



FRAMING GAZA: HOW MEDIA SHAPES INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES AND POLICIES

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Abstract

Media outlets, through different framing techniques, not only report on the Gaza conflict but also shape the narrative around it. The role of media in shaping international perspectives and policies on the Gaza conflict is significant and multifaceted. This influences public opinion, which in turn can affect international diplomatic stances and policy decisions (Hristiana Rizova and Mihaela Panayotova, 2021). The conflict, deeply rooted in historical, political, and cultural complexities, becomes a subject of diverse narratives and interpretations when presented through various media channels.

Key words: Media, Gaza, Conflict, Policies, Diplomatic

Introduction

The evolution of digital media has further complicated this landscape, offering both opportunities for broader perspectives and challenges in ensuring accurate and unbiased reporting. Understanding the power of media is crucial for an informed view of the Gaza conflict and its implications on the global stage. Media reports have a direct and indirect effect on diplomatic policies and international relationships. In crafting foreign policies, governments often take into account public opinion, which is significantly influenced by media-driven narratives (Simon J. Hulme 1996),

Media framing is a critical concept in understanding how news and information are presented to the public and how this presentation can significantly shape public opinion (Olasunkanmi Arowolo, 2021). Framing refers to the process by which media outlets choose to present a particular aspect of a story, thereby influencing how audiences interpret and understand it. This process plays a pivotal role in shaping public opinion, as it not only relays facts but also guides the interpretation and emotional response to those facts.

Media framing involves the selection and emphasis of specific angles or aspects of a complex issue, choosing which details to include or exclude, presenting the story from a particular viewpoint in favor of a particular group or individual, the choice of words and phrases that carry certain connotations, how historical or social context is provided or omitted, using visuals and sound bites, images, and video footage that support and reinforce the chosen angle.



Media framing doesn't just report the news; it shapes the audience's understanding by highlighting certain elements over others. According to media and mass communication, "Agenda-setting theory" is the ability of the news media to influence the importance placed on the topics of the public agenda, and this can be achieved by highlighting certain issues, events, or narratives over others, it suggests that the media controls what topics people think about, whether they are newspapers, television channels, or online platforms, choose what news to present and what to not, when and where (Ilona Grzywińska, Jonathan Borden, 2012). The issues that the media covers more frequently and more prominently become more active in the public mind, if a news channel repeatedly broadcasts crime stories, viewers will start feeling insecure and anxious. Because of repeated exposure to a certain topic public starts to perceive the issue as a matter of importance, thus public's perception of what is important is often reflected in the general public agenda. People tend to discuss, debate, and require action on issues that they are most frequently exposed to in and around them through the media.

If a media outlet consistently portrays a political leader in a negative context, highlighting their failures or controversies, it sets a specific frame for the audience. Priming is a concept in media effects research that refers to the way media content prepares audiences to interpret subsequent information in a specific manner, the concept operates on the psychological principle that exposure to a subject, influences the response, it begins with the audience's initial exposure to media content of any type like a news reports, editorials, TV shows, social media posts, or any form of media communication (Ewoldsen, Et. Al.) Repetitive framing leads to the creation of mental associations in the minds of the audience, once these associations are established, they become the lens through which the audience views and interprets subsequent information about that subject, when new information is presented about the primed subject, the audience processes this information based on the pre-established frame, in some instances, affects attention to certain selective aspects of new information and easier retrieval of memories that are consistent with the primed frame (Shehata, Et. Al.).

Media framing involves selecting certain aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a communicating text, thereby influencing how audiences interpret and understand the issue. When a story is framed, the media constructs a specific context and narrative around the issue. This involves the use of particular language, imagery, emphasis, and the inclusion or exclusion of certain facts or viewpoints. The frame that the media uses acts as a lens through which the audience views the issue. It shapes their understanding, attitudes, and perceptions by highlighting specific angles and interpretations (D. A. Scheufele, S. Iyengar, 2014). Using different frame can lead to different results, a security-framed immigration story may lead to public support for stricter immigration laws, while a human rights-framed story may increase public advocacy for more open and compassionate immigration policies.

Historical Background of the Palestine and Israel Conflict

Following World War I, the British took control of the area known as Palestine, previously part of the Ottoman Empire. This period saw increased immigration of Jews to the area, driven by the Zionist movement, which sought to establish a Jewish homeland (Zena Al Tahhan, 2018).



