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Fighting Wars, Killing People: New Media And Awareness Of Gaza-Israeli 2023 War

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Abstract

The recurring Israeli-Palestinian war has entered a new phase of narrative shaping with the advent of new media. This work provides an examination of new media awareness on the conflict, offering insights into its dual capacity as a tool for both unity and division. Social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Facebook were used by the warring factions in disseminating information about the war. These platforms empowered activists and citizens to broadcast their experiences and mobilize support, yet they equally facilitate the spread of disinformation and incitement. The paper is based on qualitative research method, where books, journals and other printed materials were reviewed. The paper argues for the mindful and strategic use of social media, urging a balance between harnessing its power for constructive dialogue and curbing the risks of exacerbating tensions. The agenda setting theory was used for the work. It was recommended that media houses should not wait for conflicts to escalate before creating awareness or reporting about them.

Key words: Israel-Palestinian conflict, New media, Hamas, Peace Journalism, Social media

INTRODUCTION

New media has penetrated our lives like oxygen; people use the media for obtaining all kinds of information. McCombs (2002) noted that during framing the news stories for the media, the journalist refines and reshapes our pictures of the world. Roger and Dearing (1978) found that the media select or reject issues and events and then rank them according to hierarchy of importance.

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Page and Shapiro (1992) state that television news coverage of major foreign issues did much more than affect the salience of these issues. Media organizations decide to present some news more than other which they think are less important to the general public so they kill this information and bring others into the mainstream. During war, the scarce role of the new media can be revealed. How they shape public opinion about the war becomes clear

The prolonged conflict between Israeli and Palestinian communities has entered a new phase in the digital era, where new media has become a stage of multidimensional influence and engagement (Yarchi & Ayalon, 2023). This study tried to highlight audience awareness of the Gaza-Israeli 2023 war. Due to the development of information and communication technology, especially since the emergence of new media, the paradigm of society's interaction and communication has altered drastically.

New media is used in crisis and conflicts for different reasons and by several actors, such as affected citizens, bystanders, media as well as emergency services.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict spans back to the early 20th century. The establishment of the state of Israel of 1948 and the subsequent Arab-Israeli war led to the displacement of a large number of Palestinians and set the stage for decades of strife (Chorev, 2019). Following the 1967 six-Day War, Israel's occupation of the Gaza strip and the West Bank further intensified the conflict. Palestinian resistance took shape, with various groups emerging, most notably Hamas, dedicated to opposing Israeli presence in Palestinian territories (Huda, Nurmandi, Qodir, Sutan & Utaminingsih, 2022).

The period from 2019 to 2021 saw intermittent spikes in violence, characterized by cross-border hostilities with rocket attacks and air strikes resulting in casualties and significant damage (David & Shalhoub-Kevokian, 2023). The volatile situation escalated dramatically in October 2023, when Hamas intensified rocket assaults into Israeli territory. Israel's subsequent declaration of war and the comprehensive siege of Gaza marked a new phase of intense conflict.

Without doubt, social media's role has become increasingly central, with its influence permeating each phase of the conflict. Platforms like Twitter, Instagram and others now serve as primary source of information. The current digital landscape, especially considering the recent escalations, emphasizes the need for critical examination of how New Media shapes the narrative and potentially impacts the trajectory of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is a modern theatre where historical grievances are aired, and future strategies are debated, with every post, tweet and share contributing to a global understanding and engagement with this enduring struggle (Lewis, 2023).

This work analyse the role of new media in mobilizing public opinion and influencing the international discourse on the conflict.

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METHODOLOGY

This paper adopted the qualitative research approach. It relied on secondary data from textbooks, journals,internet, book chapters, etc. It enabled the researcher assemble on the news coverage of the Israeli-Gaza war.

Problem Statement

The development of new media has expanded public diplomacy between states. Along with creating awareness, new media platforms are also the main tool for wars today. New media platforms produce awareness in the public. However, as information flow intensifies on social media platforms, disinformation and manipulation have also taken their place on the agenda. Every war is fought for more than one motive. Why war takes place is not always clear, even more problematic is why a given war occurs between given states. The deaths, pains, sufferings, deprivation and anguish brought about by the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts are indescribable. The sights of dead and mortally wounded victims, especially women and children make even the strongest to shed tears. These recurring Israeli-Gaza conflicts have got to stop.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Review of Concepts

Israeli - Palestine Crisis: An overview

The Gaza strip and Israel have been in conflict since the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza in 2005, which it had hitherto occupied since 1967. The United National and several human right organizations continue to classify Gaza as held under Israeli occupation, due to its effective military control over the territory.

