



# The Impact of Citizen Journalism in News Coverage of the Israeli Attacks on Gaza

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## ABSTRACT

The advent of social media platforms has brought about significant changes in the relationship between society and communication systems. This transformation has also impacted the way power structures and the masses communicate and interact, leading to the emergence of citizen journalism as a rapidly growing concept. This article aims to explore the significance and relevance of citizen journalism during the Israeli attacks on Gaza, which were heavily documented on social media. The article has used qualitative literature review that is flexible and allows the researcher to focus on constructed realities to put together a clear description and analysis of the reality of the influence of citizen journalism on news coverage of Israeli attacks on Gaza. The article was limited to journalistic practices on social media and citizen journalism during the Israeli attacks on Gaza.

**Keywords:** Citizen journalism, Social media, Gaza war, Disinformation, Manipulation phenomena

## INTRODUCTION

Social networking platforms become a key part of our daily lives. The percentage of people who utilize social networking sites has recently risen dramatically. Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, and other platforms are examples of social networking sites. These social networking services (SNS) are available through the Internet and are characterised by their rapid message exchange capabilities, enabling users to share photographs, audio, images, and videos. Over the past decade, these social media platforms have revolutionised communication technology, leading to a remarkable surge in their user base and facilitating the establishment of meaningful connections among individuals to advocate various causes. Furthermore, updating a status and publishing images about various events throughout the world is simple using by SNS (Hoffman, 2012).

Furthermore, our modern society lives within a profoundly interdependent and interconnected global framework, disseminated and communicated through diverse media channels and structures (Allan & Thorsen, 2009). During the twentieth century, audio-visual communication displaced textual communication, which had long dominated the informational world. Websites and social networks have facilitated the emergence of a novel era of communication, knowledge dissemination, and journalism in the twenty-first century.

The notion of citizen journalism strives to engage regular individuals in the activities of reporting, gathering, assessing, and disseminating information and news. This approach is also known by alternative designations such as "distributed journalism", "public journalism", "participatory journalism", "street journalism", among others (Duru & Duru, 2009). Due to its scarcity of a well-defined conceptual framework and guiding principles, citizen journalism exhibits a highly subjective and opinion-driven nature, resulting in its role being predominantly supplementary rather than foundational in shaping public opinion.

The concept of citizen journalism has faced censure from professional journalists and news organizations who assert that it lacks regulation, exhibits amateurish traits, and lacks coherence in terms of quality and scope of coverage. Additionally, citizen journalists are perceived to be constrained by their limited professional networks and resources, potentially hindering their ability to effectively serve the public interest (Min, 2016).

In this regard, Israel has placed limitations on the information or news that Palestinian media outlets can publish through their customary reporting (Alakklouk & Mokhtar, 2017). People in Palestine are unable to disseminate information through traditional media. Many mainstream media outlets have decided to ignore and conceal the crimes of the Israeli military against the Palestinians by sidelining or overlooking the Palestinian narrative, and the fact that many Israeli practices are illegal under international law, constituting war crimes in some cases (Najjar, 2021).

However, the ordinary Palestinian citizen leads the press scene to present his own story on platforms of social media such as “Instagram”, “Twitter”, “YouTube” and “Facebook”, without waiting for the traditional media that used to do this for a long time (Alesayi, 2021). Social media has emerged as a lifeline for numerous people in recent years to raise awareness of causes and struggles that are overlooked or excluded from mainstream media channels (Zahzah, 2021). During Israel's attack on Gaza, the number of citizen journalists in Gaza grew rapidly, competing with that of the traditional press (Al-Hilu, 2014). The social media turned into sites for not only discussion about who are supporters the Palestinian people or Israeli people but also for determining who is a Palestinian and what Palestinian identity entails (Najjar, 2010).

Furthermore, it was reported during the Israeli attack on Gaza that the prompt dissemination of breaking news through social media platforms was notably impactful and efficient, mainly attributed to citizen journalism. The pivotal contribution of citizen journalism in the coverage of the Israeli attack has been underlined in earlier research (Al-Hilu, 2014). Accordingly, the current article endeavors to investigate the involvement of citizen journalism and social media during the Israeli attack on Gaza.

