INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS IN SOCIAL ISSUES: ISRAEL–PALESTINE CONFLICT

Nurathirah Arisya Mohd SaifulNizam*

Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia

*Corresponding email: 2023104359@student.uitm.edu.my

Abstract

Social media platforms have become dominant sources of information. They play a crucial role in shaping narratives, influencing opinions and fostering engagement among users This paper explores the impact of social media on public perceptions of social issues among Malaysians, with a focus on the Israel-Palestine conflict. Further research examines how visual content, echo chambers and filter bubbles contribute to the formation of Malaysians' mindset. A qualitative approach is employed, using semi-structured interviews to gather insights from Malaysian social media users aged 18 and above. The study examines the emotional and cognitive effects of social media engagement, particularly in shaping biases, reinforcing pre-existing beliefs, and influencing advocacy efforts. It contributes to media and communication studies by offering insights into mechanisms through which social media influences public perceptions, advocacy, and policymaking in the context of international conflicts. Furthermore, it potentially informs policymakers, media organisations, and digital literacy initiatives to promote balanced and inclusive discussions.

Keywords: *Visual Content, Public Perception, Echo Chambers, Filter Bubbles, Mindset*

Pengaruh Media Sosial Terhadap Persepsi Awam Dalam Isu Sosial: Konflik Israel-Palestin

Abstrak

Laman media sosial kini menjadi sumber maklumat utama yang memainkan peranan penting dalam membentuk naratif, mempengaruhi pendapat, dan meningkatkan interaksi dalam kalangan pengguna. Kajian ini meneroka kesan media sosial terhadap persepsi masyarakat Malaysia mengenai isu sosial, dengan tumpuan kepada konflik Israel-Palestin. Penyelidikan ini meneliti bagaimana kandungan visual, 'echo chambers', dan 'filter bubbles' mempengaruhi pemikiran masyarakat Malaysia. Pendekatan kualitatif digunakan melalui temu bual separa berstruktur melibatkan pengguna media sosial Malaysia berusia 18 tahun ke atas. Kajian ini turut meneliti kesan emosi dan kognitif yang timbul daripada penggunaan media sosial, terutama dalam membentuk prasangka, memperkukuh kepercayaan sedia ada, serta mendorong usaha advokasi. Hasil kajian ini dapat memperkayakan bidang komunikasi dan media dengan menawarkan pandangan baharu mengenai mekanisme pengaruh media sosial terhadap persepsi masyarakat, advokasi, serta dasar awam dalam konteks konflik antarabangsa. Dapatan kajian juga berpotensi membantu pembuat dasar, organisasi media, dan inisiatif literasi digital dalam mempromosikan perbincangan yang lebih seimbang dan inklusif.

Kata Kunci: *Kandungan Visual, Persepsi Awam, Echo Chamber, Filter Bubbles, Pemikiran*

Introduction

Cultural identities in Malaysia are complex and multifaceted, influenced by the country's history, religion, and ethnic diversity. Social media acts as a catalyst in this dynamic, providing a platform for individuals to express their cultural affiliations and engage in discussions about global issues like the Israel-Palestinian conflict.

Social media serves as a democratizing force, providing a space for voices that were historically marginalized or ignored (Haciyakupoglu and Zhang, 2015). This is particularly important in Malaysia, where minority groups can use social media to amplify their perspectives. To understand the influence of social media on public perceptions in Malaysia, it is essential to analyze data from various platforms. This includes sentiment analysis of posts related to the Israel-Palestinian

conflict, engagement metrics (likes, shares, comments), and demographic data of users participating in these discussions. A study by the International Journal of Communication and Cultural Diplomacy (2024) highlights the importance of understanding public sentiment surrounding geopolitical issues for media monitoring and diplomatic efforts. By leveraging data analytics, this research aims to uncover patterns and trends in the ways different cultural groups in Malaysia perceive the conflict. Past research highlights how social media can both unite and divide public opinion. The logic of connective action in social media allows for personalized content sharing, which can lead to both collective mobilization and fragmentation (Bennett, 2012). In Malaysia, this paradox is evident, as social media fosters solidarity among cultural groups while also amplifying divisions.

The widespread influence of social media on the general opinion regarding the Israeli Palestinian conflict in Malaysia needs additional investigation, particularly within a heterogeneous culture where visual contents, algorithms, and echo chambers may profoundly affect public perceptions. Highly active users on social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and X have become powerful instruments for distributing visual content and influencing narratives; but they also present dangers of disinformation, biased algorithms, and restricted access to public opinions.