Hamas, an Islamist militant group, won the 2006 Palestinian Legislative election and a subsequent battle in the Gaza strip between it and Fatah, led to it taking over governance in the strip, which escalated tensions with Israel. Israel along with Egypt, improved a blockade that significantly damaged Gaza's economy, citing security concerns as the justification.

International right groups have characterized the blockade as a form collective punishment, while Israel defended it as necessary to prevent weapons and dual use goods from entering the territory.

Since the blockade, Israel and Palestinian militants have had several clashes and made attacks on each other. Hamas officials said their attack was a response to the Israeli occupation, blockade of Gaza strip, Israeli settler violence against Palestinians, restrictions on the movement of Palestinians and imprisonment of thousands of Palestinians.

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Following the attack, American counter terrorism analyst Bruce Hoffman Pointed to the 1988 Hamas Charter, commenting that Hamas had always had genocidal intentions and that it had no intentions for moderation, restraints, negotiation and the building of pathways to peace.

Social Media and the War in Gaza

Since Hamas took control of Gaza in 2007, Israel has maintained air, land and sea restrictions on access to and from Gaza for people and goods, in concert with similarly tight parameters that Egypt enforces at its land border with Gaza. On October 9, Israel announced a complete Siege in Gaza that would apparently cut Gaza's residents off from the flow of food, water, fuel and electricity. On October 12, Israel's energy minister said that Israel- imposed restrictions on the flow of goods, including fuel and the cessation of the provision of water and electricity services from Israel to Gaza would remain in place until the release of Israeli hostage from Gaza.

The terrorist attack in Israel on October 7was swift and brutal and horrified the world. But with the ongoing Israeli retaliatory attack on Gaza being played out on social media since then, day after day- in videos that often cannot be verified, the narrative has changed.

The sympathy of a lot of people in the world has shifted away from Israelis, adding that the IDF holding press conference is very different than seeing the aftermath of the attacks in Gaza. One Gaza based journalist, Plestia Alaqad, recently posted to her 3.6 million Instagram followers a video of the blue sky above her filling with smoke from a dropped bomb, and captioned it "I miss waking up to a clear blue sky''. When ABC news attempted to reach Alaqad for an interview, she did not respond. In one of her recent posts, she said, her videos speak for themselves.

The social media platform Snapchat has been used since the war began by some Gazans to post images from their lives, with videos showing people in long queues at bakeries or for water, or gathered crowds at hospitals and schools. Some international media correspondents were also able to continue broadcasting. Al Jazeera said its correspondents had been able to provide sporadic updates through satellite communication.

To advance their narratives and attract attention, 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 service" have enabled users to generate, produce, share information, search for content, and rate are referred to as social media (Bohler & Merwe, 2011).

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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 audience (Alaklouk and Mokhtar, 2017).

West Bank: Israel- Palestinian Unrest and Violence

Israeli-Palestinian tensions in the west Bank were increasing even before the outbreak of the October Israel- Hamas conflict after an upsurge in Israeli. Israeli- Palestinian violence during 2022, Casualties spiked even further in 2023. Around 30 Israelis and 190 West Bank Palestinians were killed in attacks by militants and for extremists on both sides or in clashes involving Israeli security forces and Palestinian Militants.

In 2022, some Palestinian Authority (PA) personnel reportedly acted outside their authority by directly targeting Israeli forces or settlers, raising questions about the PA'S ability to control individual's actions.

In summer 2023, clashes between Israeli forces and Palestinian Militants intensified in the Northern West Bank. Reports indicate that Hamas and PIJ may have increased their direct involvement, perhaps helping West Bank Militants employ tactics similar in sophistication to those used by Iran-supported groups in Lebanon and Gaza, such as improvised explosive devices. After a Palestinian shooting attack in June killed four Israeli settlers, a group of Israeli settlers stormed a Palestinians town, setting fire to multiple homes and cars in asscene reminiscent of a similar reprisal attract by settlers in February.

What is Hamas and who supports it?