## **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The development of social media has expanded public diplomacy between states in favor of users. Along with creating public awareness, social media platforms are also the main tool for unequal wars today. Social media platforms produce awareness in the public. However, as information flow intensifies on social media platforms, disinformation and manipulation phenomena have also taken their place on the agenda. Online disinformation is a threat to society and has risen as a prominent issue on scholarly and political agendas (Saurwein & Spencer-

Smith, 2020). In this context, the army of Israeli started deploying social media keyboard warriors to praise the military's bombing operation in Gaza and to improve Israel's image in the eyes of the world during the war (Debre, 2023). As a result, the Palestinians have used social media to further their battle against the Israeli occupation and foreign mainstream media that have decided to downplay and ignore the Palestinian narrative. Therefore, this article investigated the role of social media and citizen journalism in news coverage of Israel's attacks on Gaza.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This article is based on qualitative research methodology because it enables the researcher to assemble a precise description and analysis of the reality of the impact of citizen journalism in news coverage of the Israeli attacks on Gaza and how it could bring additional value to the Palestinian cause and strengthen the Palestinian narrative via social media. In the current article, a literature review was used as data which is one of the qualitative research methods. The literature review provides researchers the opportunity to access systematic information about an event or phenomenon and a strategic reading through the data obtained. Subsequently, the data undergoes a rigorous and analytical evaluation, employing the content analysis approach for thorough interpretation.

## **DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS**

### **THE RISE OF CITIZEN JOURNALISM**

Information gathering, dissemination, and sharing have changed as a result of several things, such as “Internet”, “new technologies”, “social platforms”, and “grassroots media”. This progression can be considered the beginning of citizen journalism and can involve anyone. Anyone can now instantly share and spread their unique experience of an event due to the liberalization of information. This new model of reporting occurs outside the media organizations' structures, which makes the media responsible for any errors or a lack of news coverage.

It is worth noting that “citizen journalism” is a rapidly developing concept essentially because of two main reasons: (1) everyone with a smartphone can do and (2) the biggest media companies

promote it because user-generated content is inexpensive compared to traditional news reporting (Duru & Duru, 2009). Nevertheless, citizen journalism did not originate solely with the advent of the Internet. Rather, this contemporary mode of communication is perceived as a media instrument that emphasizes public concerns (Iribarren, 2019).

Flew (2005) recognises three rudimentary elements donating to the rise of citizen journalism: open publication, distributed content, and collaborative editing. Additionally, Mark Glaser (2006) asserts that individuals lacking a formal journalistic background could leverage modern technology and the overall reach of the Internet to enhance, create, or verify media content independently or in cooperation with fellow contributors.

The first platform for amateur-generated information was (OhMyNews) launched in South Korea in 2000, which is frequently seen as the birthplace of citizen journalism (Kang, 2016). The underlying notion was clear: inclusivity authorised anyone to generate information, as evidenced by the site's motto, "Every citizen is a reporter." As a result, individuals transitioned from mere information recipients to active providers. By 2009, roughly 70,000 citizens from various global locations had vigorously donated stories for the site's volunteer editors (Woyke, 2009).

I Moreover, in 1963, Abraham Zapruder made the spontaneous decision to record John F. Kennedy's rally in Dallas utilising his personal camera. Unintentionally, he captured the footage of the assassination, representing an early form of citizen journalism, primarily characterised by its amateur nature (Allan, 2013). The Secret Service analyzed the film of Zapruder to help in their efforts of investigative. Although other films of the event were unrestricted, Zapruder's recording stood out as the most detailed and comprehensive account.

The terminology "citizen journalism" was originally presented in 2001 in the United States' news discourse, referring to the content and reports developed by amateur witnesses during the 9/11 attacks (Allan, 2013). Likewise, during the "2004 Asian tsunami", the term "citizen journalism" surfaced for the first time, enclosing videos and photographs uploaded by travellers onto their personal blogs (Jurrat, 2011). As stated by Stuart Allan and Einar Thorsen (2009), this form of journalism is characterized by varying interpretations of "citizenship" and "journalist," and its practice is subject to diverse political contexts across the globe. Presently, citizen journalists are

asserting their influence beyond, alongside, and within the realms of contemporary mainstream media.

