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Methods

This exploratory study comprised a qualitative content analysis of ultra-Orthodox journalists' Twitter feeds. The sample consisted of the 20 most popular ultra-Orthodox journalists on Twitter, measured by the number of followers (Appendix). These ranged between 7,500 and 50,000 followers. Only those journalists employed by an Israeli ultra-Orthodox Hebrew-speaking medium were considered. These included ultra-Orthodox newspapers, radio stations, and online news sites. All journalists employed by these media organizations were included, except foreign correspondents, as they were deemed less relevant to the research topic (this excluded one journalist from the list, who was replaced by number 21 on the list). To build the sample of journalists, a list was created for this study of all ultra-Orthodox journalists on Twitter who had over 1000 followers and 1000 tweets. While these two numbers of followers and tweets were arbitrarily chosen, they were deemed to represent markers of sufficient popularity and activity, thus representing the most popular and active ultra-Orthodox journalists on Twitter. The list was generated by snowballing Twitter interactions of ultra-Orthodox journalists' feeds. By examining who the journalists were answering, retweeting, and sharing, 40 ultra-Orthodox journalists were identified on Twitter who met these above-mentioned criteria. This primary list of 40 journalists was then cross-referenced with two existing lists that were published in the past 2 years on leading ultra-Orthodox news sites (Asulin 2018; Kolodski 2019). Lastly, a predefined quota of the 20 most popular journalists on the primary list was chosen for the study. This predefined number of journalists was chosen because it represents the most common sample size in qualitative analysis, as well as enables saturation (Mason 2010). Though this study examines the ultra-Orthodox community as a whole, and the journalists were aggregated solely by popularity on Twitter, the reader should be aware that the majority of journalists aggregated were Litvak (45%) and Sephardi (35%), and only a minority were Hasidic (20%). This observation concurs roughly with the levels of openness of each ultra-Orthodox faction discussed earlier (Friedman 1991; Lopo and Malchi 2012; Sofer-Forman and Kaliner-Kasir 2020).

After compiling the list of the most popular journalists, the 20 chosen journalists' tweets appearing between 1 March 2020 and 16 August 2020 were analyzed. These dates represent the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic in Israel. As the pandemic progressed, the dynamics and responses of the different public players, including journalists, changed or evolved, thus emphasizing the importance of analyzing different time periods during the pandemic. This chosen time period was characterized by high levels of morbidity and mortality in the ultra-Orthodox community in Israel relative to the general population (Birenbaum-Carmeli and Chassida 2021; Muhsen et al. 2021; Saban et al. 2021). Moreover, during this time period, the general public sentiment regarded the ultra-Orthodox communities as responsible for this outcome, as well as posing a significant threat to the general public due to

them deliberately ignoring government health-regulations (Maor et al., 2020). The end of this period is marked by the beginning of the third COVID wave in Israel and the formal introduction of the "traffic light" system in Israel, representing the rate of infection in cities and towns and formally revealing for the first time the levels of morbidity in predominant ultra-Orthodox cities. The latter transfers the public epistemology from speculation to substantiated by data. These tweets included all retweets, shares, and responses, in addition to original tweets, totaling 23,110 tweets. During the duration of the study, each ultra-Orthodox journalist tweeted 1156 tweets on average with a median of 1192 tweets.

A qualitative thematic analysis was then conducted by the author on the 23,110 tweets using an inductive approach (Kelle 2007). This inductive approach utilized the grounded theory approach (Ritchie et al. 2013) to comprehensively understand how ultra-Orthodox journalists were using Twitter during the pandemic. In this analysis, the study identified recurring themes and categories that reached saturation (Corbin and Strauss 1990). As the analysis was conducted by a single coder, the study employed peer debriefing (Creswell and Creswell 2017) with an external scholar with expertise in ultra-Orthodox journalists and qualitative analysis. This peer debriefing allowed for the comparison of codes and themes and the settling of differences through dialogue, thus contributing to a deeper analysis and heightened accuracy (Creswell and Creswell 2017). Though a growing number of researchers are choosing to perform a content analysis of digital content through algorithms, this method was not deemed sufficiently sensitive to identify the precise categories and themes in this research topic. Moreover, though studies of social media, and among them Twitter, are increasingly quantitative, it was considered beneficial to conduct a qualitative thematic analysis in this study, as it would allow more depth and richness in understanding the researched phenomenon (Ritchie et al. 2013), potentially capturing all "relevant aspects of the topic" (Corbin and Strauss 1990, 6). As all of the tweets analyzed were published in the public sphere by public figures with a large following, the study did not consider their analysis an intrusion of privacy, and therefore no special ethical actions were required.