During the foundational events of the Nakba in 1948, dozens of massacres targeting Arabs were conducted and about 400 Arab-majority towns and villages were depopulated with many of these being either completely destroyed or repopulated by Jewish residents and given new Hebrew names. Approximately 750,000 Palestinian Arabs (about half of Palestine's Arab population) were forced out of their homes by Zionist militias (IMEU Factsheet).

During the War of 1967, Israel captured the Gaza Strip from Egypt, along with the West Bank from Jordan and the Golan Heights from Syria. This significantly altered the region's geopolitical landscape and led to the Israeli occupation of these territories (Zachary Laub, 2017).

1993-1994 - Oslo Accords: The Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in the 1990s created the Palestinian Authority and established areas of Palestinian self-rule, but did not resolve any fundamental issue (Shamir Hassan, 2011).

In 2006, Hamas, an Islamist political and militant group, won Palestinian legislative elections and later took control of Gaza. The region has since seen several escalations of conflict, including major military confrontations in 2008-2009, 2012, 2014, 2021 and more recently on 7th October 2023 (Reuter).

Media Coverage of the Gaza Conflict

The observation by Patrick Gathara, a Senior Editor for Inclusive Storytelling at The New Humanitarian, highlights significant concerns about the biases in Western media's coverage of the conflict in Gaza. Gathara's commentary points out the apparent disparity in how Palestinian and Israeli lives and actions are portrayed in the media, suggesting a deep-rooted cultural perception in the West that values these lives differently.

He notes that many Western media outlets tend to emphasize the immorality of harming Israeli civilians, while comparatively downplaying or underreporting the harshness of the Israeli military's actions against Palestinian civilians, such as the widespread bombing of the Gaza Strip. This selective emphasis can significantly shape public opinion and understanding of the conflict.

Gathara points out the disparity in how the media covers statements by Israeli officials compared to those by Palestinian groups or their representatives. For example, the media frequently covers speeches by Israeli ministers and high-ranking officials, with some even using dehumanizing language toward Palestinians. Meanwhile, the designation of Hamas as a terrorist organization by Western governments is regularly highlighted, overshadowing the fact that various human rights groups and the United Nations have criticized Israel's policies towards Palestinians, with some describing them as constituting an apartheid regime.

Media cover the speeches of Israeli ministers, high-ranking officials, and military commanders labeling them as “human animals” (Israeli Defense Minister, Yoav Gallant). Audiences are constantly reminded that Hamas has been designated a terrorist organization by Western governments, but not that human rights groups and the UN have described Israel as an apartheid regime (Amnesty International).

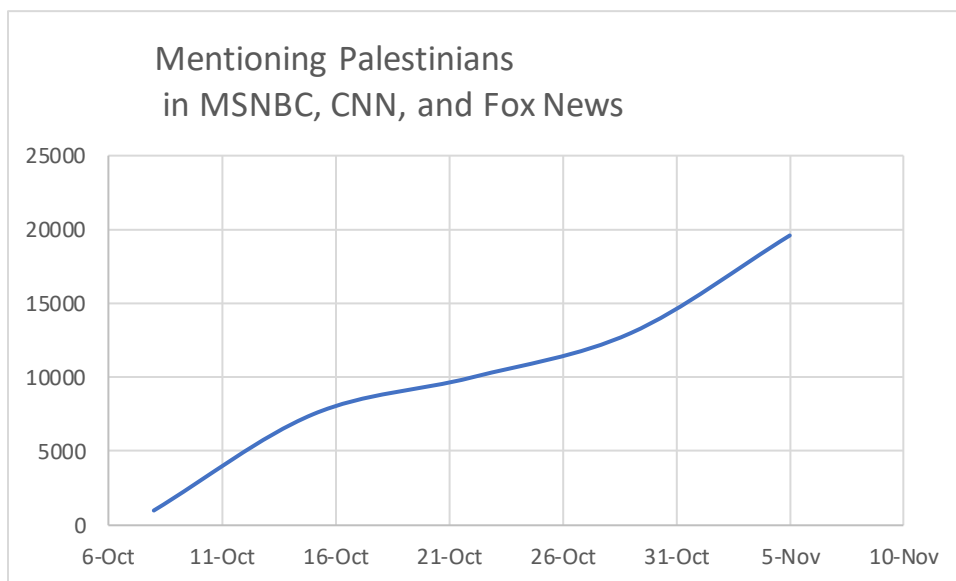
This trend in media coverage suggests a strong alignment with the Israeli narrative. Rizwana Hamid, The Centre for Media Monitoring, mentions that journalists from leading Western news outlets have even embedded themselves with the Israeli army for reporting, often

