The Role of Using Hashtags in Building of Political Knowledge On Facebook: The Case of Sheikh Jarrah

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Abstract

This study is an exploratory study to enhance the understanding of the role of Facebook in shaping users' understanding and increasing their knowledge of political issues in Egypt, and thus affecting their opinions and online and offline activities. It focused on whether the use of hashtags to link posts to a specific issue gives a clear and more coherent knowledge of political issues and increase the circulation of the posts or it would not have an effect. The case of Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in El Quds conflict was chosen and all posts with the three highest circulating hashtags (#savesheikhjarrah, #GazaUnderAttack and #freepalestine) were analyzed. The results show that using hashtags did not increase the circulation of posts beyond the first "interest stage". In addition, the content of the posts linked did not give any information on the conflict itself or its consequences. The calls for actions were restricted to online support activities with very few calls for offline activities.

Keywords: Political Knowledge – Political Understanding – Facebook Posts – Hashtags – Egypt

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دور استخدام الهاشتاج في بناء المعرفة السياسية على الفيس بوك: دراسة حالة

ملخص الدراسة :

هذه دراسة استكشافية لدراسة دور الفايسبوك في تشكيل فهم المستخدمين وزيادة معرفتهم بالقضايا السياسية في مصر مما يؤثر على آرائهم وأنشطتهم عبر الإنترنت وخارجها. وركزت الدراسة على ما إذا كان استخدام الهاشتاج لربط المنشورات بقضية معينة يعطي معرفة أكثر تكاملًا بالقضايا السياسية ويزيد من تداول المنشورات أم أنه لن يكون له تأثير. تم اختيار قضية حي الشيخ جراح للداسة وتم تحليل جميع المنشورات التي تحتوي على أعلى ثلاث هاشتاج تداولاً (saveskeikhjarrah#) و GazaUnderAttack# و freepalestine#).تظهر النتائج أن استخدام الهاشتاج لم يزيد من تداول المنشورات إلى ما بعد "مرحلة الاهتمام" الأولى. بالإضافة إلى ذلك ، فإن محتوى المنشورات المرتبطة لم يقدم أي معلومات عن النزاع نفسه أو عواقبه. اقتصرت الدعوات لاتخاذ الإجراءات على أنشطة الدعم الإفتراضية عبر الإنترنت مع عدد قليل جدًا من الدعوات للأنشطة على أرض الواقع وغير المتصلة بالإنترنت. وأخيرًا، فإن الهاشتاج المستخدم في هذه الحالة لم يسمح بتعدد الآراء الخاصة بالقضية أو تقبل الرأي الآخر. ويرجع ذلك لطبيعة الهاشتاج المنحازة للقضية الفلسطينية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المعرفة السياسية، منشورات الفايسبوك، الهاشتاج

Introduction

Social media became a main source of information among users. According to Hootsuite and We are Social annual DIGITAL report for 2021, because of the spread of COVID-19, the number of people connected to the internet jumped by 13% since the 2020 report, with the number of social media users reaching 4.2 billion by early 2021 [1]. According to the ICT Indicators Bulletin published by the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology in Egypt in June 2021, about 90% of the Internet users in Egypt use the internet to access social media [2], which roughly translates to 47.4% of the population[3]. Social media became a crucial tool to Egyptians in their daily lives with an average of 3 hours spent on social media daily and nine social media apps used by each Egyptian at the same time, which make Egypt ranks 16th globally in the world for time spent on social media[4].

According to Statista website, Facebook ranks the first as the most popular social media platform in the world[5], and in Egypt in August 2021 with 53.18 million users, while Facebook Messenger and Instagram ranked second and third with the number of accounts reaching 46.8 million and close to 16.81 million, respectively[6], 62.5% of them were men and 31.7% are aged 25 to 34 [7]. In addition, 2020 witnessed a significant growth in digital audience as 65+ years' old users of Facebook growing in numbers due to the forced physical restrictions worldwide and the shifting to online activities[8].