Findings

The findings presented here comprise the themes that reached saturation by appearing time and again in the Twitter feeds of ultra-Orthodox journalists during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic. Each theme appeared multiple times in the same feed, as well as in different journalists' feeds. While these findings reveal journalists' sentiments during the early months of the pandemic, the reader should be aware that as the pandemic progressed, these sentiments might have changed. The analysis found that all surveyed ultra-Orthodox journalists regularly utilized Twitter as a platform to advocate for the protection of the ultra-Orthodox community during the COVID-19 pandemic. This advocacy could contribute to individual ultra-Orthodox capability "to be secure" and was made up of six unique practices on Twitter.

Explaining the Unique Challenges Endangering Ultra-Orthodox Jews during COVID-19

All of the ultra-Orthodox journalists regularly used Twitter feeds to address the unique challenges their community was facing during the pandemic. These particularly distinctive challenging concerns consisted of problematic living conditions, financial needs, and information disparities.

Living Conditions

The ultra-Orthodox Jewish community in Israel is characterized by large families—consisting of 6.6 children on average—who live together in small, crowded apartments (Cahaner and Malach 2020). These living conditions could affect the rate and speed of infection of the disease, which in turn could stigmatize the ultra-Orthodox community. Possibly in an effort to head this off, the ultra-Orthodox journalists frequently used Twitter to point out these unique living conditions as extenuating circumstances for the spread of the virus. For instance:

We are all experiencing difficult times. But while the average Israeli citizen is quarantining at least in a spacious house with a “compact” family - for the ultra-Orthodox it is just the opposite: a tiny apartment and a large family. Despite this, we are doing our best and being careful. (Arye Erlich, 1 April 2020)

Try to imagine 210,000 people in a small area of 8 square kilometers ... Most of the residents of Bnei Brak, men, women, and children, hidden in their homes, families with 8 and 10 children. This is completely crazy. So enough. It is time to understand this reality and offer solutions. (Benny Rabinowitz, 5 April 2020)

Furthermore, tweeting about this could also serve as a call to policymakers to organize special quarantine accommodations outside these living conditions so that members of the community who have been infected could leave the crowded conditions and pose less of a threat to the community at large. For example:

She was informed that she had indeed been exposed to a verified (COVID-19) patient and that now she must be quarantined. But they sent her to a house full of children, without a hotel and without an offer for a hotel room. (Shimon Liberty, 3 April 2020)

A 56-year-old Jew lives in Bnei Brak. On the 3/24 he complained of symptoms, was examined, and found positive for Corona. Since 3/26 he is at home with his 6 children and his wife who has a pre-existing condition. He is locked in his room, begging to go to a hotel, calling the municipal hotline, MDA, the Ministry of Health, and still nothing. (Avi Mimran, 2 April 2020)

Indeed, it eventually became the Israeli government’s policy to quarantine individuals in special hotels if they could not safely quarantine at home. These hotels were operated by the Ministry of Health and Home Front Command and included special accommodations for members of the ultra-Orthodox community, such as kosher foods (Barkan 2020). However, while kosher food was provided to all quarantine sites, each subgroup in the ultra-Orthodox community requested a specific rigorous *kashrut* certification suitable to them (Blumenthal and Farkash 2020).

Additionally, the ultra-Orthodox journalists advocated for the basic needs of the community, such as access to food and social services. This advocacy became necessary following the lockdowns that were imposed at the time mainly on ultra-Orthodox communities (Forsher et al. 2020). For instance: “troubling pictures from Bnei Brak. The city is besieged and fortified, no one enters or leaves. I hope they will take care of the food supply and basic needs seriously and will not abandon the residents” (Yossi Elituv, 3 April 2020); “they closed the city of Bnei Brak in one day but have not offered any solutions to the residents” (Yaakov Rivlin, 5 April 2020); “Putting 200,000 residents in lockdown without a real possibility to purchase food, with the police closing supermarkets as a ‘punishment’ because poor residents gathered at its entrance to buy food, is to starve people!” (Moshe Glassner, 3 April 2020). Indeed, the Israeli government eventually enacted an organized distribution of food for Bnei Brak and other municipalities that were put in lockdown (Milman 2020).