One prominent example of misinformation in conflict reporting is the misinterpretation of genuine images showing the bodies of those killed by Hamas on 7 Oct, a 2015 video of the execution of a 16-year-old girl in Guatemala was misinterpreted online as showing a young Israeli woman being burned alive by a "Palestinian mob" (New Straits Times, 2024).

Furthermore, Datuk R Ramanan, Malaysia's Deputy Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives Minister emphasized that Western media outlets portray Palestine as a terrorist entity. However, he questioned this narrative, stating, "Are the children who are killed terrorists? Are nurses terrorists? Doctors? United Nations peacekeepers—are they terrorists? No. This (killing) is the brutality and cruelty of the Zionist regime. We are gathered here for Palestinian liberation; let us pray for peace and call for an end to the genocide in Palestine" (New Straits Times, 2024).

These examples highlight the significant role media narratives and misinformation play in shaping Malaysian engagement with conflict-related content. It raises critical questions about how Malaysians engage with conflict-related content, the emotional and cognitive impact of such exposure, and its implications for advocacy and public discourse. While global studies on this subject exist, research specifically examining these factors in the Malaysian context remains limited, underscoring the need for localized investigations.

In this globalization era, social media has become dominant in people's views on global conflicts in the Middle East, which is Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This study examines how social media platforms can shape public perceptions in social issues between young adults and social media users by age 18 years old and above differ from other existing studies.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do different social media platforms use visual content to shape public perceptions on Israel-Palestinian conflict?
RQ2: How do echo chambers and filter bubbles affect the diversity of public perceptions viewpoints regarding the Israel-Palestinian conflict?
RQ3: What are the mindset of the Malaysian public regarding the 2023 Israel-Palestinian conflict?

Research Objectives

RO1: To investigate how social media platforms use visuals to shape public perceptions of the Israel-Palestinian conflict.
RO2: To examine how echo chambers and filter bubbles reinforce public perceptions about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
RO3: To determine Malaysian public mindset towards the 2023 Israel-Palestinian conflict.

Literature Review

Social Media Platform Coverage and Portrayal

Various social media platforms show different levels of coverage and portrayal of the Israel-Palestinian conflict, shaped by their specific

characteristics and the types of users they attract. Facebook has 3.07 billion monthly active users, followed by YouTube with 2.53 billion, Instagram with 2 billion, TikTok with 1.69 billion, X with 590 million, Telegram with 950 million and more relevant social media platforms (DataReportal, 2024). The coverage and portrayal of the Gaza conflict in social media has been seen as contentious and controlled by Western. Individual, media routines, organisational, social institutional and social systems level factors have affected coverage of the conflict- and the depth and complexity of first-hand accounts (Fahmy et al. (2024). Khamis (2023) has criticised the issues of coverage failure to contextualize this complex and long-lasting conflict over several decades and flesh out the Palestinian victims by downplaying their continuous humanitarian suffering. Thus, while social media platforms serve as critical tools for information dissemination and grassroots activism, their role in shaping perceptions of the Israel-Palestinian conflict underscores the broader challenges of digital media ethics, representation, and the politics of visibility. Addressing these issues requires greater platform accountability, transparency in content moderation policies, and a commitment to amplifying diverse voices to ensure a more accurate and inclusive portrayal of conflicts.

Visual Content in Media and Its Influence

Visual content comprising images, videos, and infographics has a profound impact on public engagement and perception. The three primary forms of visual content - images, videos, and infographics were comprehensively examined to understand their impact on engagement and perception. Within the context of social communication, visual elements are analyzed for their function on shaping narratives, evoking emotions, and influencing public perception. Also, it is believed that visual symbols are more powerful than verbal ones in conveying tales, values, emotions, and persuasion (Amer, 2018). For example, after the assassination of Hamas military chief Ahmed Said Khalil al-Jabari in November 2012, the Israel Defence and Hamas' Alqassam Brigades posted graphic photos of civilian deaths and suffering on their Twitter accounts, as well as explicit propaganda (The Guardian, 2012).