Egyptians are very active on social media, and they ranked second globally in the average number of comments and likes each month[9]. Although 46.2% of internet users in Egypt visit social media platforms for work and 56.4% for information about brands and production[10], seeking other information like health and political information can't be dismissed. The informative role of social media concerning political issues as well as its ability to enhance political participation has been extensively researched since the beginning of the Arab spring in 2011[11]. The main elements of any political communication campaign are "ideology, propaganda and persuasion"[12]. Social media is very successful in presenting and promoting ideas in a very easy and fast way and the mere repetition of news or posts by sharing and re-sharing them is a very successful persuasive tool[13].

Although social media has the potential to be a safe, free and accessible space to express any and all political views and create the perfect diverse political discussion, research results show that this is not the case. According to Pew Research Center, 70% of social media users in the US never or rarely post their political or social views and opinions on social media for the fear of being attacked or the things they post, or share be used against them later on. Also, around one fifth of Americans don't have anything new to add or they aren't really interested in the topic, or they don't want to offend others[14]. In Egypt, 34.5% of internet users in Egypt are worried about the misuse of their personal data[15].

One of the main points preventing social media from fulfilling its potential is the huge amount of circulating information. The same unique advantage of social media in offering unlimited access to information is considered a major disadvantage. Users often get overwhelmed with the sheer amount of information they receive on any given issue. They either fail to discern the real information from the lies and misinformation, especially if it's widely circulated, or they get sick of it and stop following, sharing, or searching in this particular issue. At the same time, although users mistrust the information they receive on social media, they also don't fact check what they receive and the information at face value[16]. These actions call for questioning the responsibility of spreading information via social media. Should social media operator companies be held responsible for the dangerous, fake, and misleading information circulating on social media? Or is it the responsibility of the individual posting and sharing the information?

Freedom of Speech and Participating in Political Discussions on Facebook

Social media, according to Networked Public Sphere Theory, allows the users to enjoy the freedom to discuss and comment on social and political issues away from traditional media outlets, which are controlled by the government and key companies or individuals[17]. Social media is a user generated content sphere that theoretically allows anyone to express their opinions and thoughts freely. The problem with the actual practice of freedom of speech is not absolute.

Many factors prohibit this freedom from both the online service providers and from the individuals themselves.

This supposed freedom of expression is not without limitations, since most OSPs, like Facebook, Google, Microsoft, and Twitter, practice some form of censorship on its content. There are many ways OSPs can manipulate users' access to online information. One way of doing that is the "terms of usage" that all users need to abide by. Another subtler, but ultimately more effective, way to manipulate the access to information is the algorithms used to filter the information inside each software or application. They basically filter the information in favor of "powerful actors" by giving the priority for specific websites, pages, or posts to appear when searching for information[18].

At the same time, since these providers became the main source of information to the majority of users, some measure of social responsibility had to befall on them. Pages, post, videos, and websites promoting hate speech and child pornography for example should be banned on these providers. However, there are no clear ethical guidelines or rules that can apply in all situations. The extreme diversity of cultures, norms, and values of OSP users makes it impossible to put one ethical guideline for all. Moreover, most of the political and social issues have gray areas, which makes it very difficult to decide what's acceptable and what's not[19].

Another problem is that the unlimited sources of information circulating on the web needs to be prioritized in some way to benefit the users searching for information. In order to do that online service providers (OSPs) use algorithms to categorize and order the sources of information to make it easier to access. The problem with these algorithms is that they are biased. The simplest form of bias is that the sites with higher traffic are put at the beginning and the ones with lesser traffic at the end following the concept of the "rich get richer". On the other hand, without regulating the flow of information individual liberties will not be protected[20].