Hamas, or the Islamic Resistance Movement, is a Palestinian Islamist military and socio political movement that grew out of the Muslim Brotherhood, a Sunni religious and political organization founded in Egypt in 1928 that has branches through the world. Hamas emerged in Gaza in the late 1980s and established itself as an alternative to the secular Fatah movement in the 1990s by violently attacking Israeli targets after Fatah had entered into a peace process with Israel. Overtime, Hamas has attacked or repressed Palestinian Political and Factional opponents.

After Israel withdrew military force from Gaza in 2005, Hamas forcibly seized the territory from the Fatah- Controlled Palestinian Authority (PA) in 2007. Hamas has both political and military components and exercise de Facto government authority and manages services provision in Gaza.

Hamas controls Gaza through its security forces and obtains resources from smuggling, informal taxes, and reported external assistance. According to the U.S State

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Department, "Hamas has received funding, weapon, and training from Iran and raises funds in Persian Gulf countries. Media reporters have suggested that during this decade, Hamas has received some of its funding in cryptocurrency.

Yahya Sinwar, Hamas Leader for Gaza, came from Hamas Military wing. Hamas and other Gaza-based militants have engaged in occasional conflict with Israel since Hamas seized Gaza by force in 2007.

During major conflicts in 2008-2009,2012, 2014 and 2021, Hamas and other militants launched rockets towards Israel, and Israelis military strike decimated much of Gaza's infrastructure.

Israeli-Hamas War: Why?

Hamas leaders have said that their planning and preparation for the October 2023 attacks took place over several years, suggesting that the group made a strategic decision to prepare itself to be able to carry out attacks and operations that might change the status quo and prevailing assumptions in the group's long confrontation with Israel. Thedecision to launch the attacks in October 2023 reflects various Hamas motivating factors such as;

- Disrupting Arab- Israeli domestic turmoil
- Seeking to strengthen its domestic and regional position
- Capitalizing on Israeli domestic turmoil
- Using hostages for prisoner releases or other concessions

According to report by the Wall Street Journal and CNN, Citing a cryprocurency analyst firm, digital currency wallet linked to Hamas allegedly received about $41 million over a similar time frame (a figure attributed to a different analytics firm), but Israeli authorities may have been able to interdict some or all of that amount. Israel has reportedly spent billions of dollars on "sensors to detect underground movement and building a barrier toblock tunnels from reaching into Israel". From FY 2016 to FY 2023, after Hamas extensive use of cross- border tunnels in the 2014 Israel- Hamas conflict.

Crisis Communication and Peace Journalism

The role of social media in the Israeli –Palestinian conflict is multifaceted and deeply influential. Social media remains a pivotal forum for activist and dissenters to voice their concerns, while simultaneously, it serves as a platform that security agencies closely scrutinize for potential threats. According to Wolfsfeld et al (2013), social media can offer a voice to the voiceless, allowing marginalized groups to be heard on a global stage.

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In the context of the Israeli –Palestinian conflict, this has meant that both Israeli and Palestinians have been able to bypass traditional media outlets to tell their stories directly to the world (Wolfsfeld, Segev, & Sheafer, 2013).

Social media has emerged as a transformative force in contemporary conflicts, offering a platform for dialogue, activism, and the spread of information. Its role in peace and conflict is complex, as it carries the potential to both fuel tensions and foster dialogue. A study by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) highlights this dual nature, showing that while social media can incite violence, it can also be used to de-escalate conflict through peace messaging and the promotion of dialogue (UNDP,2019).

New media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat has been used to communicate the ongoing crisis between Israel and Gaza. The sights of dead and mortally wounded victims, especially children and women is all over the media space.

Further examining the new media's role in crisis communication, Zeitzoff (2017) argues that the new media has the power to mobilize supporters and influence political outcomes. In the case of the Israeli –Palestinian conflict, this has meant the mobilization of protests, the organisation of grassroots campaign and the global spread of political narratives (Zeitzoff, 2017). The very nature of new media's rapid information sharing has sometimes resulted in the escalation of tense situations due to spread of unverified or inflammatory content. The potential of new media as tool for peace is significant. Galtung's theory of peace of journalism highlights the role media can play in promoting understanding and reconciliation (Galtung,1965). However, new media platforms can also be a double-edged sword, as the same tool used for promoting peace can also spread hate speech and incitement. For instance, Israeli government and military officials have used social media to make strong statements; the prime minister of Israel posted a message using dehumanizing language, and the minister of National Security, Itamar Ben Gvir, made a statement regarding Hamas on twitter.