Social Media as a Platform for Conflict Narratives

Social media has significantly influenced global conflict narratives, particularly Gaza war, by providing alternative perspectives and filling gaps in mainstream media coverage (Kokeyo, 2023), transforming how conflicts are reported and perceived (IEMED, 2024; Avelar, 2024). The platform's algorithm tends to prioritize content that generates high engagement, which can sometimes amplify sensationalist or emotionally charged posts. *X* is known for its real-time updates and concise format, making it a preferred platform for breaking news and immediate reactions. *Instagram, Facebook* and *X* have given civilians a voice via personal tales, photographs, and real-time updates. Viral hashtags like #freepalestine and #Gazaunderattack have raised awareness and started debates across borders (IEMED, 2024; Shestakov, 2022). Strong evidence that social media denotes conflict narratives can be seen through in 2014 where corporate media channels, BBC perpetuated the narrative of Israel as a victim and BBC headlined an article about Israel's renewed Hamas attacks, which was later edited to read "Israel steps up plans to stop rocket attacks from Gaza." (Ramamurthy, 2016). Through The Guardian news, Owen Jones' belief that the western media values Israeli life more than Palestinian life, highlighting blatant bias. This study explores the conflict narrative of Palestine-Israel on social media framing public perception.

Echo Chambers and Filter Bubbles

Echo chambers and filter bubbles significantly affect the diversity of viewpoints encountered by users regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Echo chambers occur when users are exposed predominantly to information and opinions that reinforce their existing beliefs, while filter bubbles are created by algorithms that curate content based on users' past behavior, further limiting exposure to diverse perspectives.

Flaxman, Goel, and Rao (2016) found that social media users are more likely to encounter news that aligns with their pre-existing views, reinforcing their beliefs and contributing to polarization.

Echo chambers and filter bubbles are particularly pronounced in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where the stakes are high, and emotions run deep. Studies have shown that users within these insular communities are more likely to encounter and share misinformation, which can exacerbate tensions and hinder constructive dialogue. During periods of heightened conflict, May 2021, social media platforms saw a surge in the spread of unverified claims and inflammatory content, often perpetuated within echo chambers. This not only affects users' perceptions but also has broader implications for public opinion and policymaking. Efforts to mitigate the effects of echo chambers and filter bubbles, such as promoting digital literacy and encouraging exposure to diverse viewpoints, are crucial for fostering a more informed and balanced discourse on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Malaysian Public Perceptions and Identity

Socio-politically and culturally unique identity often marked by strong solidarity with the Palestinian. This solidarity is deeply rooted in the Muslim majority of Malaysia, who perceive the conflict from religious, humanitarian, and geopolitical perspectives. It is believed that Malaysians' support for the Palestinians is not only linked to religious affinity but also to a sense of justice, given that the public frequently slams Israeli actions as a denial of international law.This sentiment led to public rallies, online advocacy, and Malaysian government policy stances on behalf of the Palestinians. At a time when Western media cannot be trusted, social media helps disseminate Gaza news and awareness. Malaysians as big pro-Palestine have boycotted American food chains and other products with Israeli links by voice support on social media (New Straits Times, 2024).

The multi-ethnic nature of Malaysia also influences public perception. One such view comes from non-Muslim Malaysians who, though not propelled by religious sentiments, often stand in line with humanitarian arguments in support of Palestinian struggles. Such positions also bring about the intersection of different cultural values that constitute Malaysian identity and thus allow for solidarity across ethnic and religious lines (New Straits Times, 2024).

More recently, ISEAS (2024) stresses that Malaysia's international image as a vocal supporter of Palestinian rights reflects the country's middle power identity in global geopolitics, using the Palestinian cause to express moral leadership over international issues.

Social media serves as an active platform for molding Malaysian perceptions. Platforms amplify such narratives in line with Malaysia's identity to create solidarity across borders while reaffirming national and cultural values.

Related Theories: Agenda-Setting Theory

Agenda-setting theory, developed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972, argues that the media has great power in shaping public discussion by selecting the issues in the public consciousness (Fazilat, 2021). During McCombs and Shaw seminal study of the 1968 U.S. presidential election, Bernand Cohen (1963) proposed an idea of the findings stated that the media may not be successful in telling people what to think. Still, it is stunningly successful in telling its audiences what to think about choosing to report on certain topics and not others. By presenting topics in a particular order and manner, news organisations and other media outlets provide a framework for public discourse, shaping what the public considers important or even worthy of consideration.
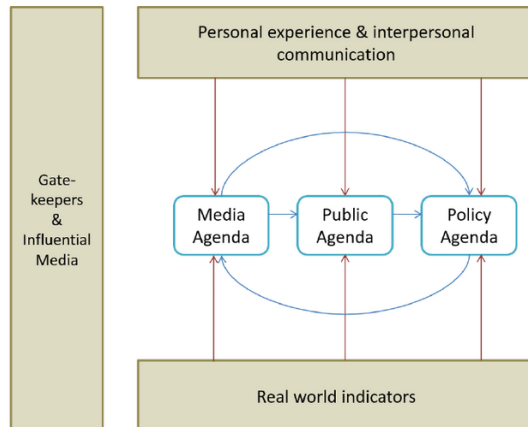

