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Social media as a primary source of information: Exploring its role in disseminating the current situation in Palestine

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Abstract

The proliferation of social media has changed the global information paradigm, enabling immediate and direct access to breaking news. This research examines the role of social media as a primary source of information, focusing on the context of the conflict in Palestine. Through a qualitative desk research approach, it explores how social media contributes to disseminating current events in Palestine. The analysis involved a review of literature related to social media development, conflict information dynamics, and its impact on public opinion. The results show that social media has become an essential tool in accelerating and expanding the reach of information about the situation in Palestine. Individual actions, such as sharing news or personal views, can trigger significant public responses and shape narratives that influence global perceptions. Moreover, the active engagement of social media users in relaying actual information plays a key role in shaping opinions and attitudes toward the conflict. This research provides insight into the complex dynamics of social media as a key source of information, illustrating how information is disseminated and understood in the context of the Palestinian conflict. The implications of this research can contribute to further understanding social media's role in shaping public opinion and influencing the global narrative on sensitive issues such as the Palestinian conflict.

Keywords: social media, main source of information, Palestine, conflict, public opinion

1. Introduction

The conflict between Israel and Palestine has spanned more than a century, encompassing a series of events and confrontations involving various parties. Initially, in 1917, the British Foreign Secretary's Balfour Declaration promised the establishment of "a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine." The British Mandate then set the stage for mass migration of Jews to the region. During this period, conflict escalated as Palestinians resisted migration and demographic change. The Arab Revolts of 1936 to 1939 reflected growing tensions, followed by the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 and the first Arab–Israeli war.

The Nakba (disaster) event in 1948 resulted in the expulsion and refugees of Palestine and the establishment of Israel. A series of subsequent events, including the Six Day War in 1967, the first Intifada in 1987, and the Oslo accords in 1993, formed the complex context of the conflict. The second intifada in 2000 involved increased tensions, a series of violent events, and the construction of the separation wall by Israel. The civil war between Fatah and Hamas as well as Israel's attacks on Gaza in 2008, 2012, 2014 and 2021 have further complicated the dynamics of the conflict. Over the decades, this conflict has also created significant humanitarian impacts, including the construction of illegal settlements, the blockade of the Gaza Strip, and damage to Palestinian infrastructure. The history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict reflects the complexity, trauma and ongoing challenges in the search for a peaceful solution in the region (CNBC, 2023).

Social media, as a product of information technology modernization, has also become a witness and participant in the narrative of the long Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In this era, where access to information has become more open and democratic, social media provides a platform for individuals to spread their own information and views. In the context of the conflict in Palestine, social media has become the main source of information that allows the latest conditions to be disseminated quickly and widely. When conflict broke out, especially in a series of Israeli attacks on Gaza, Palestinians and pro-Palestinian activists used social media to convey their narrative. Photos, videos and direct reports from the scene provide a means of

providing a more in-depth and personal picture of the impact of the conflict. On the other hand, the Israeli side also uses social media to provide their explanations and views, creating a complex information dynamic (Gallo & Marzano, 2009).

The role of social media in spreading the latest conditions in Palestine also involves the active participation of the global community. Support campaigns, solidarity hashtags and calls for action spread across platforms such as Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. In this way, social media is not only a local information channel, but also a virtual bridge that connects individuals and groups around the world in dialogue and solidarity movements. However, the complexity lies in the nature of social media which does not always provide objective and verified information (Efendi, Taufiqurrohman, Supriadi, & Kuswananda, 2023). Hoaxes, propaganda and tendentious narratives can also develop in this environment. Therefore, the role of social media in disseminating information in Palestine creates new challenges in understanding the conflict, as each party can shape the narrative according to their own perspective.