Financial Help: Loss of Income and Unemployment

One of the main challenges affecting people during the pandemic has been the financial fallout (Arlosoroff 2020; Kochhar 2020). While many people have lost their jobs, the financial downside has affected the marginalized parts of society worse (Hoofman and Secord 2021; Klingbail 2020; Kochhar 2020; Kumar et al. 2021; Sestanovic et al. 2021). Thus, while the ultra-Orthodox journalists also advocated on Twitter for financial help for the general public, such as: “Half a million unemployed and seventy thousand businesses shattered ... The Israeli government must open its reserves and provide immediate assistance to the unemployed and business owners” (Yossi Elituv, 28 June 2020), they mainly used Twitter to press for the financial needs of their own community, highlighting the greater need of ultra-Orthodox relative to the general population. For example: “Families with many children [insinuating ultra-Orthodox families] need financial help desperately, much more than the small families [insinuating secular families]” (Shimon Breitkopf, 1 April 2020); “The ultra-Orthodox households have unique challenges during an economic crisis, as their expenses are only on basic needs, there really is nowhere to cut during a crisis” (Yossi Elituv, 2 August 2020); “The maximum grant for a family is 2,000 NIS, whether they have four children or fourteen. However, the value of 2,000 NIS in an ultra-Orthodox family is much higher than in any other sector.” (Shlomo Kook, 1 April 2020).

Obstacles Facing the Ultra-Orthodox Community in Receiving Vital Information during the Pandemic

Receiving information during a health emergency is vital for all individuals (Shomron and Schejter, 2019). However, ultra-Orthodox journalists turned to Twitter to point out that their community members were not receiving the vital information they required during the pandemic. The journalists also noted several reasons for this. The first reason was the failure of government authorities to supply the ultra-Orthodox community with vital information in real time. For instance:

If the ultra-Orthodox are only partially adhering to the health guidelines, it is only because of a lack of information as a result of the late awakening of the Ministry of Health in informing the ultra-Orthodox. (Avi Rabina, 19 March 2020)

I was in three ultra-Orthodox cities today and I noticed that the ultra-Orthodox adopted the corona guidelines at the level of a religious mitzvah. 80 percent were with masks, social distancing, small events, and minimal gatherings. This points to the fact that at the beginning of the pandemic there was very poor informing [of ultra-Orthodox] ... but now many in the general public should learn from the ultra-Orthodox. (Arye Elrich, 3 June 2020)

This framed the parity of information also as an extenuating circumstance, possibly lifting the blame off community members for getting sick or for not adhering to health guidelines. The journalists often explained that specially targeted information was needed, as the ultra-Orthodox community is known for avoiding the consumption of mainstream media for religious reasons. For example:

Taking the ultra-Orthodox DNA in the field of volunteering and donating, as well as in everything related to prayer in the minyan and Torah study, and changing it in a few days, is not easy. This requires dedicated information, and the transfer of information to a large public that does not consume mainstream media. (Benny Rabinowitz, 1 April 2020)

Advocating for safety and security, the journalists regularly warned their followers about misinformation, for example: “It is advisable to be very careful about spreading rumors and poor medical diagnoses... There is no mitzvah to wash the net in Baba Ma’ase’s” (Yossi Elituv, 13 March 2020), and confronted misinformation that could pose a risk to the safety of community members, such as the mistaken belief that it is prohibited to answer the phone on Saturday when waiting for COVID-19 test results. Yet, these Tweets might not have been intended for ultra-Orthodox followers, as their existence is questionable, but might have been intended for the secular audience to impress upon them the seriousness that ultra-Orthodox were conveying regarding the disease.

Dispelling COVID-19 Accusations Directed against Ultra-Orthodox Jews

The ultra-Orthodox journalists regularly utilized Twitter’s platform in order to dispel accusations directed toward their community members during the pandemic. The

first accusation they confronted was that ultra-Orthodox Jews were all infected with the COVID-19 disease and were spreading it to everyone else. The journalists confronted this accusation in two ways. They framed this accusation as antisemitic and published hand-picked statistics which revealed a low prevalence of the disease in their community. For instance:

Groups of disguised self-defined anti-Semites have received the historic opportunity to hate openly, without hiding, and without political correctness: the ultra-Orthodox, those with the beards and the Jewish look are filthy and spread diseases. Avoid them. Close them in a ghetto. Their Minister? sector spreads viruses. We are in Israel 2020. The voices are Europe 1930. (Arye Erlich, 3 April 2020)

I hear the frantic reports that “almost every ultra-Orthodox in Bnei Brak has tested positive” sorry to cool the excitement with facts. Here are two examples from the past week: on the 24th 312 tests were conducted with only 38 positives. And on the 25th 430 tests were conducted with only 56 positives. (Moshe Glassner, 28 March 2020)

Framing Israeli government agents and Jewish secular speakers as antisemitic is a long standing ritual in some parts of the ultra-Orthodox community in Israel. In addition to it serving as a provocation, this also serves, from the ultra-Orthodox perspective, to contextualize the happenings in a historical–theological narrative in which the current “aggressors” are metamorphed into the enemies of old, and the community’s current suffering is contextualized as a continuation of historical persecution of Jewish communities.