Figure 1: Three main component of Agenda-Setting Theory proposed by Rogers And Dearing (1988) (Albalawi & Sixsmith, 2015)

The model underlines the interdependence between media exposure and the salience of issues in the public's mind. By giving extensive coverage to certain events, conflicts, or stories, media outlets create an agenda of issues that influence the perceptions of their audiences. For example, within the context of global conflicts, media can emphasize one or another aspect of an issue, be it humanitarian crises, political—negotiations, or violence, which then influences how audiences prioritize or empathize with such issues. The development of the theory included the notion of second-level agenda-setting, where attention was placed on how certain attributes or frames of an issue were made more salient to influence public attitudes about them.

Social media has hugely amplified the dynamics of agenda-setting, creating an ecosystem where issues are encountered through curated feeds that are often algorithmically shaped. In contrast to traditional media, social platforms democratize agenda-setting, allowing not only influencers but also everyday users to push topics into mainstream visibility. However, while the platforms breed echo chambers and filter bubbles, they also enhanced selective exposure and bias as a factor in amplifying polarization on contentious issues such as those related to the Israel-Palestinian conflict.
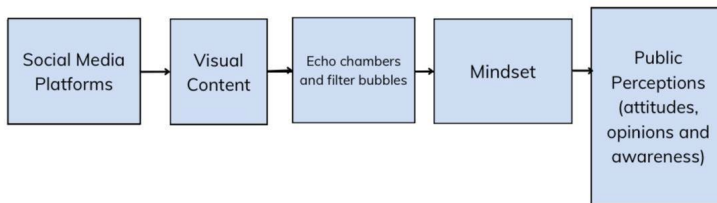
Research Framework

Figure 2: Research Framework

The following is the research framework, which begins with exploring social media platforms. Social media platforms influence how society perceives social issues of public interest regarding the Israel-Palestinian

conflict. It is based on a framework where the social media platforms are the main medium for the dissemination of visual content. Visual content is an up-and-coming form of communication wherein, through images, videos, and infographics, one can tell complex stories concisely and emotionally. Various researchers have identified that visual media enhances engagement and emotional impact-something quite relevant in conflict narratives where imagery often evokes hard reactions.

What is posted will become further polarized as it goes into echo chambers and filter bubbles. Echo chambers describe when an individual gets primarily information confirming their pre-existing belief system, while a filter bubble reinforces that through algorithms showing users what they are most likely to like. Within the context of the Israel-Palestinian conflict, this step is crucial, as it explains how repeated exposure to one-sided narratives fosters rigid mindsets and reinforces biases.

The influence that this may have upon public perceptions, which is constitutive of attitudes, opinion, and awareness, represents the final point of the framework. In line with the idea that a person's mindset, regarding certain issues, forms of exposure to narratives and lack of exposure to other narratives, the greater perceptions of conflict are consequently molded. This framework also fits the agenda-setting theory, as social media really decides not only which issues are discussed but also how they are framed. This model integrates the echo chamber and visual content model, hence embedding a more nuanced lens through which to analyze how public attitudes toward the Israel-Palestinian conflict are constructed and perpetuated.

Context and Background of the Study

Social media like Facebook, X, and Instagram are worldwide accessible and have revolutionized the communication flow and the way information is consumed. It ended the one-way communication era. There are 33.59 million internet users in Malaysia based on January 2024 which increased by 1.1 percent - 357 thousand between January 2023, while 28.68 million as active social media users from 18 years old and above at the beginning of 2024 (DataReportal, 2024).