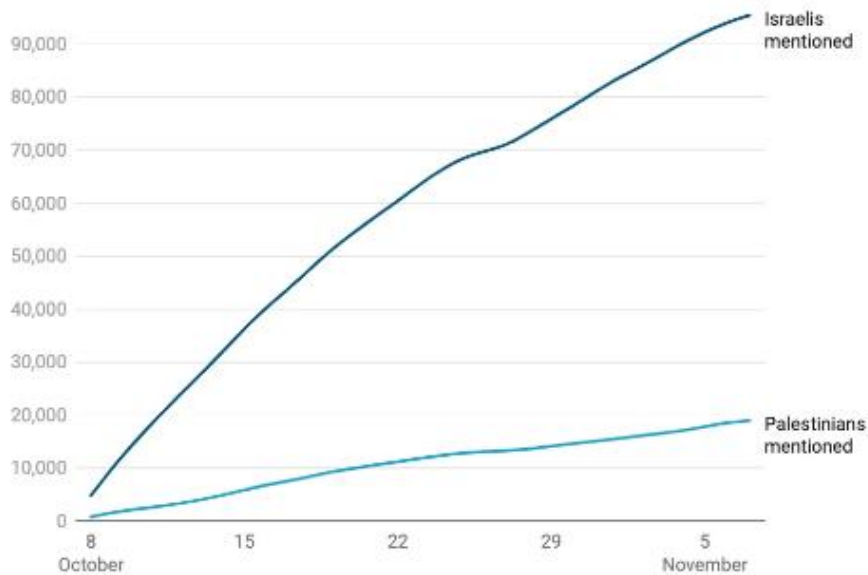


reflecting the Israeli viewpoint and adhering to military censorship and the official Israeli stance. This practice can further skew the narrative presented to the public.

Hamid's points out the use of language in media coverage and how it can dehumanize the conflict. In his analysis, he notes the significantly higher frequency of the word "massacred" used in reference to Israeli casualties compared to the phrase "left to die" for Palestinian casualties. This choice of language in reporting can have profound implications on public perception, often creating an unbalanced view that favors one side of the conflict over the other. In a viral video, a protester accuses CNN's Clarissa Ward of biased reporting in her coverage at the Rafah border crossing. A quantitative analysis of the first month of conflict, reveals how the dehumanization of the Gaza conflict is portrayed in US Cable News. The notion "Massacred" vs "Left to Die" word "massacred" was used for Israelis killed by Palestinians over 90,000 times against the word "left to die" for Palestinians less the 20,000 times.

	8-Oct	15-Oct	22-Oct	29-Oct	5-Nov
Mentioning Israelis	4000	32000	61000	78000	97000
Mentioning Palestinians	1000	7500	10000	13000	19600





The statement that over 25,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza and that no mainstream Western media outlet has labeled these deaths as a “massacre” reflects significant concerns about media framing and language usage in conflict reporting. The term "massacre" is generally understood, as per the Oxford Dictionary, to refer to the indiscriminate mass killing of people. The choice of media outlets not to use this term in the context of the high number of Palestinian casualties can be seen as indicative of the framing biases in conflict coverage.