The second accusation the journalists often confronted on Twitter was that ultra-Orthodox Jews were not adhering to social distancing and hygiene guidelines. The journalists countered this accusation by regularly publishing photographs and accounts in their Twitter feeds of ultra-Orthodox Jews practicing social distancing in different scenarios, such as shopping and gatherings. A special emphasis on adhering to the guidelines was seen in their tweets regarding religious activities, such as praying, studying, funerals, and weddings. For instance: “For the first time in the history of the yeshiva the lights were turned off at the Knesset HaGadol yeshiva in Kiryat Sefer, and the yeshiva was closed” (Ariel Elharar, 18 March 2020); “The kollels return to study in groups of 15 people keeping a distance of two meters and wearing masks” (Itay Gadasi, 11 May 2020). The journalists also regularly portrayed well-known rabbis wearing masks and adhering to the guidelines depicting them as role models for the community. Furthermore, in many of the tweets, the journalists emphasized that adhering to the health guidelines did not represent only health officials’ decrees, but also stemmed from a religious obligation to adhere to rabbinical decrees that supported these health guidelines (Figs. 1, 2).

Encouraging Social Distancing and Health Guidelines

Indeed, the journalists did not only provide evidence that the ultra-Orthodox were adhering to the social guidelines, but also intentionally encouraged members of the



Fig. 1 “Kiddush Hashem [sanctification of his name]: Gur Hasidim who prayed tonight with the Rebbe, and observe the guidelines of the Rabbis and the Ministry of Health in keeping two meters distance from each other” (Israel Cohen, 17 May 2020)



Fig. 2 “At the house of Maran Rabbi Shteinman ZT”L on 5 Chazon Ish street the Gaon (Head) Rabbi Yosef Grinmen as godfather in the Brit (circumcision) of a student’s son” (Moshe Weisberg, 8 July 2020)

ultra-Orthodox community to do so. Yet, it is plausible that these tweets were not intended for ultra-Orthodox followers, but instead intended for the secular audience to impress upon them the seriousness that ultra-Orthodox were conveying regarding the virus. Thus, this practice could serve a dual purpose, with the latter representing ambassadorial journalism, and the former representing traditional journalism.

The tweets of this practice included the full array of health guidelines, from wearing masks and physical distancing, to avoiding crowded places such as Yeshivas and synagogues and mass gatherings, such as weddings.

I've just returned from a big grocery store in Bnei Brak. I did not see a single person ultra-Orthodox or other without a mask and gloves. They prevented the entry of too many people at once, and the loudspeaker reminded everyone of the health guidelines every few minutes. [this was] Very good. Hopefully, it will continue. (Benny Rabinowitz, 16 April 2020)

Moreover, a habitual practice in this regard was to tweet about rabbinical figures that not only ordered strict adherence to the guidelines, but also served as role models themselves, illustrated by encouraging people to mimic the rabbi's behavior (Figs. 3, 4).

Highlighting the Social Contributions of Ultra-Orthodox Jews to the General Public during the Pandemic

The journalists consistently tweeted about the social contributions of ultra-Orthodox members to the general population. These contributions included a large array of topics, including distributing food to the needy, donating blood and medical equipment, and volunteering at medical facilities (Figs. 5, 6).

This practice of highlighting social contributions could contribute to the security of ultra-Orthodox members, as it framed them in a positive light in the eyes of the public and could serve to reduce negative stigmas and accusations mentioned earlier.



Fig. 3 "Personal example: the Gaon (Head) Rabbi Yehuda Silman praying this morning's 'beginning of month' prayer in a reduced Minyan [prayer group] on a street in Bnei Brak" (Avi Rabina, 26 March 2020)



Fig. 4 “‘To do as you are told’: the great Gaon (Head) Rabbi Dov Landow on his way to teach at the Slavodka Yeshiva while strictly adhering to all the guidelines: mask, gloves and walking stick, so that he won’t have to lean on his helpers” (Shlomo Kook, 28 June 2020)

Criticizing Wrongdoers Who Violated the Health Guidelines

The ultra-Orthodox journalists regularly took to Twitter to criticize and call out different groups of people endangering their community. These groups included the secular population, ultra-Orthodox subgroups who were ignoring the health guidelines, government policies, and law enforcement.