As the connectivity of the internet becomes more common in developing countries, social media users have gained the opportunity to share information and ideas, allowing them to control the spread of views. By looking at social media context, news on the conflict between Israel and Palestine has been flooding each platform regularly, with news portals constantly broadcasting more information about the status of both parties. Al Jazeera has reported that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict dates back over a century, when Britain signed the Balfour Declaration during World War I, promising to establish a national home for Jews in Palestine. British soldiers took over the region from the Ottoman Empire at the end of October 1917. Then latest in 2023, Hamas retaliated against Israel by launching a surprise attack that included 5000 rockets and other offensive actions on Israeli territory. Hence, the world expected such a scenario to occur as enmity between Israel and Palestine had greatly grown since the 1973 Yom Kippur War that took place between both parties. Moreover, social media has played a significant role in the conflict, influencing all phases.

Besides that, social media users in Malaysia have multicultural ethics and religions, are have different ways to consume the latest news and spread awareness regarding the issues. Some of the users may be criticizing or supporting Palestine, remain neutral, or otherwise. These days, social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and others are used as main information sources, platforms for ideological conflicts, and instruments for global diplomacy (Garra-Alloush & Magadley, 2022) For example, social media has been effective in attracting worldwide users and influencing them to join in the conflict, even from afar. This research explores more on how social media has influenced in shaping of public opinions in aspects of the Israeli and Palestinian conflict.

Operational Definition

Evaluating human emotional responses (such as sadness, empathy, and frustration) and their knowledge of the issue allows one to delve into the concept of public perception. Examining how people think the media portrays and distorts the Israel-Palestinian conflict via "visual content" is an aspect of the study. Visual content refers to the graphic elements and images used

in various forms of communication, especially in the contexts of marketing and branding (Okat and Solak, 2019). One aspect of this study is looking at how well Malaysians were able to identify algorithmic bias and how actively they sought out other viewpoints. An echo chamber refers to a closed system in which individuals never hear anything that contradicts or speaks negatively of the beliefs (Yadav & Drew, 2023) In a similar vein, Malaysians trust in news sources, awareness of algorithmic influence, and ability to consume diverse content can be measured to describe filter bubbles, which are environments generated by personalisation algorithms and consist of only familiar information. One way to gauge the extent to which people share a common mindset is to look at how they feel about the conflict, how they follow advocacy movements (such as the #FreePalestine hashtag), and what they think about the impact of political decisions and international interventions.

Methodology

A qualitative approach has been applied to delve into the complex and personal perspectives of social media users on the Israel-Palestine issue. Focus groups and in-depth interviews conduct precise information. The in-depth interview session executed within interpretivism to highlight the acquisition of subjective information by analyzing persons in detail via extensive discussions (E-Internal Relations, 2021).

The collected data is subjected to thematic analysis, a method for identifying, describing, and drawing conclusions from overarching themes in datasets. The analysis includes coding the data, identifying the topics, and interpreting the results according to the research questions. Naeem and Ozuem (2022) identified six stages to the process: I. Keyword selection; II. Quotations; III. Coding; IV. Theming; V. Interpretation; and VI. Conceptual model creation. This study's data analysis follows the research objectives (RO) by using thematic analysis to investigate the impact of social media on views of the Israel-Palestinian conflict.

The summary of the data of two informants in terms of age both are 23 years old, female, single, Islam, and ethnic group Malay and average

daily use of social media (hours) eight hours and above for Informant 1, and two to three hours for Informant 2. Both informants share the same demographic characteristics. The sample size is limited (n=2) with the sample being chosen based on convenient sampling and the other one based on purposive sampling. The purposive sampling is being used due to the Informant frequently use social media in daily and almost use all the social media platforms. Informants also keep on posting, resharing, and following up about the conflict

Findings and Discussion

The findings are categorized based on the research objectives; i) to investigate how social platforms use visual content to shape public perceptions on Israeli-Palestinian conflict ii) to examine how echo chambers and filter bubbles reinforce public perceptions about Israeli-Palestinian conflict, iii) to determine the Malaysian public's mindset towards the 2023 Israeli-Palestinian.

RQ1: How do different social media platforms use visual content to shape public perceptions on Israel-Palestinian conflict?

The Role of Visual Content in Emotional Mobilization

The analysis of interview data revealed that visual content plays a significant role in shaping public opinion on conflict. Informants described the visual content as gore, disturbing, dismembered, bloody and emotionally overwhelming. Informant 2 responded:

"I rarely watch videos or any other visual contents regarding the conflicts as they are so violence and gore because they tend to be violent, graphic, and emotionally overwhelming."

"As I previously mentioned, the visual posts impacted my emotions negatively as it tends to get violence and gore, and I do not have the guts to watch them."