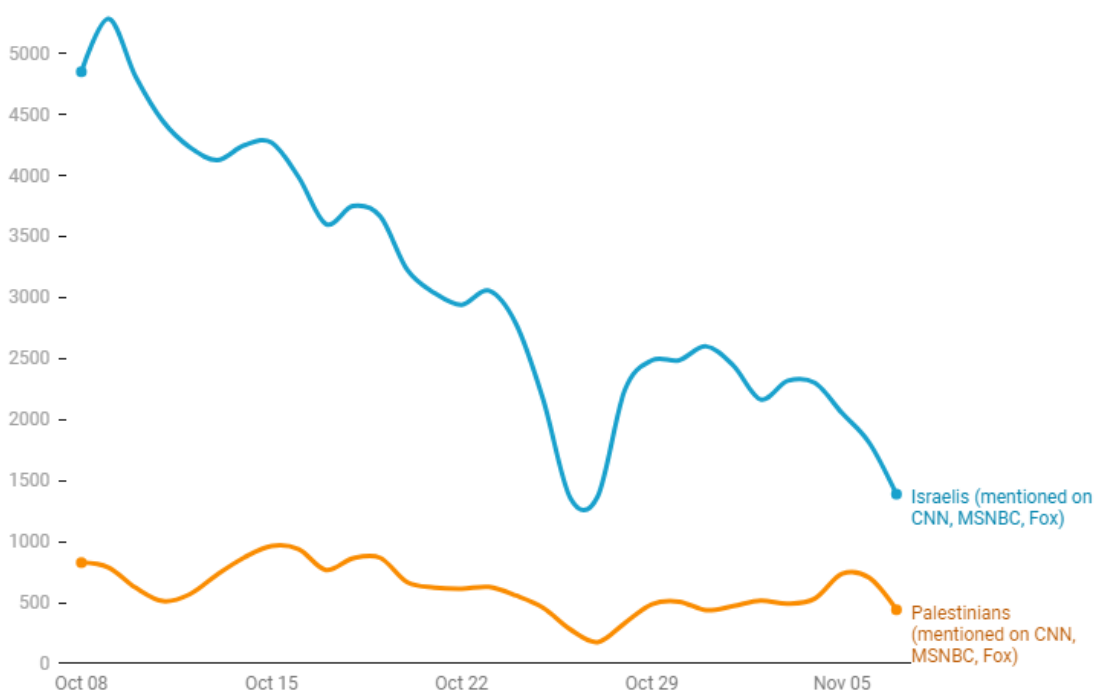
This disparity in terminology usage highlights a broader issue in media reporting, where the language used to describe similar events can vary significantly based on the parties involved. The use of emotive and impactful language often depends on cultural, political, and editorial perspectives, which can influence public perception and understanding of a conflict. The decision not to use certain terms for specific events or casualties can contribute to a narrative that implicitly values some lives and experiences over others.

Research found that the Israel Defense Force spokesperson, Peter Lerner was broadcast live on the three channels a total of 19 out of the 30 days between October 7th - November 7th.

CNN	26
Fox	15
MSNBC	3

Throughout these interviews, Lerner frequently asserts that various structures, including schools, universities, places of worship, and civilian residences, are legitimate targets. However, it's notable that during these discussions, no interviewer ever requests evidence to support these claims. Additionally, there appears to be a lack of balance in the mainstream media's coverage of the conflict. This imbalance is evident in the selection of individuals who are provided a platform to express their views. There seems to be a preference for Israeli spokespersons or commentators, who often present their narratives unchallenged, leading to potential inconsistencies in the media portrayal of the conflict.

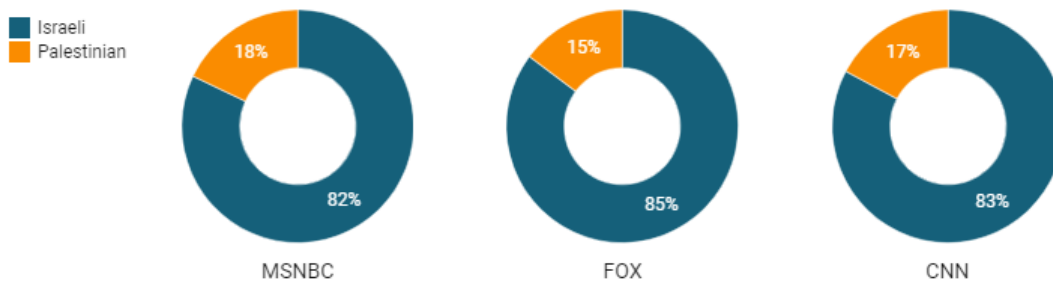
Israelis are mentioned more than Palestinians every day on CNN, MSNBC, and FOX. This remained the case even as Palestinian deaths began to far outpace Israeli deaths.