## **SOCIAL MEDIA DRIVING CITIZEN JOURNALISM**

The development of journalism has been affected by the beginning of new media technology and the emergence of substitutions of news sources, which have essentially reshaped both readers' consumption patterns and journalistic writing. New media contains different forms of audio, textual, and visual information that are available online, spanning platforms such as the "Internet", "smartphone and tablet applications", as well as "online radio shows and podcasts". The advancement in social media use has greatly lessened the conventional monopoly power of conventional journalism and television (Tan, 2016). Social media has grown to be one of the most significant communications in the world, in order to facilitate contact between individuals regardless of distance, make it simple for people to share information, files, images, and videos, send messages, and have in-person talks with friends (Akram & Kumar, 2017). For people who want to keep up with the news, online media has become a real reference. The rise in the number of people who rely on Internet news sources has been gradual (Nielsen, Cornia, & Kalogeropoulos, 2016).

There are millions of users of social media worldwide participated in the virtual environment. It has become a growing phenomenon with many definitions in public and academic use. Ellison (2007) defined social network as a web-based service that allows users to establish a profile within a confined, organised system, generates a roster of fellow users with comparable shared affiliations, examines their respective networks of connections, and reviews connections established by other participants within the system. A social network serves as an interactive platform where individuals freely generate, share, exchange, and discuss information using text, images, audio, and videos while connected to the internet.

According to Geoff (2015), the top motivations for using social media are to keep in touch with friends, keep up with news and current events, fill up spare time, exchange opinions, general networking with other people, and share aspects of our daily lives. In addition, it is argued that "social interaction", "information seeking", "entertainment", "expression of opinion", "pass time", "communicative and convenience utility", "information-sharing", and

“surveillance/knowledge of others” are the eight satisfactions and uses that Whiting and Williams (2013) identified for using social networking sites.

Social media, and future Internet applications will bring more opportunities for people wishing to participate in the news process (Hamdy, 2010). The emergence of social networks, multimedia, and advanced communication technologies has facilitated the exploration of new media avenues for journalism, information dissemination, and communication in the twenty-first century. Notably, citizen journalism has gained prominence, enabling any individual to potentially assume the role of a reporter. As a subset of civic media, citizen journalism entails the utilization of internet-based communication tools, including websites, forums, various types of blogs, as well as photo and video sharing platforms, along with firsthand comments from a vast and diverse global audience. This participatory form of journalism, often referred to as "public," "participatory," "democratic," "guerrilla," or "street" journalism, empowers users to actively engage in journalistic practices, express themselves, and effectively document and disseminate information (Iribarren, 2019).

According to Nip (2006), citizen journalists are people who develop and produce original news content without the help or participation of media outlets or professional journalists. Individuals known as citizen journalists contribute news to major media outlets and may be associated with particular social movements (Goode, 2009). According to Radsch (2013), "citizen journalism" comprises a particular and activist approach to gathering and transmitting news, occurring beyond the confines of traditional media establishments and emerging in response to shortages or inadequacies noted within the domain of professional journalism. While Jay Rosen (2008) provides a straightforward definition, "when the people formerly known as the audience use the press tools at their disposal to inform one another."

Given its dependence on social media, the significance of the power wielded by "citizen journalism" cannot be underestimated. Utilising readily accessible tools such as a "cell phone" and "Wi-Fi" or "mobile data," these journalists swiftly share breaking news and personal viewpoints on social media, reaching their audience within moments. In addition, "citizen journalists" have assumed an invariant role as contributors to mainstream news, furnishing pertinent information and visual content, particularly in regions where professional journalists face restricted access or have no access at all (Jurrat, 2011). In this context, two different forms

of journalism appear- on-site accounts provided by individuals present at the scene and reports by foreign correspondents. Nowadays, individuals can avoid conventional news agencies by leveraging a camera phone and social networking platforms. Nevertheless, social media has proved its efficacy in news coverage, serving as a viable model and also presenting lucrative business opportunities (Dredge, 2014).