"Seeing videos and photos of violence and suffering often leads to feelings of helplessness, frustration, and empathy."

The explicit nature of these visuals was described as disturbing by Informant 1:

"The contents kinda (kind of) disturbing and too explicit"

"It is disturbing, but not for my personal views it doesn't really distract or impact my emotions like I got trauma."

Additionally, the informants faced the emotional impact despite watching those gore visual content. While social media has the power to raise awareness, it also contributes to emotional distress among certain users. As highlighted by Informant 1 and 2:

"For my personal views it doesn't really distract or impact my emotions like I got trauma."

"Emotionally impacts with thinking on "how dare them?"

"Seeing such visual contents can be extremely distressing and can negatively impact me emotionally"

"It can be emotionally draining."

The exposure to these violent images described how sometimes they feel useless, helpless, frustrated, sad, weird perspectives and urge the law enforcement in human rights.

"The visual posts also made me feel useless as I do not have any capacity or powers to help the Palestinians."

"Seeing videos and photos of violence and suffering often leads to feelings of helplessness, frustration, and empathy."

"It's quite frustrating, and disappointing how the world is actually quite biased because of brainwashing"

"It does make me sad."

"These debates often revolve around human rights, international law, and the legality of actions taken by both sides in the conflict."

"They have weird perspectives or opinions, even when the Muslim leader or Palestine is killed by Israel, they actually like celebrating it as something of a victory that they are proud of. It's kind of weird"

The strong emotional reactions align with Agenda Setting Theory, which posits that the media can shape public opinion by highlighting specific issues. However, repeated exposure led to emotional fatigue, making some users less engaged over time and it is supported that visuals are more powerful than verbal ones in emotions, and persuasion (Amer, 2018).

RQ2: How do echo chambers and filter bubbles affect the diversity of public perceptions viewpoints regarding the Israel-Palestinian conflict?

The Influence of Echo Chambers and Filter Bubbles

Findings confirm social media platforms contribute to echo chambers significantly reinforce one-sided narratives then shaping how Malaysian social media users perceive the conflict. The indicator stated by informant 1 explained how social media tends to present information that aligns with a user's pre-existing beliefs by limiting the exposure towards diverse points then leads to human bias. Informant 1 observed:

"Everything updates how many people have been dismembered because of the cold war and at the same time for those people that support Israel, mostly from the US, or anyone that is Indian, from an Indian country, everything that they usually side with"

"But we can say how they're quite biased if Muslim is meant to be religious, it causes something bad but if Israel being too religious is normal because it's what Jesus says."

"It's quite frustrating, and disappointing how the majority is actually quite biased because of brainwashing. As long as anything doesn't happen to the US, the defense issue, so it's fine."

However, human bias either by the politician, citizen, media ownership itself will lead to accuracy and authenticity of news as they have the power of control. Informants 1 and 2 found:

"As the conflict involves those who control the world economically and politically (read: USA), the accuracy and authenticity of the news are often tainted."

"We can see obviously Meta, because they control Instagram, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp."

Furthermore, concerns on censorship and content filtering on Palestinian due to cover up the truth were raised by Informant 1.

"They always like to censor or filter any content that sided on Palestinian."

"As we say that the Meta are trying to cover up the truth or what's currently happening."

Informant 1 highlighted platforms like Meta depriotize pro-Palestinian content to push propaganda and public demands.

"Mostly they tried to push the propaganda of Israel and as they are peacemakers."

"Every information or current issue, anything is for the public's demands"

Furthermore, findings claimed users are often trapped in manipulation of social media algorithms where opposing viewpoints are suppressed with Informant 2:

"The algorithm is often biased more towards the Israeli as they paid the social media owners/developers to boost postings where they are the so-called 'victims' of the conflict."

These insights demonstrate how algorithm-driven content curation not only shapes user perspectives but also raises ethical concerns about fairness, authenticity, and media manipulation in global conflicts. Addressing these issues requires increased transparency from tech

companies and critical engagement from social media users to challenge biased narratives.

RQ3: What are the mindset of the Malaysian public regarding the 2023 Israel-Palestinian conflict?

The Malaysian Mindset on the Conflict

The Malaysian public mindset towards the conflict was also examined by revealing a strong inclination toward supporting Palestine. Informants 1 and 2 emphasized the role of real-time updates because of the existence of the whistleblowers in mobilizing the public awareness. Despite ongoing boycotts, there is uncertainty about whether people remain fully engaged with these updates. This highlights the challenge of sustaining public awareness and action in long-term conflicts.