On the other hand, users themselves put censors on their use of social media in political participation. Some researchers argue that personal references can fine-tune the search bias to overcome the problems

created. At the same time, customizing the information search gets individuals stuck in the same informational sphere that agrees with their opinions and attitudes with no exposure to the other side of the argument. This means that if users don't actively seek information on the topic, it's more likely they won't be subjected to it, unless someone from their network, who they follow regularly, is posting about this issue[21]. Users also, don't like to offend people in their networks, so they tend to not voice their opinions if they feel that some people in their networks could oppose them or be offended. Researchers think this will cause more isolation and the increased fear of the other with only people with big social capital will be daring enough to voice their opinions[22]. This fear of the other and their opinions is largely due to the large amount of hostile reactions of Facebook users to political opinions that doesn't match their opinions[23].

Also, users tend to evaluate the level of risk to themselves and to their relationships before choosing to express any opinion of social media[24]. They know that these opinions will be there forever and could come back to haunt them one day. In the end, it's not enough to use social media to be politically aware or to be active participator in political discussion. The type of networks, personal preferences, pre-conceived perceptions and self-efficacy are all factors that affect using social media for political discussions or political participations.

Social Media and Learning Political Information

The attention to social media's role in political conversation increased vastly after the Arab Spring in Tunisia and Egypt. Although it is claimed that these cases of social media power in political actions is not the norm, more cases are being put under study due to the major role played by social media in cultivating attention and summoning the masses for actual change. Just a few examples are #FeesMustFall, #ZumaMustFall[25], #metoo[26], #blacklivesmatter[27], and ALS ice bucket challenge[28].

Researchers suggest that learning political and current affairs news from traditional media is stronger than social media[29]. Also, studies showed a learning effect of political news when using digital media

like online newspapers, websites and other online sources[30] but this is not the case with social media[31]. Although, there is indication that the role of social media in political learning could be increased when accompanied by online and offline political discussions[32]. Also, results indicate that twitter and blogs are more effective in spreading political awareness and engaging political discussion than Facebook or YouTube[33].

Simultaneously, social media is a main source of news and information to Egyptians. According to Statista.com, Egypt is the second highest Arab country using social media as a news source with 31% of the surveyed population stating that, even Egyptian journalists rely heavily on social media as a source of information[34]. Since Facebook is the most social media application used among Egyptians, it is safe to say it is one of the main sources of information and news to them.

Facebook posts can contain both visual and editorial content. Although the visual content is more attractive to users, editorial content holds the key to increasing the learning[35]. This means that the words written within the post is the main element in increasing the awareness among users, while the visual material, whether videos or images, elicit the emotional response needed to do an action towards the issue the post discusses. Images and videos are very easy to be processed[36], but words can carry complex meanings and messages[37], which makes it easier to frame the issues using words rather than pictures[38].

This suggests that social media, including Facebook, has no real effect on learning political and social news. Nevertheless, recent research suggests that maybe the interactivity of social media that creates discussions by commenting, liking and sharing could actually lead to political news learning[39].

The use of hashtags

Hashtags are being widely used now in most social media applications. The interest in hashtags and its effects in the scientific world is increasing. For now, the results of research on hashtags show that the effect of using hashtags is controversial. Hashtags can overcome the problem of information abundance and focus the search to specific topics or like mind individuals[40].

Some researchers claim that the frequency of the hashtags allows the evolving of the issue over time to expand and proliferate, also building a more personal connection between the users and the related topic[41] and allowing hashtags to work on more than one dimension[42]. At the same time, some evidence shows that "hashtag activism" is somewhat effective in mobilizing offline activities[43] and organizing "digital communities"[44]. While others found that using political hashtags with politically moderate users make them reluctant to engage in the political activities and often question the credibility of the post or news item[45].

One problem of using hashtags to link posts or news items on Facebook is the already set cognitive structure set in the minds of users about the related hashtag. Users will interpret the hashtags, and thus the linked posts, according to their own background knowledge and personal experience on the topic of the hashtags. There is also the problem of misspelling the hashtag, which will cause the posts not to appear when retrieving the related posts[46].