### **CITIZEN JOURNALISM AND SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN MOBILIZING THE PUBLIC POLITICAL OPINION.**

Recently the social networking sites (SNSs) role's in attitude formation, and political participation and learning has received a lot of attention. According to some studies, social networking sites (SNS) act as a novel communication avenue for comprehending political variations, promote the establishment of political networks among individuals and encourage concentration in political endeavours within offline and online spheres (Baek, 2015). Social networking sites are assumed to pave the way for a "political participation" due to the fact that SNS have technological advantages, such as "social interactions and networks". In addition, the news sharing activities on social media and individuals' level of political interest have a big role in the mobilizing the public opinion. Regular utilisation of SNS is associated with an increased probability of engaging in interactions with other individuals (Choi & Lee, 2015).

For example, In South Africa, the public is utilizing Facebook to engage in political discussion, as well as to connect with one another and share political information in novel ways to analyze political conditions (Steenkamp & Hyde-Clarke, 2014). On the other hand, social media plays a role as a source of non-governmental information and notified the internal community as well as the exterior community about internal activities (Mansour, 2012).

The pictures' and reports' eyewitness taken by regular citizens are the only evidence accessible in authoritarian nations, and they could have an impact on world politics (Jurrat, 2011). As an illustration, in the highly contested Iranian presidential election of 2009, entry of foreign correspondents into the country was forbidden, the government exercised power over local media, and journalists expressing opposition views were subject to imprisonment. Regardless, the global community, including many Iranians, gained awareness of the demonstrations and the ensuing violent suppression through visual content and accounts shared on individual blogs and



social media platforms and sent directly to international media outlets. This overall dissemination allowed millions of individuals worldwide to observe the events, provoking world leaders and the Iranian government to publicly address and provide commentary on the unfolding political developments in Iran (Elson, Yeung, Roshan, Bohandy & Nader, 2012; Jurrat, 2011).

In contrast, Arab people have changed the method of using “social media” to political purposes and mobilizing the public opinion instead of personal purposes. The uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa have been by social media which acted as a trigger for all the events that have unfolded under the name of the Arab Spring 2011 (Alhindi, Talha & Sulong, 2012). Social media sites have played an essential role during the era of the Arab Spring 2011 due to the interaction and communication among participants of political protests via social media (Mansour, 2012). The use of modern technology made interaction and communication easier between participants of recent political protests in the Middle East (Beaumont, 2011).

During the Arab Spring of 2011, the impact of social media was evident as protesters employed these platforms to coordinate demonstrations, disseminate information about their activities, and raise awareness of unfolding events both within their local communities and on a global scale (Howard, Duffy, Freelon, Hussain, Mari, & Mazaid, 2011). Leaders of the Arab civil society emphasized the pivotal role played by the internet, mobile devices, and social media in facilitating the protests. Moreover, Arab individuals have embraced the utilisation of "digital media" as a medium to exercise their entitlement to freedom of expression, as well as, to active civic participation (Brown, Guskin & Mitchell, 2012).

Albostangy (2020), discovered in her study "The Role of Citizen Journalist in the Arab Revolution" that the degree of acceptance of citizen journalism by the media elite scored first when compared to other sources of news. Also, the study's findings suggest that the majority of the news and information provided by citizen journalists is not credible and not professional. In contrast, the triumph of Tunisian and Egyptian activists in effectively employing social media to orchestrate extensive protests that led to the resignation of their respective leaders bolstered the notion that citizen utilization of digital technologies can foster democracy or facilitate its establishment (Al Ghazzi, 2014). Therefore, numerous journalists and scholars perceive citizen journalism as a form of journalism that exhibits greater transparency and embraces democratic

principles (Jurrat, 2011). Therefore, the Palestinian people's desire to use social media has recently increased as a result of the benefits of the Arab Spring revolutions, forcing Palestinian government representatives and factions in the “West Bank” and “Gaza Strip” to utilise “social media” to highlight security and political issues in an effort to win over the public opinion of the world to the Palestinian cause (Balousha, 2013).

### **THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE**

For Palestinians, who have no journalism experience or political activists they found a new way to express their opinions by using social media as a platform. The Palestinian residents have undergone notable achievements on different events through the strategic utilisation of social media to coordinate political and social assemblages and effectively marshal public sentiment. (AbuZayad, 2015). Therefore, the Palestinian people have used social media to support their issue and only social media reflects reality, not creates it. Also, the Palestinian media have used social media as news platforms with millions' followers, and the online data and content that are shared by them play a role in the fighting against Israel (Estrin, 2015).