In exploring the role of social media as a primary source of information, it is important to explore its impact on global perceptions, public opinion, and responses to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. With a deeper understanding of how social media plays a role in shaping conflict narratives, society, including researchers themselves, can explore the potential to build better understanding, reduce polarization, and encourage constructive dialogue to achieve peaceful solutions. It is important to note that social media is not only a means of conveying information, but also an arena where ideological and opinion confrontations take place. In the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, netizens from various parts of the world are involved in discussions that are often full of emotion and polarization. Conflicting opinions and views can quickly create a tense digital environment, reflecting the depth of divisions that also occur in the real world.

The ability of social media to spark mobilization and collective action is also integral to the dynamics of this conflict. Online campaigns to boycott or support a party can have a real impact on public opinion and the economy. This creates additional pressure on the parties involved in the conflict, showing that social media is not just a passive observer, but rather a player who plays a role in directing the flow of events (Oktaviani & Fatchiya, 2019). However, it should be noted that social media also has the potential to build communication bridges between opposing groups. Under ideal conditions, these platforms can be used as platforms for open dialogue, enabling the exchange of ideas and understanding. This shows that, while providing new challenges, social media also has potential as a tool to accelerate the process of constructive dialogue and diplomacy.

The aim of this research is to investigate the role of social media as a primary source of information in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. By exploring how social media influences the spread of current conditions in Palestine, this research aims to understand its impact on global perceptions, public opinion and responses to the conflict. In addition, this research wants to identify the complexity of information dynamics in the social media era, including its potential contribution in building dialogue or, conversely, increasing polarization and tension. Through a deeper understanding of the role of social media, the aim of this research is to provide valuable insights for designing more effective communication approaches in managing conflict and encouraging efforts towards peaceful solutions.

2. Method

This research will use a qualitative approach with a focus on literature study and social media content analysis. A qualitative approach was chosen because it provides broader space for an in-depth understanding of the complexity of interactions on social media and its impact on perceptions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The literature study will include an in-depth

review of relevant literature, including Agenda Setting theory, the Two-Step Flow Communication Model, and Public Dialogue Theory.

Social media content analysis will involve collecting and researching content related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. The choice of this platform is based on its popularity and influence in shaping public opinion. The data collected will include posts, comments, and various forms of interaction that reflect discussion and dialogue regarding the conflict. Additionally, social network mapping can provide insight into how information and opinions move between opinion leaders and the general public.

Data analysis in this study will involve several stages to comprehend the role of social media in disseminating up-to-date information regarding the situation in Palestine. Firstly, the collected literature will be analyzed in-depth to understand the theoretical framework underlying the influence of social media on perceptions of the Israel-Palestine conflict. The Agenda Setting theory, the Two-Step Flow Communication Model, and Public Dialogue Theory will be employed as foundations to identify how specific issues are framed and presented on social media.

Subsequently, social media content analysis will be conducted with a focus on major platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. The gathered data will encompass posts, comments, and various forms of interaction reflecting discussions and dialogues about the Israel-Palestine conflict. This analysis will involve identifying common patterns, including the most frequently discussed topics, dominant content types, and forms of interaction that most significantly influence public perceptions. Furthermore, through social network mapping, this research aims to understand how information and opinions circulate between opinion leaders and the general public. This will provide insights into how influencers or key figures play a role in shaping public opinions regarding the conflict.

As a quality control measure, this research will identify and consider potential biases and verify sources of information. Involvement in this process will help maintain the objectivity and credibility of research findings. By using a combination of literature study approaches and social media content analysis, this research aims to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the role of social media in shaping opinion and dialogue regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

3. Results and Discussion

By delving into a literature review of the role of social media in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, this research provides in-depth insight into the dynamics of information and opinion developing in the digital era. Based on analysis of Agenda Setting theory, Two-Step Flow Communication Model, and Public Dialogue Theory, researchers can detail the impact of social media in shaping conflict narratives and influencing global perceptions. At the Agenda Setting level, social media proves its power as a dynamic agenda-forming agent. In the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, topics or narratives that dominate social media can quickly create a global information focus. Individual users and activist groups have an active role in setting the agenda, creating trends, and shaping powerful narratives. This phenomenon creates challenges and opportunities, where opinion formation can be influenced by the speed and accuracy of information spread on social media.