In the Israeli - Palestinian context, new media has become an essential tool for crisis communication and peace journalism.

New media, Conflict and Conflict Reporting

Conflict according to Abass (2018) is considered as an overall socio-economic development of any society, obstacle to progress, economic prosperity and political stability. Hence, conflict must be managed properly so it does not escalate into war. Conflict can be defined in this paper as escalation of disagreement which is brought about by a clash of interest.

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A new media platform has become a key part of our daily lives. The percentage of people who use platforms like Twitter, Tiktok, Instagram, YouTube and Facebook has risen dramatically. These platforms were used in disseminating information about the conflict between Israel –Gaza. The advent of social media has brought a transformational shift in how individuals and groups organize and galvanize support for various causes (Abushbak & Majeed, 2020). The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is no exception, with both sides utilizing these platforms to mobilize supporters, orchestrate campaigns among others. A study by Arifuddin (2022) highlights how political actors and activists use social media to both set the agenda and determine the framing of the Israeli - Palestianian conflict in the digital sphere.

Furthermore, the influence of new media is not limited to reporting conflict or organizing protest; it also serves as a powerful platform for influencing the narratives surrounding the conflict. Through the strategic use of new media, actor within the conflict can frame their perspectives in a manner that appeals to emotions and perceived historical narratives, thereby gaining sympathizers and supporters (Oxford analytical, 2013).

New media has shaped conflict reporting in diverse ways. This can be seen in the various online movements within the Israeli- Palestinian war, where platforms like twitter, in particular, has been a space where hashtags related to the war often trend globally, drawing attention to specific incidents or broader issues around the war. These online activities not only raise awareness but also put pressure on policy makers and international observers.

Social media play a significant role in enhancing awareness on the Israeli- Palestinian 2023 war. It is a clear- cut war where Muslims are supporting Palestine and Hamas and Christians supporting Israel. Some hashtags like #IstandwithIsrael, #IstandwithHamas has taken over the media space. Social media sometime are not balance in their reportage. There is often an iota of bias in their reportage and this has somewhat increased the tension in the Isreali- Palestinian war. Through live tweet, videos, and posts, the global audience receives a more personalized and immediate portrayal of the conflict, which can influence either positively or negatively. This crystalizes theimportance of virtues of journalism; accuracy, objectivity and truth.

Theoretical Framework

The paper is anchored on the Agenda setting theory and the Just War theory. The Agenda setting theory was first propounded by Dr. Maxwell McCombs and Dr. Donald Shaw in 1972. Robinson (1999) said that new technologies have transformed the potential of the new media to deliver a constant flow of global, real-time news. Donohue (1995) said a 'guard

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dog' perspective is obtained to understand the better functioning of the mass media which is an important set of communication agencies in the social system. According to him, this perspective takes into account, the varying role performances by mass media in reporting on major issues. It deals with audience awareness and information. Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972) noted that media do not tell us what to think but rather what to think about.

Media provide an agenda for public discussion of an issue and sets the stage for the audience understanding. The mass media and the new media by reporting events such as the war in Gaza draws people's attention to the war as it unfolds, including various issues that relate to the event.

The new media especially the social media have been replete with content, especially videos of the conflict. Videos of children and women dead and wounded are everywhere making the world to cry and question the humanity of the warmongers and war entrepreneurs and terrorists, like Hamas.

The Just War Theory (Jus Bellum iustum)

Just War Theory is an ethical theological and philosophical explanation on the wrongness of war and the conditions upon which war could gain legitimacy. Simply put, Just War Theory x-rays conditions that provide judgement.

The Just War Theory (jus Bellum iustum), a doctrine of military ethics developed by moral theologians and international policy makers, holds that a violent conflict should meet approved philosophical, religious and political criteria for it to be acceptable. The attention and discussions on war ethics emanated from the concern raised by people who questioned the justification for the suffering caused by the Gaza-Israeli 2023 war. The just war theory has three main areas of interest. The first is the establishment of jus ad bellum (the right to go to war). The second is establishing jus in bella (right conduct within wars) while the third is jus post bellum which harps on (justice after the war).