Another more important problem that started to gain attention recently is the hashtag "Backlash"[47]. Recent evidence shows that after a time, very popular hashtags have a counter effect on individuals. When individuals are exposed to the news with a specific hashtag for a long while, they are saturated and refuse to hear about the topic related to the hashtag anymore. They even sometimes have negative attitudes towards the news because of the associated hashtag[48].

Political hashtags specifically can create more gaps rather than bridging the differences pertaining to controversial social issues. Although hashtags can link people of similar interest together, it also links people of similar minds together[49]. It heightens the sense of the

"other" which makes it harder to be open for discussion and listen to the other side[50]. This problem is critical when dealing with political conflict, as it might lead to increasing political intolerance. Political intolerance is heightened when the media messages focus on one side and demeans the other[51].

Arguably, it could also give the users the opportunity to link all the information together to build a clear and complete picture of the issue, thus enabling them to form an educated opinion or decision on the issue at hand. Research proves that users expect that using hashtags will increase their awareness of any specific topic[52], but the question remains, can hashtags alone really do that?

Sheikh Jarrah

Sheikh Jarrah is a district located east of El Quds where 28 Palestinian families face eviction to make space for Israeli settlers. The legal dispute has been going for years, but it highly escalated in May of 2021 after the families in the Area and the Area of Silwan, another Palestinian neighborhood facing mass eviction of Palestinian families, received official notice with a deadline for them to leave the area and surrender their homes. The Israeli government considers the Palestinian families squatters or "unpaying tenants" staying on a land owned by Israeli corporations[53]. While Palestinian families claim they have documents proving they own this land since before the declaration of the Israeli State in 1948.

Anger flared after one video went viral on May 8, 2021, from the Instagram account of Muna El Kurd, whose family lives in Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood. In the video, she was confronting Jacob the settler who lives in what used to be half of her home. In the video Jacob said, "If I don't steal your home someone else is going to steal it." This statement ignited the feelings of anger in the Arab world and the video was shared on all social media. On May 9, 2021, Israeli troops were videoed storming Al Aqsa Mosque while Palestinians were praying. This day coincided with being the 27th of Ramadan, which is the most holy day in the most holy month among Muslims. This made tempers flare even more. On May 10, 2021, Hamas decided to bomb Jerusalem as retaliation for what happened in Al Aqsa

Mosque. As a retribution, Israeli started a sever bombing of Gaza strip and the destructions were massive. After 11 days of bombing a cease-fire was reached from both sides, but during these days social media in Egypt were filled with Palestine News and the #savesheikhjarrah was created.

The #saveshiekhjarrah was a leaderless movement with no central organization or NGO moving guiding the direction of the movement even in an indirect way. The hashtag was initiated by Sheikh Jarrah citizens who refused to enforce the order of the Israeli courts to leave their homes and give it to Israeli settlers.

The movement was detached from both the Palestinian government and Hamas. And more hashtags appeared after the initial one. The most popular ones were #GazaUnderAttack and #freepalestine, along with #saveshiekhjarrah.

Problem Statement

Previous research on hashtags is still few, and the area it focuses on is related to how hashtags are used to prompt individuals to do an action related to a specific social or political issue. There is little to no research talking about the building up of information and cognitive structures that could take place due to the use of hashtags. That's why this research investigates the content of all Facebook posts using hashtags related to Sheikh Jarrah political issue. Facebook was chosen because it is the most common social media used, which makes it the main source of information for a large number of individuals, and because hashtags were introduced recently to Facebook and other social media apps as it was solely used for Twitter before.

Aim of Research

This research aims to:

1- Investigate the content of all the available posts using the most common hashtags related to Sheikh Jarrah issue on Facebook.

2- Analyze the information presented in these posts.

3- Test the effect of using hashtags on presenting a collective knowledge of Sheikh Jarrah issue.