As per the "2021 social networking report", it shows that Facebook emerged as the most widely utilised social networking platform among Palestinians with a substantial rate of “95.16%”. WhatsApp followed with “81.5%” of users, while Instagram garnered “63.28%” usage, TikTok had “27.70%”, and Twitter recorded “26.14%”. Additionally, the Ipoke report highlights that Israeli authorities have summoned approximately 6.9% of Palestinian users and detained 6.1% of them based on their social media activities and content (Ali, 2022). Israeli policy toward Palestinians who used social media like Facebook or Twitter is the biggest challenge that Palestinians must overcome in order to use social media as a platform for free speech (AbuZayad, 2015).

Social networking sites (SNS) play a key role in devastating communication obstacles among Palestinians, as people in Palestine strive for alternative media platforms, such as online media, to share and exchange data connected to the Palestinian causality (Vries, Simry, & Maoz, 2015). For instance, the overall favour of Facebook has prompted many Palestinian activists to establish a digital presence, utilising it as a means to advocate for peace in Palestine and as a platform to post articles (Alakklouk & Mokhtar, 2017). Together, Mor, Ron, and Maoz (2016) claim that

Facebook has developed into a conduit for disseminating news about possible solutions to the Palestine-Israel conflict.

The challenges encountered by Palestine expand further armed conflicts, encompassing the Israeli occupation's restrictions on data and news concerning the hardship, maltreatment, and injustices taken by Palestinian journalists and citizens (Lopes, 2014). In addition, following pressure from Israeli politicians, social media corporations have agreed that they will work together to curb online terrorist incitement by Palestinians (Baker, 2016). Israel is doing everything possible to isolate Gaza from the rest of the world. For years, the Gaza Strip has been a recurring flashpoint in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Israel has placed severe limitations on the Gaza Strip (Rucke, 2012). Nevertheless, the populace in Gaza undergoes a sense of endures confinement and effective socio-economic adversity. But despite these conditions, the majority of social and political events are covered and relayed to the Palestinian people by citizen journalists via social media in recent years (AbuZayad, 2015), such as updating followers on news from Palestine that condemns Israeli activities against Palestinians throughout the war (Abu-Ayyash, 2015).

Therefore, the Palestinian people in Gaza found the virtual world, where they may freely move from nation to country and get the knowledge they require. They can establish and develop their networks in order to fight mainstream propaganda that portrays Palestinians as aggressors or terrorists (Baker, 2012).

### **CITIZEN JOURNALISM AND SOCIAL MEDIA DURING THE ISRAELI ATTACK ON GAZA**

To advance their narratives and attract attention to their own suffering in order to win international sympathy and support, Palestinian media made major use of social media and it has far-reaching implications for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Additionally, the “Web-based tools and services” have enabled users to generate, produce, share information, search for content, and rate are referred to as social media (Bohler & Merwe, 2011). The emergence of new media such as Facebook and Twitter have caused in a dynamic transformation in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which leading to citizen journalists who considered social media as a window they could present their own narrative and share them with their readers (Alakklouk & Mokhtar,

2017). Palestinian citizen journalists were able to communicate and influence public opinion and perspectives through social media tools and channels, as well as introduce themselves as an agent of change (Al-Hilu, 2014). Therefore, the war in Gaza created content generated by citizen, and the appearance of some forms of participatory journalism (Hamdy, 2010).

### **The 2008-09 Gaza War**

By the end of 2008, the Gaza Strip had experienced its first war, the Israeli army barred foreign media, leaving just a few news organizations to cover the fight (Rucke, 2012). Conversely, Israel employed social media in conjunction with its military operation "The Cast Lead" to exercise influence over the media portrayal of the conflict and to shape the narrative (El Zein & Abusalem, 2015). Moreover, the Israeli army's jurisdiction over the Gaza Strip borders and its control over the mobile network facilitated the monitoring and filtering of photo transmissions through cell phones (Daileda, 2014).