The graph above captures every 30-second segment on any of these news channels in which the terms “Israeli” or “Palestinian” or any adjacent terms were mentioned between October 7 and November 7.

MSNBC, CNN, and Fox News coverage show that 230 Israeli hostages got more coverage than the more than 25,000+ Palestinians killed by Israel.



Between October 7th and 24th, we found that Palestinian children across Fox News, MSNBC, and CNN were mentioned 699 times, while Israeli children were mentioned 1,221 times. Even as the death toll of Palestinian children exceeded the total death toll of all Israelis killed in the Hamas attack, the number of on-air mentions of Palestinian children remained lower on average than on-air mentions of Israeli children.

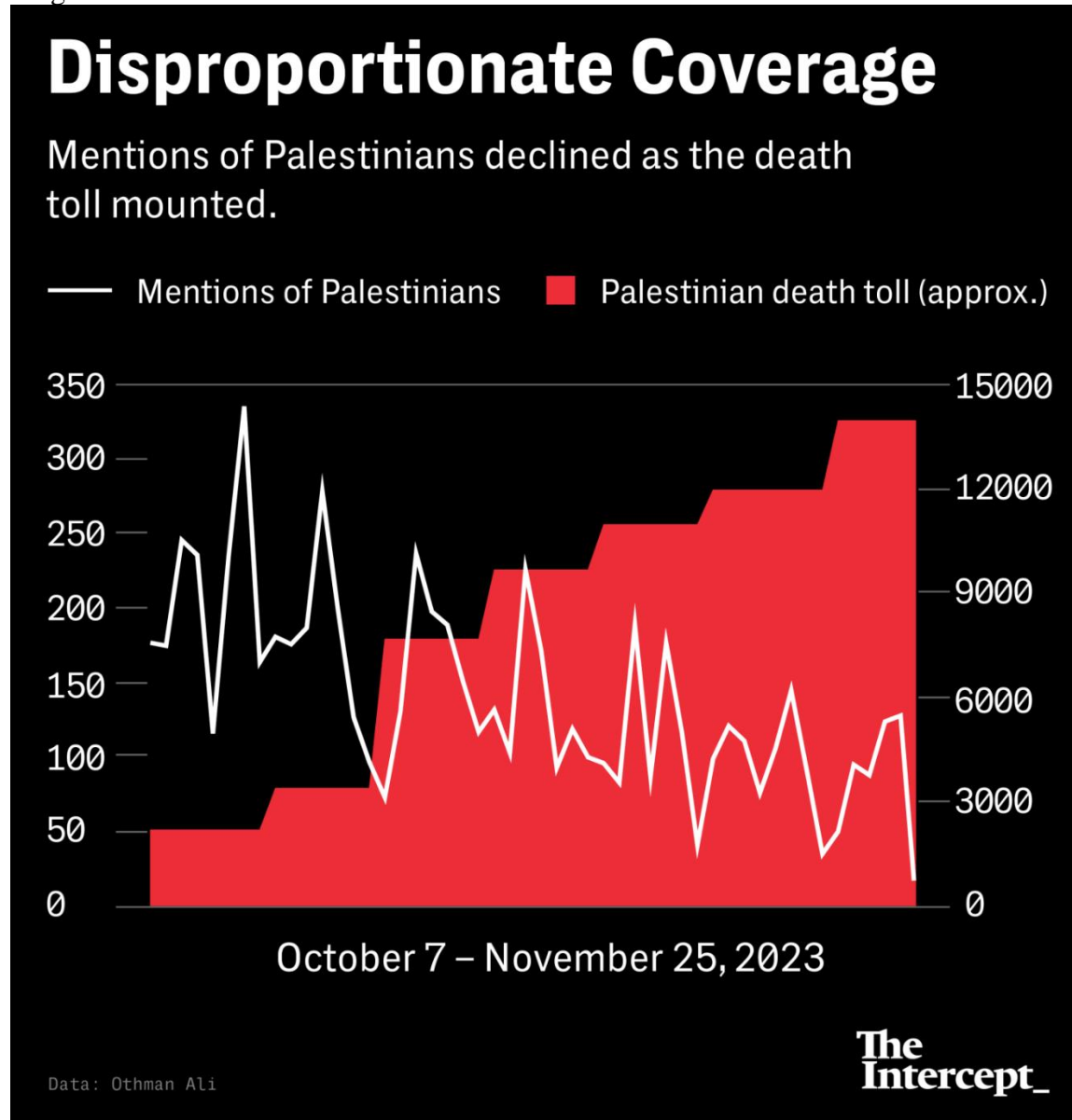
Major U.S. newspapers disproportionately emphasized Israeli deaths in the conflict; used emotive language to describe the killings of Israelis, but not Palestinians; and offered lopsided coverage of antisemitic acts in the U.S., while largely ignoring anti-Muslim racism in the wake of October 7. Pro-Palestinian activists have accused major publications of pro-Israel bias, with the New York Times