Importance of Research

1- Adding to the existing knowledge in relation to the Connectivism Learning Theory.

2- Explaining the effect of using political hashtags on the building of information of political issues.

3- Adding to the literature on using Facebook in political issues.

Theoretical Framework

Connectivism Learning Theory

The most common theories in the field of learning are the Behaviorism, Cognitivism and Constructivism[54]. All three address how learning takes place but they differ in the how. First, Behaviorism Theory was developed in the beginning of the twentieth century. It basically stated that social learning takes place by interacting with the surrounding environment[55].

Second, the Cognitivism Theory, which was based on the assumption that all the knowledge that a person receives in interpreted by this individual according the previously built cognitive structures of previous knowledge. Each new information adds to this structures and becomes the bases of interpreting new information. This theory emphasizes the inner mental processes like thinking, remembering and interpreting information[56].

The third theory is Social Constructivism Theory. This is a relatively new theory that states that individuals are active participants in the learning process and they create their own knowledge while interacting with their social and cultural environments[57].

In the digital era, the learning process became very complicated and technology became an integral part of it. One of the new theories that tries to explain how users learn from new media is the Connective Learning Theory[58]. This theory was developed by George Siemens and Stephen Downes in 2005. It states that the constant connectedness gives users opportunities about their learning and gives more power to peer-to-peer learning through discussions and exposure to different

points of views, which gives the users wider understanding to make sense of information, solve problems and make decisions[59].

Social media became an integral part of the learning process, whether direct or indirect. Social media was found to relieve the school related stress and is sought to certify and endorse one's creative abilities and encourage online and offline social and civic activities, which is all beneficial to the learning process indirectly. Also, it was found to be a good medium for students to seek help in school related work[60].

On the other hand, social media plays an integral role in lifelong learning stages, like giving narratives or stories for inspiration, giving social support, organizing action, providing different styles and pace for learning, and provide feedback on new experiences[61]. Besides, social media illicit discussions and activity among users, even if it's only online activities, which has some effect on political learning[62]. These few results support the hypothesis of the Connectivism Learning Theory.

Although this theory was mainly used in the field of education, it focuses on how individuals learn from the interaction of all the new technological sources, and how students learn from informal settings. A big part of that now is social media. Since informal learning is spontaneous and not structured, and at the same time it's personal, social media is a great tool for it[63]. Social media can facilitate informal learning as it can be used both as personal learning or community learning[64].

Based on that, this paper suggests that using hashtags could help in building a more cumulative picture of the political topic and thus increase political awareness and knowledge.

Research Questions

All these arguments lead to the following research questions:

RQ1. How was the issue of Sheik Jarrah framed in the Facebook posts using the hashtags? How did this frame evolve through time?

RQ2. For how long did the interest in the problem continue?

RQ3. What were the calls for actions included in the posts using the hashtags related to sheikh Jarrah situation?

RQ4. What type of information did the posts using the hashtags give about the Sheikh Jarrah situation?

Methodology

The study aims at investigating the capability of hashtags to link the individual posts to one main issue and giving a comprehensive outlook on political issues, which could increase the awareness of political issues. The methodology used was content analysis, where Facebook posts using hashtags related to Sheikh Jarrah incident were collected and analyzed.

Facebook was chosen for this study as representative of social media because it's not widely studied due to the difficulties of collecting the data from this particular social media site. The algorithms of Facebook make the Facebook experience very personalized to each individual user separately. But during social movements, the large interaction of users, following specific pages, joining Facebook groups or using specific hashtags makes it relatively possible to track the progress of the movement.

The study started from the 8th of May 2021 until August 2nd. This date was chosen because it was the date the Israeli troops stormed Al Aqsa Mosque during the Muslims prayers on the night of 27th of Ramadan, which is the most holy day in Ramadan for Muslims. Coinciding with this date was the spreading of a video made by Muna El Kurd, one of the symbols of resistance in Sheikh Jarrah, of her talking to the Israeli settler who took her home. The study period ends with the day the Israeli court should have ruled in the case filed by Muna's family and five other families contesting the evacuation of their homes.