Criticizing the Ultra-Orthodox Jews Who Were Not Adhering to the Health Guidelines

The journalists utilized Twitter to criticize the ultra-Orthodox Jews who were not adhering to social distancing and hygiene guidelines. This public criticism might possibly have served to pressure the violators themselves to adhere to the guidelines, thus lowering the risk of infection in the community. However, the goal of this public criticism could also be to convey to the general public that most ultra-Orthodox were adhering to the guidelines and that the community itself was taking responsibility for dealing with the small groups of troublemakers. For instance: “Murderers, get back inside. When a student, Rabbi or anyone else leaves their home and does not adhere to the Ministry of Health guidelines, they are murderers. They are endangering us all” (Ishay Coen, 29 March 2020); “Zero tolerance for residents who violate the guidelines. We will not compromise everyone’s life” (Yossi Elituv, 14 July 2020). Indeed, this criticism on Twitter by ultra-Orthodox journalists should be viewed in the larger Israeli context. During the pandemic, the mainstream Israeli media regularly reported incidents of mass violations of health guidelines in ultra-Orthodox communities, especially Hasidic communities (Shomron, in press). While



Fig. 5 Here is a picture that excites me: under a global lockdown and in the most difficult conditions— the benefactor Rabbi Ephraim Stern from “Oneg Shabbat and Yom Tov” does not forget the poor. Under the close supervision of Ministry of Health representatives, this organization distributes huge packages of meat, wine, eggs and vegetables, to tens of thousands of families, with a total value of millions of shekels. (Arya Erlich, 1 April 2020)



Fig. 6 Amazing family: this is a record! An entire ultra-Orthodox family!!! Volunteering at MDA [local Red Cross] going from city to city to test people for Coronavirus, and they are the guilty ones? Shame on the country and the media that show only one side of the picture. (Ariel Elharar, shares Shimi Abramczyk, 6 April 2020)

these incidents could threaten the safety of both ultra-Orthodox members and the general Israeli population, and the following mediated reporting could lead to awareness and resolutions, this reporting could also be seen by ultra-Orthodox members

as a xenophobic attack on their communities by the Jewish secular majority. Furthermore, the latter could be seen as the underlying motivation for the utilization of Twitter by ultra-Orthodox journalists during the pandemic.

Criticizing the Secular Population for Not Adhering to Health Guidelines

The ultra-Orthodox journalists regularly criticized the secular public for not adhering to the health guidelines. This was done in two contexts. The first context expressed the fear that COVID-19 would spread throughout the country affecting everyone. However, the main context for this criticism was to mitigate the accusations and blame toward the ultra-Orthodox community that they were not adhering to the regulations. This in effect could lead to easing special restrictions that were put solely on the ultra-Orthodox. For instance: “Disgrace. In my city they closed all the synagogues and they put us all in lockdown and we prayed outside in the yards, so that thousands [of secular] could have fun at the beaches and parks” (Yossi Elituv, 21 March 2020). Indeed, the ultra-Orthodox journalists expressed that a double standard was being imposed on their community relative to the secular population. For instance:

The next time the state thinks of imposing a double standard and opening the beaches, gyms, beauty salons, and bars—it should take into account Jewish beliefs. The full closure of Lag B’Omer in Meron was incorrect. There was room for a solution that would balance maintaining public health with a centuries-old tradition. (Arye Erlich, 12 May 2020)

Thus, the journalists tweeted many pictures and videos of mass gatherings of secular people not adhering to Health Ministry guidelines. These visual images were usually accompanied by the ultra-Orthodox journalists’ sarcastic comments such as “those ultra-Orthodox” above a picture of crowded secular beachgoers, and referring to a secular political demonstration, a journalist tweeted: “I especially liked the adherence to the rules of the Ministry of Health, the understanding that two meters apart protects lives, that people should be social distancing, in contrast to those primitive ultra-Orthodox. Oops...” (Avraham Grinzwieg, 23 March 2020).

Criticizing the Government, Municipalities, and Law Enforcement

The ultra-Orthodox journalists utilized Twitter to criticize acts of government, municipalities, and law enforcement when they thought these endangered their community. This included a large array of topics, including quarantine policies, testing levels, the collapse of social services, unemployment, and misinformation. Moreover, this also included criticism of police officers, for example: “the police officer who authorized the mass funeral in Bnei Brak last night must be fired this morning. Total craziness” (Yossi Elituv, 29 March 2020) and

Behind the lockdown in Betar is Sara, a mother of seven who earns 4,000 NIS working in Jerusalem. She is the sole breadwinner after her husband died from Coronavirus. This morning tough police officers threw her off the bus and she

had to walk the whole way home hurting and crying. Like her, there were hundreds this morning. Shame on you. (Arya Erlich, 9 July 2020)

This type of criticism on Twitter serves a vital role in advocating the security of the community as it represents independent thinking in managing the pandemic risks. Indeed, the ultra-Orthodox journalists did not consider "authority" to equal "being right" and called out the authorities when they perceived them as failing to uphold the health guidelines and keep their community safe and secure.