However, due to the restrictions on foreign press entry into Gaza, along with challenges like limited electricity and internet infrastructure, media outlets turned to Palestinian journalists who worked across various media formats to produce both film and primary reporting for both traditional and emerging media platforms. The 2008 war coincided with the rise of citizen journalism, where social media and individual bloggers emerged as the most feasible news sources, providing content to traditional media outlets (Hamdy, 2010). For instance, Sameh Akram Habeeb contributed reports for television and was interviewed by numerous international media organizations. Simultaneously, he managed to maintain his blog titled "Gaza Strip: The Untold Story," updating it daily during the war with written summaries of daily news, along with uploaded photos and videos. Throughout the conflict, he encountered multiple threatening emails from extremists (Gilinisky, 2009). Given the restrictions on journalists entering Gaza, external observers had to rely on independent contributors like Habeeb, who collaborated with traditional media while also disseminating news through social media channels (Ward, 2009).

Al Jazeera channel executives prioritised comprehending and acknowledging the significance of citizen journalism, individual bloggers, and social media users (Al-Atrqci, 2009; Hamdy, 2010). Among the limited news organizations with correspondents physically present in Gaza, Al-Jazeera stood out. To enhance information gathering, they established a dedicated reporting

platform known as “War on Gaza”. Individuals, both ordinary citizens and journalists, had the capacity to employ their mobile phones or computers to dispatch SMS and Twitter messages to a database, where Al-Jazeera would verify the authenticity of the stories. Subsequently, the events were incorporated into the AJGaza Twitter feed, resulting in comprehensive coverage of Israel's aerial bombardments and ground operations in Gaza (Zeitzoff, 2011). During the 2008-2009 Gaza war, social networking, and new media sources emerged, greatly increasing the pace and transmission of information from the battlefield. In this war, more than 1,300 people died in Gaza and 5,000 people were wounded (Gavlak & Jamjoum, 2009).

### **The 2012 Gaza War**

The 2012 Gaza War was Israel and Palestinians' first digital battle (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015). During the Israeli military operation "Pillar of Defence" against the “Gaza Strip” in November 2012, around “175 Palestinians were killed and over 1,000 were injured” as a result of Israeli air strikes (Hussain, 2017).

Palestinians effectively harnessed Facebook as a significant parallel arena, akin to the physical battlefield, where they countered Israeli military forces armed with massive weaponry (Balousha, 2013). In 2012, traditional media outlets, including Al Jazeera English (AJE), adopted social media platforms as tools for information gathering and news dissemination (Zahoor & Sadiq, 2021). During the 2012 Gaza conflict, social media served as a means to gauge public support. Both Israel and Palestine extensively employed hashtags to categorize their messages, mobilize backing for their actions, and enable other Twitter users to express support by including these hashtags in their Twitter feeds (Zeitzoff, 2015). Notably, the most prominent hashtags were "#GazaUnderAttack" signifying support for Palestine, and "#IsraelUnderFire" representing support for Israel (Ashkenazi, 2013).

The 2012 Gaza war was the first-time social media was heavily used, notably Twitter to disseminate information to the general public and engage in cyber-warfare (Rucke, 2012). (Rucke, 2012). During the conflict, the exchanges between Israel and Palestinians on the English-language Twitter feed led certain analysts to label it as the inaugural instance of a "Twitter battle" (Sutter, 2012). According to hashtag mentions of “#GazaUnderAttack”, Palestine

had more supporters on Twitter, reaching a high of 170,000 in a single day, compared to only 25,000 for “#IsraelUnderFire” (Ashkenazi, 2013).

The Israeli war on Gaza in 2012 saw the emergence of many active individuals. The character of active individuals in Gaza are educated youth, speaking English fluently, don't work in media field and is active on social media daily, uploading, and sharing videos and pictures about the damaging in Gaza through YouTube and Twitter. In this case, we can consider them as witnesses; those who witnessed the events become solid and trusted sources of news and sometimes more efficient in passing the news than some news mediums themselves (Saadeh, 2012). As a result, the role of social media in this fight was significant in the historic Nov. 29 U.N. vote in favor of raising Palestine to the status of a non-member observer state, in which 138 countries voted in favor (Rucke, 2012). Through the use of SNSs, Palestinians have observed an increase in worldwide support for the Palestinian cause at the United Nations (AbuZayad, 2015).

### **The 2014 Gaza War**

The communicative environment in this war was very different to the one of the previous wars in Gaza. Israel started Operation known as “Protective Edge” in the summer of 2014 against Gaza and lasted for about 6 weeks, from July 8th to August 26th 2014 (Siapera, Hunt & Lynn, 2015). By the end of the war more than 2,000 Palestinians dead and 11,000 injured (Abu-Ayyash, 2015).