In the Two-Step Flow Communication Model, opinion leaders on social media, both well-known public figures and ordinary individuals, play a key role in transmitting and shaping information. This dynamic creates a domino effect in which certain views can spread quickly and reach a wide audience. This model adapts well to digital environments, where direct interactions between individuals play an important role in opinion formation (Hasmawati, 2011). However, challenges arise from the plurality of opinions which can trigger polarization

in discussions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Public Dialogue Theory underlines the potential of social media as a forum for the democratic exchange of ideas and views. However, in the context of this very sensitive conflict, the formation of an inclusive digital public space is still a challenge. Polarity of opinion and tensions can hinder constructive dialogue, and disinformation and propaganda complicate efforts to create a healthy conversational environment (Tjahyadi, 2003).

From the research results, it appears that social media plays a central role in forming opinions and disseminating information regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The power of agenda setting, the influence of opinion leaders, and the potential for public dialogue on social media create complexities that need to be considered. It is important to understand that the decentralized nature of social media gives individuals and groups the power to shape the narrative. This opens the door to diversity of opinion, but also increases the risk of polarization and conflict of opinion. In the context of a long-standing and tense conflict such as Israel-Palestine, social media not only reflects the reality of the conflict, but also shapes it. The real challenge lies in how to manage information spread on social media. Hoaxes, propaganda and tendentious narratives can confuse people's understanding of the conflict. Therefore, further research needs to be conducted to explore effective strategies in dealing with disinformation and maintaining the integrity of information spread through social platforms (Christawan, Ariadi, Thalib, Astika, & Suyanto, 2023).

In addition, the potential of social media as a tool to facilitate constructive dialogue and diplomacy needs to be optimized. By understanding how agenda setting mechanisms, Two-Step Flow Communication, and Public Dialogue theory operate on social media, the parties involved can design more effective communication approaches to manage conflict and encourage efforts towards peaceful solutions. Overall, this research makes a significant contribution to understanding the role of social media in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. By detailing its impact on global perceptions, public opinion and responses to conflict, this research opens up space for further reflection and action in managing information in this digital era of complexity.

The research also highlights the nuanced ways in which social media platforms differ in their influence and reach within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For instance, Twitter may serve as a platform where real-time updates and debates are prevalent, fostering immediate reactions and mobilizations among users. In contrast, platforms like Facebook and Instagram might facilitate longer-form discussions, personal storytelling, and community-building, thereby influencing perceptions on a more emotional and personal level. Recognizing these platform-specific dynamics is crucial for stakeholders seeking to engage with audiences effectively and ethically (Didik Madyatmadja, Abdurachman, Gaol, Pudjianto, & Hapsara, 2018). Moreover, the role of algorithms in shaping the visibility and virality of content related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict cannot be overlooked. Platforms employ algorithms that prioritize certain types of content based on user engagement metrics, potentially leading to echo chambers where users are primarily exposed to perspectives that align with their existing beliefs. This algorithmic bias poses challenges for fostering a balanced and informed public discourse on the conflict. As such, there is a need for transparency and accountability from social media companies in how their algorithms curate and disseminate information related to sensitive geopolitical issues.

Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of digital literacy and media literacy education initiatives to equip users with the skills to critically evaluate information encountered on social media platforms. Given the proliferation of misinformation, disinformation, and propaganda surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, empowering individuals to discern credible sources, verify information, and engage in respectful dialogue is paramount.

Educational efforts can help mitigate the negative consequences of information manipulation and contribute to a more informed and empathetic public discourse. The findings of this research emphasize the interconnectedness of the digital realm and real-world geopolitical dynamics. Social media platforms are not merely passive conduits for information but are deeply intertwined with geopolitical power dynamics, historical narratives, and identity politics related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Marpianta, 2019). As such, efforts to harness the potential of social media for peacebuilding and conflict resolution must be cognizant of these complex interrelationships. Multilateral initiatives involving governments, civil society organizations, tech companies, and international bodies may offer a collaborative pathway forward in navigating the ethical, political, and technological challenges posed by social media in the context of protracted conflicts like the Israeli-Palestinian dispute.