Calling Out Acts of Hatred and Bigotry That Have Been Directed toward Ultra-Orthodox Jews

The ultra-Orthodox journalists often relied on the Twitter platform to call out hatred and bigotry that was directed toward their community. Their tweets referred to specific incidents as well as to the general atmosphere in the country in which the ultra-Orthodox community was usually blamed for the spread of the virus. For example: "They incite, slander and defame the ultra-Orthodox even though most of them adhere to the guidelines" (Israel Cohen, 30 March 2020); "every clown on television is savagely defaming the ultra-Orthodox" (Yossi Elituv, 2 April 2020); "A Hasidic man was fined for wearing his mask wrong, and in protest, he removed his religious attire. This feeling is common in the ultra-Orthodox community, that without religious attire, the probability of a fine goes down" (Ariel Elharar, 7 July 2020). Often, the ultra-Orthodox journalists framed this hatred as antisemitic and associated it with historical antisemitism, regularly referencing the Holocaust. For example: "The work has begun constructing the Ghetto fence around Bnei Brak" (Betzael Kahn, 6 April 2020); "The television item of Dana Weiss was simply anti-Semitic" (Avraham Grinzwieg, 19 March 2020); "There is a problem, we must stop infections, but the dangerous approach that [Mayor] Shama is leading is semi anti-Semitic" (Arye Erlich, 6 April 2020); "When they discuss the ultra-Orthodox dead, news editors in Israel will approve Nazi Germany comments" (Ishay Coen, 30 March 2020) (Fig. 7).

If by the ultra-Orthodox journalists calling out this hatred and bigotry on the Twitter platform could result in the improvement of the ultra-Orthodox community's security and raise public awareness of these sentiments, then perhaps the culprits would be shamed and pressured to desist.

Discussion

This study set out to understand how ultra-Orthodox journalists utilized the Twitter platform during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic in Israel. The study reveals that ultra-Orthodox journalists habitually utilized Twitter to advocate the security of their community. This was done through six unique strategies: (1) explaining the unique challenges endangering ultra-Orthodox Jews during COVID-19, (2) dispelling COVID-19 accusations directed against ultra-Orthodox Jews, (3) encouraging social distancing and health guidelines, (4) highlighting the social contributions of ultra-Orthodox Jews to the general public during the pandemic, (5)



Fig. 7 Does somebody have a cure against this shocking anti-Semitism? Hadn't we had enough of the Nazi Propaganda 80 years ago? Sickening [caricature from Haaretz newspaper] (Betzael Kahn, 4 August 2020)

criticizing wrongdoers who violated the health guidelines, and (6) calling out acts of hatred and bigotry that have been directed toward ultra-Orthodox Jews.

The utilization of Twitter for the advocacy of security that would be important during regular times would be of vital necessity during a health emergency such as the COVID-19 pandemic, as the ultra-Orthodox community has suffered elevated risks and loss, as previously discussed. Moreover, this advocacy of security represents the most important capability journalists can realize through the media as it pertains to the sanctity of life itself and a dignified existence (Jacobson 2016; Nussbaum 2011; Shomron 2021; Shomron and Tirosh 2020). Capabilities refer to what each person can do or be in life and serve as a measurement of rights and liberties in society (Sen 1993, 2005). Indeed, it is advantageous to interpret the findings of this study through the capabilities approach. This approach, which critiques John Rawls's theory of justice (Rawls 1971), focuses on the fair distribution of opportunities in society as a more accurate method for measuring justice than by what people can achieve relative to ownership over primary goods (Nussbaum 2011). The media, both traditional and contemporary, have been defined by scholars as a vital social resource that should therefore be distributed fairly, as it encompasses important capabilities (Couldry 2019; Garnham 1997; Hesmondhalgh 2017; Jacobson 2016; Kaushik and Lopez-Calva 2011; Schejter and Tirosh 2016; Shomron and David, 2022; Shomron and Schejter, 2021). These capabilities include: to be secure, identification and imitation, identity and belonging, to be informed, voicing, pleasurable entertainment, and civil participation (Shomron and Schejter 2021). The successful

realization of the capability "to be secure" by ultra-Orthodox journalists on Twitter would reflect the fair distribution of the social media resource in this regard, possibly contributing to the well-being of members of the ultra-Orthodox community. Moreover, this utilization reveals the vital role ultra-Orthodox journalists and social media, such as Twitter, could play in the realization of capabilities and well-being.

Additionally, the six aforementioned categories potentially serve two distinct aspects regarding the capability "to be secure": first, contributing to the security of individuals from both the majority group and the ultra-Orthodox community by raising awareness of transgressions regarding adherence to health guidelines and revealing the unique challenges and vulnerabilities in the community regarding the adherence, thus encouraging appropriate solutions. Second, protecting the ultra-Orthodox community from social stigma and negative accusations directed toward them by the majority group. While security can refer to a variety of angles, the advocacy of security found in this study most likely represents the unique context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Further research should examine whether and how the advocacy of security takes place in other fields beyond that of the pandemic.