As stated by Zhang (2021), social media assumes a facilitative role in contemporary conflicts and wars, while traditional news organizations and their audiences utilize its features to shape and counter-set the public agenda. As the war unfolds, a considerable bias in favor of Israel is observed in the majority of Western media, wherein news is manipulated to portray Palestinians' demolished homes as Israeli ones, with scant attention given to Palestinian casualties (Ghoshroy, 2014). Consequently, Palestinian activists turn to social media as a platform to share their narratives, which often receive inadequate attention from conventional news outlets (Li & Prasad, 2018). Consequently, an online confrontation ensued, pitting Israeli state media outlets against Palestinian citizen journalists armed solely with their personal laptops, smartphones, and cameras (Al-Helou, 2014).

During the 2014 war, the Israeli army and Israeli officials used social media sites, mainly Twitter, to update their followers, aired videos on YouTube, and published photographs of Israelis finding shelter to avoid rockets. Palestinians, on the other hand, used social media to disseminate stories and photographs claiming to be victims of the occupation and demonstrating that the Israeli army kills the elderly, women, and children (El-Zein & Abusalem, 2015).

By incorporating hashtags such as "#GazaUnderAttack" and "#PrayforGaza" in their tweets, citizen journalists in Gaza effectively waged a cyber-war, successfully reaching audiences in the Western world. Utilizing social media platforms, Gaza residents and citizen journalists received inquiries and interview requests from international media organizations (Al-Helou, 2014). Seib (2021) reported that during the initial eight days of the July 2014 Gaza war, the hashtag "#GazaUnderAttack" was utilized more than 375,000 times on "Facebook" and "Twitter," with its usage surpassing four million times throughout the month-long duration of the conflict. Through the inclusion of photos depicting the sufferings caused by Israeli attacks, these social media posts highlighted the realities on the ground in Gaza and the severity of bloodshed. Twitter emerged as a venue through which tens of thousands of ordinary individuals expressed and updated their personal perspectives concerning the human toll of Israel's war. Moreover, the Twitter network was instrumental in facilitating interactions with Palestinian activists, disseminating narratives of Palestinian victims to online followers, and organizing local solidarity initiatives (Abu-Ayyash, 2015).

In the last week of the war, many people uploaded videos to "YouTube" with the hashtag "RubbleBucketChallenge" or "GazaBucketChallenge". The participants utilized a bucket of dust and rubble instead of a bucket of iced water to raise awareness of the situation in Gaza (Gander, 2014). While on Instagram, the vocabulary used to express pro-Palestine content included hashtags such as "#FreeGaza," "#PrayForGaza," "#Genocide," and "#BoycottIsrael" (Lotan, 2014). However, the venting of emotions online has cost numerous people. According to a 2014 RT News article, at Jerusalem's Hadassah College, an Arab female student lost her scholarship due to a Facebook post supporting the Palestinian people and demonstrating Israeli war crimes in Gaza.

Israel lost the social media war over Gaza, particularly during Al-Shuja'iya neighborhood massacre's which an Israel killed more than 500 civilians. During the pause in the Israeli attack,

some journalists entered Shujaiya and posted photographs of what they witnessed. Others tweeted photographs from the Al-Shifa hospital in Gaza City (Abunimah, 2014). The news of this crime began diffused on social network sites quickly by the activists on the ground, and they were as a link with various peoples through social networking and new media pages (Mason, 2014).

It can be concluded that the picture from Gaza began to be clear and notice its details via social media. The power of social network sites during the 2014 Gaza's war is the ability of journalists to use it from within Gaza itself. There were more journalists and activists on the ground during the 2014 Gaza's war and many of them focusing on children of Gaza as victims of war by spread their photos or videos via social media (Daileda, 2014).