In a study conducted by world prestigious media watchdog "Intercept" between October 7th and 24th, it was observed that mainstream U.S. media outlets, including Fox News, MSNBC, and CNN, mentioned Palestinian children 699 times, whereas Israeli children were mentioned 1,221 times. This disparity in coverage is notable, especially considering that the death toll of Palestinian children surpassed the total number of Israelis killed in the Hamas attacks during this period. Despite this, the frequency of on-air mentions of Palestinian children was consistently lower than that of Israeli children. Major U.S. newspapers exhibited a disproportionate emphasis on Israeli casualties in their conflict coverage. They tended to use more emotive language when reporting on Israeli deaths compared to Palestinian deaths. Furthermore, these newspapers provided asymmetrical coverage of antisemitic incidents in the U.S., while largely overlooking anti-Muslim racism, especially following the events of October 7. This discrepancy in reporting has led pro-Palestinian activists to accuse major media outlets, including the New York Times, of displaying a pro-Israel bias in their coverage of the conflict.

The Intercept collected more than 1,000 articles from the New York Times, the Washington Post, and the Los Angeles Times about Israel’s war on Gaza and tallied up the usages of certain key terms and the context in which they were used. The tallies reveal a gross imbalance in the way



Israelis and pro-Israel figures are covered versus Palestinians and pro-Palestinian voices — with usages that favor Israeli narratives over Palestinian ones.



Highly emotive terms for the killing of civilians like “slaughter,” “massacre,” and “horrific” were reserved almost exclusively for Israelis who were killed by Palestinians, rather than the other way around. The term “slaughter” was used by editors and reporters to describe the killing of Israelis versus Palestinians 60 to 1, and “massacre” was used to describe the killing of Israelis versus Palestinians 125 to 2. “Horrific” was used to describe the killing of Israelis versus Palestinians 36 to 4.



Despite Israel's war on Gaza being perhaps the deadliest war for children, only two headlines out of over 1,100 news articles in the study mention the word "children" related to Gazan children. The New York Times referred in one case to "Israeli women and children" being exchanged for "Palestinian women and minors." Killings described using emotive language like "massacre," "slaughter," or "horrific." Hamas's killings of Israeli civilians are consistently portrayed as part of the group's strategy, whereas Palestinian civilian killings are covered almost as if they were a series of one-off mistakes, made thousands of times (The Intercept).



The New York Times



SUBSCRIBE FOR \$1/WEEK

Forced expulsions

~~Evictions~~ in Jerusalem Become Focus of ~~Israeli-Palestinian~~ ~~Conflict~~ Struggle

Ethnically cleanse Palestinians

The effort to ~~evict six Arab families from a~~
~~their homes~~
~~contested neighborhood~~ has drawn attention
to the Israeli ~~effort~~ to remove Palestinians from
parts of East Jerusalem and led to protests.

Crime

Perception Operation

An Al Jazeera contributor suggests that the perception of Palestinians in Western societies is heavily influenced by prevailing narratives of colonialism, white supremacy, and Islamophobia. These ideologies, it is argued, shape the lens through which states, institutions, individuals, and the media in the West view global events. This perspective implies a systemic bias against recognizing Palestinian humanity in these spheres (Patrick Gathara, 2023). There is a contention



that mainstream Western media is significantly influenced, if not controlled, by pro-Israeli entities, including the Israeli government and The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), along with commercial interests. Such control, the argument goes, extends to shaping narratives in the media to align with pro-Israeli perspectives.