Embedded Journalism (A Concept)

Embedded journalism refers to news reporters being attached to military units involved in armed conflict. These reporters travel with the troops, camp with them and report from the battle field. In fact, they eat, live, travel and sleep with the troops (Katovsky, 2023). One of the major problems of embedded journalism is the polarization of perspectives. In the case of the Gaza-Israeli war, embedded journalism provides a means to control to some extent, what gets to the audience as the embedded reporters unwittingly

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and in some cases, are wittingly biased in their reportage. Thereby exposing each sides supporters predominantly to contents that aligns with their existing beliefs.

Beyond reasonable doubt, embedding has become part of modern warfare. While it enables the media practitioners of both warring factors to be in the war front and get first hand information. The information that go out of the battlefield is somewhat controlled. It is clear that the new media will continue to play a significant role in shaping conflict narrative. The questions then are: Can there be a just war? Are these wars unavoidable? Do the players observe the rule of engagement in the execution of the wars? And what happens after the war? So many people have condemned the war between Gaza-Israeli, arguing that the key players have neither exploited all peaceful means nor employed the rules of engagement. As it is always said, the important thing is not winning the war, but surviving the peace. Jus post bellum aims at ensuring justice and good conduct after a war.

DISCUSSION

The coverage of Israeli-Gaza war through social media has garnered considerable attention, drawing significant engagement and serving as a prompt source of news for social media users. There are also so many indicators that the media are biased in their reportage of the Israel-Palestinian war. This was done by setting up background for public discussion through Agenda setting theory. One of the main challenges is the spread of misinformation and the difficulty in verifying facts. Misinformation can fuel hostility and lead to real-world violence, making the task of peace keeping even more complex (Magdaci, Matalon, & Yamin,2022).

Another significant concern is the use of social media platforms as tools for propaganda by both Israel and Palestinian actors (Abushbak & Majeed, 2020). Tapping into a global audience, both sides of the conflict have the ability to craft and propagate narratives that serve their strategic interests. The challenge here is the polarization of perspectives, where each side's supporters are exposed predominantly to contents that aligns with their existing beliefs, as explained by Katz and Shapiro (2019). This 'echo chamber' effect can reinforce hardline stances and hinder the prospects for understanding and dialogue. According to a report by Greenberg and Byers (2022), social media has been used by both Israeli defense forces and Palestinian groups to gather intelligence and conduct cyber operations against each other, sometimes leading to a 'digital arms race' that complements the physical conflict.

This discourse revealed that social media has brought unity and created divisions. While it has amplified global criticism of Israeli policies, it has also sparked outbreaks of violence and internal discord among Palestinians. It is clear that new media will continue to

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play a significant role in shaping conflict narrative. The capacity of social media to function as a tool for peace building or as a catalyst for violence underscores the critical need for a nuanced understanding and strategic use of this digital resource by all involved.

CONCLUSION

The power of new media, when harnessed effectively, can contribute to creating bridges of understanding and dialogue, yet its misuse can just as easily deepen existing conflicts. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with its deep historical roots and complex geopolitical dimensions, continues to challenge the global community's pursuit of peace and security. New media has continued to play a vital role in creating awareness about issues in the world and has made people to participate in discussing the Gaza-Israeli 2023 war. This would have been impossible without the new media. Thus, new media has enabled participation through discussions about the war. People are discussing issues that caused the war and how a lasting solution can be achieved for the war that has lasted for decades. The agenda setting function of the new media have been played very actively by creating awareness and increasing interest about the war, thereby keeping the world updated about the Gaza –Israeli war.

The analysis of social media's impact reveals a dual nature-it is both a unifier and a divider. While social media is not a panacea for the deeply entrenched Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it remains a powerful force with the potential to alter the course of history. The collective responsibility is to drive this force toward the advancement of peace, understanding and a future where both Israelis and Palestinians can coexist and thrive.

Recommendations

Based on the discussion and conclusion of the paper, the following recommendations are made:

- Peace building organizations should be supported to use media more strategically and meaningfully as a tool for dialogue, allowing for pairing with offline interventions.
- Technological companies and donors should increase efforts to leverage new media as a public tool for positive political dialogue and countering misinformation and prejudice that can lead to violence.
- Media houses should beam their torchlight and not wait for conflict to escalate before creating awareness about them.
- Social media should be harnessed effectively in creating bridges of understanding and dialogue amidst war.

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