### **The 2021 Gaza War**

The Gaza war in May 2021 followed after the mobility restrictions and relocation of Palestinians in East Jerusalem. 13 Palestinian households in Sheikh Jarrah have been ordered evicted by Israeli courts. Palestinians have begun protesting Israel's Supreme Court's decision to remove Sheikh Jarrah Palestinian families in Jerusalem. Then, during Ramadan in 2021, Palestinians visiting the “al-Aqsa Mosque” in Jerusalem's Old City were attacked and dispersed by Israeli forces. Subsequently, on May 10, 2021, Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad initiated missile attacks on Israel, leading Israel to retaliate with numerous airstrikes on Gaza (Panayotova & Rizova, 2021). Israel launched a catastrophic 11-day military attack against the Gaza Strip (Humaid, 2022).

Muna Al Kurd, a Palestinian activist from Sheikh Jarrah, has long advocated for the neighborhood; she launched an internet campaign with the hashtag “#SaveSheikhJarrah” to highlight the plight of the neighborhood's people (Jundi, 2021). The Palestinian citizens used social media platforms such as “Facebook,” “Twitter,” “blogs,” “YouTube,” “Instagram,” and even “TikTok” with hashtags such as #SaveSheikhJarrah, #FreePalestine, and “#GazaUnderAttack” in both English and Arabic to disseminate information about the latest Israeli attacks, Palestinian victims, and the destruction left behind. During recent tensions in 2021, these hashtags have been used over seven million times to draw attention to the struggle for Palestinian rights (Tynes, 2021). The utilise of digital media by Palestinians has contributed



to the support of the Palestinian message and enhanced the visibility of the Palestinian cause, resulting in increased global awareness of the plight of the Palestinian people (Khamis, 202).

Social media platforms assumed a pivotal role in shaping public opinion during the 2021 Gaza war. Numerous pro-Palestinian posts gained significant visibility, being disseminated by individuals with substantial followings (Conn, 2021). However, social media platforms faced accusations of censorship. For instance, Instagram blocked information related to the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, where Israeli security forces clashed with worshippers. Furthermore, Facebook prohibited Gaza's Islamist rulers, Hamas, from utilizing its platform, and also deleted the content they had created (Gulliford, 2021). Moreover, following the removal of several posts depicting escalating tensions in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah, some personal accounts of Palestinians were suspended. As a response, numerous individuals shared screenshots of their blocked accounts to disseminate information about the forceful evictions of Palestinian families in Sheikh Jarrah (Osman, 2021).

As per a report by Middle East Eye in 2022, the actions taken by "Facebook" and "Instagram" during Israel's 2021 assault on Gaza had significant implications for the basic human rights of Palestinians. Amidst the May 2021 conflict, the parent corporation of these platforms (Meta) faced extensive allegations of censorship and partiality (Middle East Eye, 2022). In the previous two years, Palestinians have documented over 1,400 complaints against social media corporations that censor Palestinian-related content. The favored approach for suppressing Palestinian content has been the suspension of accounts or coercing users to delete their posts. During the course of this conflict, the Israeli occupation resulted in the loss of 256 Palestinian lives, including 66 children (Gjevori, 2022).

## **CONCLUSION**

The coverage of Israeli attacks on Gaza through social media has garnered considerable attention, drawing significant engagement and serving as a prompt source of news for Palestinian social media users. Moreover, social media has played a prominent role in reporting on Israeli attacks on Gaza and dispelling rumors propagated by the Israeli occupation, prompting the researcher to delve further into this phenomenon. This article posits that social media possesses the potential to bolster the effectiveness of Palestinian efforts in advancing their cause.

Consequently, this study aims to inspire students, journalists, and activists to utilize social media as a novel and open platform in countering Israel's actions. Recognizing that the media battle on social networks poses a formidable challenge to the Israeli occupation, this research seeks to explore the dynamics of this emerging battleground. This study holds significant value as it contributes to the comprehension of the Palestinian issue, especially for students, activists, and journalists who wield social media as a potent tool to disseminate information about the massacres and victims within Gaza. By doing so, they aim to garner global and international public opinion, ultimately exposing the Israeli occupation on social media as a war criminal. As emphasized by Mason (2014), the media community's importance has grown in the modern era, with electronic media encompassing not only textual content but also multimedia elements. For Palestinians, social media has emerged as a crucial instrument to garner international support, especially after a period of marginalization of their cause (Setton, 2021). Despite attempts by media organizations and social media platforms to manipulate and distort narratives about Palestine, they will never succeed in concealing the truth or silencing Palestinians' legitimate calls for justice indefinitely (Zahzah, 2021).

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