Social media, however, is highlighted as a contrasting platform where different narratives can emerge. In past Israel-Palestine conflicts, it is claimed that efforts were made to dominate social media discourse, including the blocking of accounts and discussions critical of Israel. Despite these attempts, the recent conflict saw a delay in such control measures. This delay, combined with the diverse commercial interests of various social media applications, allowed for a broader range of perspectives and narratives to be shared and heard. This shift indicates a potential change in how the Israel-Palestine conflict is discussed and understood in the digital age.

The dissemination of misinformation and disinformation regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict is not a recent development; it's a longstanding issue. However, the advent and growing influence of social media has significantly transformed how information about this conflict is shared and perceived. Platforms like TikTok and Instagram, in particular, have emerged as major players in this regard. TikTok, with its vast and diverse user base, has become a crucial platform for sharing content related to the conflict, as the platform's algorithm, designed to promote engaging content, can involuntarily amplify information of any kind if such content is engaging to viewers.

This phenomenon underscores the complex role of social media in shaping public understanding of geopolitical conflicts. While these platforms offer unprecedented opportunities for sharing personal narratives and on-the-ground perspectives, they also pose significant risks of spreading unverified or false information, which can influence public opinion and potentially impact the course of such conflicts.

Israel and its allies tried to control the public discourse around social media, they tried every option including censoring, suppression pressuring, and blocking. The Israeli Defense Force has a profile on TikTok, which had 1.7 million followers in 2021 (Luckhurst, Toby, 2021) Hamas has been barred from most social media sites and is unable to post on Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok; however, some content from the group has been posted on other sites such as Telegram, where an account reportedly aligned to Hamas would post photos and videos in support of Hamas or documenting their actions (Thompson, Stuart A.; Isaac, Mike 2023).

According to Humanz, a tech company founded by a former Israeli intelligence officer, in the first four days of the conflict, #Palestine has some 27.8 billion views, and the hashtag #Israel has 23 billion on TikTok (Lorenz, Taylor, 2023), in later analysis showed that during October 2023 there were 7.39 billion posts with pro-Israeli tags posted to Instagram and TikTok, while there were 109.61 billion posts with pro-Palestinian tags published on the sites in the same time (Kabir 2023). The documentation and spreading of information about the conflict is not a new phenomenon with multiple clips showing the continued conflict going viral since the app was first released (Luckhurst, Toby, 2021).

Hamas has posted shocking videos about the initial attack, capturing hostages and taking kidnapped persons back to Gaza. (Levine, Alexandra S, 2023) Some posts that have been shared of the attacks against Israel and its citizens were reportedly spread through a paid partnership with



the Israeli Foreign Affairs Ministry, and are a part of the Israeli government's sweeping social media campaign to muster support for its military actions, over seven days, Israel's Foreign Affairs Ministry had run about 30 ads that were seen over 4 million times on X (Martin, Liv; Goujard, Clothilde; Fuchs, Hailey, 2023). The Israeli prosecutor's office sent over 8,000 removal requests to Meta and TikTok for content related to the war, resulting in 94% of the requests being removed. (Brewster, Thomas, 2023)

Social media has played a transformative role in shaping public perception of the conflict between Israel and Hamas. This impact is particularly pronounced among younger audiences, who increasingly rely on social media platforms for their news and information.

In recent years, there has been a noticeable shift in how the younger generation views Israel and the situation of Palestinian civilians, largely influenced by the narratives and images circulated on social media. This shift is significant because social media not only provides a platform for diverse voices and perspectives but also shapes the way conflicts are understood and discussed by a global audience.

Social media's real-time, unfiltered nature allows for the immediate sharing of personal stories and on-the-ground experiences, which can offer a more nuanced and humanized view of the conflict. This has contributed to changing perceptions, especially among young people, about the complexities and human impact of the Israel-Hamas conflict.

Conclusion

The large-scale demonstrations and public gatherings in support of Palestine indeed suggest that the influence of social media platforms and certain Western media organizations might not be as pervasive or persuasive as previously believed, particularly in the context of shaping public opinion about the Israel-Palestine conflict.

These mass mobilizations indicate a significant level of awareness and concern among the public, challenging the notion that the narratives presented by mainstream media and social media are entirely shaping public perceptions. It demonstrates that despite the potential for psychological influence through media, people are capable of forming independent opinions and taking action based on their beliefs and understandings of the situation.



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