To understand the community's special need for protection, we point to the structural sociological makeup of Israeli society. While the ultra-Orthodox community is mostly autonomous from state policies and sociocultural interferences, it is also an impoverished group that is estranged from the general society and is often ostracized and stigmatized by the general society (Shelef 2010; Zaban 2016). These attitudes, which are often mirrored in the general Israeli media, habitually frame the ultra-Orthodox as a threat to the general public as well as stereotypically portray individuals from the community in a negative way (Shoham 2012). Concurringly, this need for protection would be elevated during the COVID-19 pandemic as the ultra-Orthodox community both suffered higher levels of morbidity and mortality (Birenbaum-Carmeli and Chassida 2021; Muhsen et al. 2021; Saban et al. 2021), and was blamed for the spread of the disease (Gilman 2021; Shomron, in press).

The advocating for the security of their community contributes to a new understanding of ultra-Orthodox journalists' professional ethos. They serve not only as social agents who preserve community values (Golan and Mishol-Shauli 2018; Wasserman and Gabel 2019), but also as protectors of their community from outside threats to life, rights, and a dignified existence. Understanding how ultra-Orthodox journalists perceive their role is vital, as their perceptions highly influence their journalistic practices and the final media product (Hermida and Mellado 2020). This then supports the classic ideal of public service in journalism, in which journalists aspire to be a "representative watchdog of the status quo in the name of people who 'vote with their wallets' for their services" (Deuze 2005, 447). However, this study suggests that the role of advocates and protectors is unique to ultra-Orthodox journalists relative to other journalists as their advocacy occurs outside their community and away from their audiences. It is possible that the ultra-Orthodox audience consuming these journalists' content in the centralized traditional sectoral media is not even aware of these happenings on the Twitter platform. Indeed, this campaigning might be taking place in the secular world away from their community, as the ultra-Orthodox audience operates outside their community only for predefined "worthy" goals that cannot be achieved in the community (Cohen 2017). For example,

ultra-Orthodox Facebook users reported limited use that focused solely on work-related objectives (Lev-On and Lissitsa 2018). Thus, this study posits that ultra-Orthodox journalists might have a double professional ethos: (a) the preservation of community values and (b) advocacy on behalf of and protection of their community when interacting with the secular world. Further research should include interviews with ultra-Orthodox journalists to understand their motivation and beliefs regarding their professional ethos and their use of the Twitter platform.

Moreover, this study empirically presents for the first time how journalists can play a crucial role in enabling capabilities, especially the capability “to be secure.” Indeed, Sen (2009) considered media a vital pillar for the realization of capabilities, due to its “*protective function* in giving voice to the neglected and the disadvantaged, which can greatly contribute to human security” as well as its contribution to “disseminating knowledge and allowing critical scrutiny” (Sen 2009, 336). However, while capability theorists and media scholars have pointed to the media’s potential role in enabling capabilities (e.g., Couldry 2019; Garnham 1997; Hesmondhalgh 2017; Jacobson 2016; Kaushik and Lopez-Calva 2011; Schejter and Tirosh 2016; Sen 2009; Shomron and David 2022; Shomron and Schejter 2021), this study is the first to offer an empirical presentation of capability enablement by journalists. Thus, the utilization of the capabilities approach in this study greatly contributes to existing journalism theories, as it enriches the understanding of the vital role journalists carry in society, especially in times of dire need such as the COVID-19 global pandemic. Indeed, the capabilities approach should not be viewed as an alternative framework to existing journalism theories, but rather as an additional layer of interpretation, offering the perspectives of human rights and distributive justice to journalism practices. As such, the successful utilization of Twitter by ultra-Orthodox journalists can represent the fair distribution of the social media resource in society, as seen through the enablement of capabilities in general, and the capability “to be secure” in particular.

Equally important and in accordance with previous studies, this study suggests that social media can be more enabling of capabilities relative to traditional media (Schejter and Tirosh 2016; Shomron and David 2022; Shomron and Schejter 2021). While these studies suggested this was due to the technological characteristics and individualistic nature of contemporary media, this study suggests this to be the case owing to inter-social interactivity. That is, its inter-social interactivity manifests as ultra-Orthodox journalists might be acting on Twitter in an “ambassadorial” role, advocating for their community’s behalf with the secular majority group. Inter-social interactivity, which is enabled on Twitter and other social media, is not possible in sectoral media in the ultra-Orthodox community, as they cater solely to the community. Thus, building on Dogu’s (2020) research on connectedness and collaboration, this study points to a new type of connectedness and collaboration occurring between journalists and other actors in society in the utilization of Twitter. Indeed, it is probable that these phenomena have only been made possible owing to the existence of social media, thus pointing to a new accord between marginalized populations including religious communities and the majority group, made possible by the bridging characteristic of social media. However, as this study did not measure for effects, future research could

measure whether this potential bridging—as seen through the utilization of Twitter by ultra-Orthodox journalists—leads to its desired effect.