Expanding on the discussion, it is crucial to recognize the impact of user demographics on the dissemination and reception of information on social media platforms. Understanding how different age groups, socio-economic backgrounds, and geographical locations engage with content related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can provide insights into the varied perspectives that shape online narratives. Younger generations, often more active on platforms like TikTok and Snapchat, may consume information in distinct ways compared to older generations on traditional platforms, influencing the diversity and dynamism of the digital conversation (Smith & Akter, 2018). Additionally, the research sheds light on the ethical considerations surrounding the moderation and regulation of content on social media platforms. The responsibility of tech companies in addressing hate speech, incitement, and the spread of harmful narratives becomes paramount in the context of a conflict as sensitive as the one between Israel and Palestine. Striking a balance between freedom of expression and preventing the amplification of content that contributes to violence or discrimination is an ongoing challenge. Examining the effectiveness of current moderation policies and proposing improvements can contribute to creating safer online spaces for dialogue.

The study invites reflection on the potential role of social media in fostering grassroots movements and activism for peace in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While social media can amplify divisive voices, it also provides a platform for marginalized perspectives and voices calling for dialogue and reconciliation. Exploring instances where social media has been utilized as a tool for peacebuilding initiatives or as a means to connect individuals with shared aspirations for resolution can provide valuable lessons for leveraging the positive potential of these platforms. The research findings suggest the need for diplomatic and conflict resolution efforts to adapt to the digital age. Traditional methods of diplomacy may find new avenues for engagement through social media, creating opportunities for track-two diplomacy and citizen-driven initiatives. Governments and international organizations can explore innovative strategies for utilizing social media to foster direct communication between citizens, policymakers, and influencers, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and transparent peace process.

This research not only underscores the complexities of social media's role in shaping perceptions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict but also prompts a forward-looking perspective. The evolving nature of digital communication necessitates continuous examination and adaptation of strategies to harness the potential benefits while mitigating the challenges. By considering the multifaceted aspects discussed, stakeholders can work towards an informed, ethical, and constructive use of social media in the context of geopolitical conflicts, paving the way for a more nuanced and interconnected global discourse.

4. Conclusion



Based on the discussion that has been explained, this research illustrates the crucial role of social media in shaping the dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The results of the analysis of Agenda Setting theory, the Two-Step Flow Communication Model, and Public Dialogue Theory reveal the complexity of interactions on social media, which significantly influences opinion formation, global perceptions, and responses to these conflicts. Social media provides a platform for individual users and opinion leaders, both as narrative-shaping agents and as a forum for constructive dialogue. However, the complexity lies in social media's ability to present a plurality of opinions while triggering polarization. Disinformation is also a serious challenge. Therefore, a deep understanding of the mechanisms of agenda setting and communication on social media is essential in developing effective strategies to manage information, facilitate healthy dialogue, and defuse these sensitive conflicts. In light of the conclusions drawn from this research, future investigations should delve into several key areas to enhance our understanding of the intricate relationship between social media and conflict dynamics. Firstly, exploring the influence of algorithms on the visibility and reach of narratives can provide insights into the role of technology in shaping opinions. Cross-cultural analyses will help uncover universal patterns or context-specific factors, broadening the scope beyond the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Longitudinal studies tracking the evolution of social media discourse over time can reveal trends and the efficacy of strategies employed to manage information. Additionally, future research should address the role of social media in conflict resolution, and ethical considerations surrounding its use in conflict zones. Lastly, exploring multi-stakeholder perspectives can provide a holistic understanding of how different groups engage with social media in conflict contexts. Collectively, these research avenues offer a roadmap for developing effective strategies in information management, dialogue facilitation, and conflict resolution in the era of social media.

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