"So, we can observe that the real-times update is getting low because either people don't care anymore, or maybe they are real updates, but people don't give their attention to it because it's already been too long that people don't really pay their attention too."

"But I believe that they are still a real-time update from the Palestinian people, especially the journalists from Palestinian."

"Real-time updates create a sense of urgency and immediacy. They make the conflict feel more personal and pressing to those who did not try to even contribute to stop the conflicts."

"I'm not sure if they are actually aware of the whistleblower trying to get our attention back, since we have been boycotting them for almost two years."

Malaysian social media users demonstrate a strong inclination toward pro-Palestinian narratives, influenced by political factors, lack of international intervention and people become caring less over the time.

"It makes me feel a sense of helplessness and frustration, knowing that these children are paying the price for political decisions made by others."

"What's even more upsetting is the lack of international intervention to stop this suffering."

"So, we can observe that the real-times update is getting low because either people don't care anymore, or maybe they are real updates, but people don't give their attention to it because it's already been too long that people don't really pay their attention too."

This research supports existing literature that suggests collective identity formations play a crucial role in shaping online activism on *Instagram, Facebook* and *X* which given civilians a voice via viral hashtags like #freepalestine and #Gazaunderattack have raised awareness and started debates across borders (IEMED, 2024; Shestakov, 2022). Otherwise, the presence of digital advocacy efforts, such as boycott campaigns and viral hashtags like #FreePalestine and #FromTheRivesToTheSea,PalestineWillBeFree serves as a tool for media influence.

"I guess for Malaysians, I think is #IsraelKoyak. But more I don't know if it's a useful hashtag, but it is like quotes which is #FromTheRiverToTheSea,PalestineWillBeFree."

"Hashtags and trending topics are essential for finding relevant content quickly. On this conflict, we are aware on with #FreePalestine."

Fact-checking initiatives and algorithmic transparency are important in combating misinformation. Informants emphasized the importance of open discussions to counter propaganda and correct misleading information, particularly regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They highlighted how social media can be used to manipulate public perception, with the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) often portraying themselves as victims while Palestinians face severe hardships. The disparity in access to basic necessities and digital platforms further underscores the need for fair and transparent content moderation. Neutrality in algorithms and promoting verified information can help create a more accurate and balanced understanding of the conflict.

"It's very good for people to discuss their own knowledge and share what people miss to learn or misinformation that have been distributed through propaganda, everything to keep the side of Israel."

"However, it can also spread misinformation's for instance the IDF on Twitter/X often play victim as if they were the one that suffers the most while in reality, they still have the privilege to use social media while the Palestinian cannot even afford drinking water and basic food."

Thus, informant 2 shared the legal implications is a must to advocate humanitarian aid and legal protection for civilians.

"Their innocence and vulnerability make it all the more painful to witness, and it reinforces the importance of advocating for humanitarian aid and legal protections for civilians, especially children, in conflict zones."

Recommendation

Future research should explore a larger and more diverse sample to understand how different age groups, ethnicities, and backgrounds in Malaysia perceive the Israel-Palestinian conflict through social media. Researchers should examine the long-term psychological effects of repeated exposure to visual content and whether it leads to emotional fatigue or desensitization. Studying the role of media literacy programs in helping users critically analyze online content could provide insights into reducing misinformation and bias. Future studies could investigate how government policies and platform regulations affect the visibility and censorship of conflict related content on social media.

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrated consistency, as recurring themes emerged across participants despite variations in their backgrounds and perspectives. Credibility and reliability were reinforced through peer debriefing and triangulation, ensuring that the themes were systematically validated. By incorporating diverse perspectives, the study captured a broad range of experiences and attitudes toward social media engagement with conflict-related content. The in-depth interview protocol effectively facilitated responses aligned with the research objectives. Thematic analysis identified five (5) overarching codes and 30 themes, offering a structured understanding of the data. Overall, this study provides valuable insights into how Malaysians interact with conflict-related content, contributing a localized perspective to the global discourse on social media influence on the public.

Author's Declaration

This article has not been published previously, not under consideration for publication elsewhere. This publication has approved by all authors for publication and has not been published elsewhere printed or electronically in the same form or in any other language without the written consent of the copyright-holder, which is Forum Komunikasi.

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