Furthermore, while this study presents six unique qualitative categories through which ultra-Orthodox journalists utilize Twitter to advocate the security of their community, future research should measure the prevalence of these categories and the advocacy of security through quantitative analysis. Furthermore, future research could measure how this prevalence differs between journalists from different ultra-Orthodox factions. Additionally, as other religious minority groups suffered incitement and elevated consequences during the pandemic (e.g., Mukherjee 2020), future research should examine how those communities reacted, revealing the commonalities and differences in the reactions, perhaps determining the more successful reactions in particular through social media. Lastly, while this study focuses primarily on ultra-Orthodox in Israel, further research should examine the use of social media by ultra-Orthodox journalists around the world, mostly in North America and Europe where large ultra-Orthodox communities reside.

The study includes different limitations: it focuses only on ultra-Orthodox Jews in Israel without examining those living abroad; it does not include a comparison with other communities; it focuses only on journalists and not on other social agents, including social media celebrities and private individuals; it does not distinguish between different ultra-Orthodox factions, possibly missing inner-group nuances between them; it focuses on a limited time period, possibly missing new developments with the progression of the pandemic; it includes a relatively low number of cases analyzed; and it focuses solely on Twitter, possibly missing other activities taking place on other social media platforms. These limitations could serve as a basis for future research on the topic. Indeed, the phenomenon of ambassadorial journalism should be examined on other media platforms and regarding other disadvantaged communities, as it can serve as an important social tool to better individuals' life situations, particularly in times of need.

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the professional ethos of ultra-Orthodox journalists' that includes their aspiration to protect their community. Furthermore, this study sheds light on the vital role Twitter can play in journalistic work through inter-social interactivity and the enablement of capabilities and particularly the capability "to be secure." Additionally, this study contributes to the sociology of Israeli society and particularly the inter-social interactivity made possible through digital media between the ultra-Orthodox community and the general Israeli society. These two groups, who are often spatially separated and socially confrontational toward each other, have found Twitter as a performative platform, a space in which to interact and promote the community. For the ultra-Orthodox, a platform to voice their needs and circumstances, and for the general population, a platform to hear the voice of the disadvantaged. Lastly, this study expands the understanding of the social media resource as it contributes to policymakers tasked with formulating its fair distribution in society in accordance with the capabilities approach and its objective of promoting well-being.

Appendix

See Table 1.

Table 1 Table of the 20 most popular ultra-Orthodox journalists on Twitter (last updated August 21st, 2020)

	Name	Medium	Total number of followers	Total number of tweets	Number of tweets during the study	Link to Twitter account
1	Yossi Elituv	Newspaper/ radio	50,400	12,700	1194	@yoelituv
2	Arye Erlich	Newspaper/ radio	36,700	19,100	2010	@AryeErlich
3	Israel Cohen	Radio	29,000	17,900	1762	@Israelcohen911
4	Moshe Weisberg	Online	26,500	13,100	2287	@moshe_nayes
5	Yaakov Rivlin	Newspaper/ radio	24,000	7850	930	@arivlin1
6	Avraham Grinzwieg	Online	21,900	10,600	1534	@avigrin10
7	Ari Kalman	Online	19,400	16,700	1482	@aronkalman1
8	Benny Rabinowitz	Radio	16,700	20,900	2251	@benirabin
9	Ishay Coen	Online	15,700	22,600	1861	@ishaycoen
10	Sari Rot	Online	14,900	8086	975	@sari_rot
11	Avi Mimran	Radio	13,500	1609	215	@avimimran
12	Shimon Breittkopf	Newspaper	12,700	5796	45	@Shimonyb
13	Itay Gadasi	Radio	11,500	8616	655	@itayg1
14	Shalhevet Hasdiel	Newspaper	9516	4846	241	@ShalhevetHasdie
15	Betzalel Kahn	Radio	9287	1487	153	@betzalel_kahn
16	Moshe Glassner	Radio	9127	2613	257	@moshe_glassner
17	Shimon Liberty	Newspaper	8168	25,000	1680	@shimonliberty
18	Ariel Elharar	Newspaper	7670	4349	1765	@ariel_elharar_
19	Avi Rabina	Online	7641	6869	1191	@AviRabina
20	Shlomo Kook	Newspaper	7562	3911	622	@shlomokook

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Dr. Baruch Shomron is a postdoctoral fellow at the Department of Communication at Johannes Gutenberg University, Mainz, Germany. His research focuses on communication rights, media capabilities, media representations, digital divide, and health communication, especially regarding marginalized populations.