This movement used a lot of hashtags, the most prominent are #GazaUnderAttack, which started on the 8th of May 2021, and have got 5.7 million people posting about it, #saveshiekhjarrah, which started on May 6th, 2021, and have got 4.6 million people posting about it, and #freepalestine, which started on the 10th of May 2021, with 3.1 million people posting about it. Manual content analysis was

conducted on all available posts using one of the mentioned hashtags. The search was done on the 3rd of August 2021.

Unit and Categories of Analysis

The unit of analysis was the post itself. After searching Facebook using the three main hashtags, there was a total of 108 posts for #GazaUnderAttack, 284 posts for #saveshiekhjarrah, and a total of 96 posts for #freepalestine. After excluding the irrelevant and repeated posts the total number of posts analyzed in this study were 261 posts.

The analysis was conducted based on descriptive categories and content categories. The descriptive categories included the day the post was uploaded, the source, the number of likes, number of comments, number of views and number of shares. It also included the type of material used in the post (only writings, images, or videos). As for the content categories it included the language used for the post (Arabic, English, Hebrew, others), the use of subtitles (English with Arabic subtitles, Arabic with English subtitles, Hebrew with English subtitles, Hebrew with Arabic subtitles), the content of the post, the calls for action in the post, the characters featured in the post, the valence of the post and the framing used in the post.

Table (1)

Operational definitions

Term	Operational Definition
Youth	Males or females who were described as youth or physically look young
Old	Males or females with white hair, or wrinkled skin
Mothers	If the picture or video contains a female with small children or described in the captions as being a mother
Pictures	Still photographs, drawings or cartoons.
Video	The posts containing moving pictures with or without music
Calls for action	Any post that contains a command verb like Donate, support, free, do, boycott, stand for, protest, etc.
Type of information	What information did the post provide? No information (posts were there were no words only hashtags or pictures with no words or video with music with no words or clear information) Content describing an incident (were the post has specific information on an incident like an arrest or a bombing but no information about sheikh jarrah)

	Linking the issue to new topics (were posts don't explain the problem, reasons or consequences but tries to link what happens to other issues like UN sanctions, stereotyping, inequality and so on) Giving information (when the post gives information about or explains the problem in sheikh jarrah, the reasons behind it or the consequences of it.
Type of appeal	rational appeal: posts stating facts and/or numbers with no showing of emotions in the text or visual material emotional appeal: posts using photos that elicit emotions like symbolic drawings, destroyed buildings, hurt people, or using text with words provoking feelings like anger, sadness, hate, frustration, happiness, pride, etc.

Reliability

Two coders were used. 60 posts were given to them to analyze. Each made 480 decisions. They agreed on 402 of them which makes the reliability calculated equals to 0.84, meaning high reliability on the categories and its definitions.

Results

This study aims at investigating the effect of using hashtags in overcoming some of the shortcomings of Facebook in creating political awareness and increasing political activities. The idea is that using hashtags will link scattered posts on a specific political issue to give a cohesive and complete picture in relation to the issue. All posts using the above hashtags were consumer generated or from citizen news sources pages. No official news agency posts were found using the hashtags under study.

Framing of the issue

The results show a major difference between the portrayal of Palestinians and the portrayal of Israelis.

Table (2)

The frequency of appearance of different characters in the posts

Nationality / Who is portrayed	Palestine	Israel	Total
Civilian Male Youth (by appearance or as labeled in the post)	21	7	28
Civilian Female Youth (by appearance or as labeled in the post)	28		28
Civilian Male elder (by appearance or as labeled in the post)	5		5
Civilian Female elder (by appearance or as labeled in the post)	8		8
Children (by appearance or as labeled in the post)	40		40
Soldiers (by appearance or as labeled in the post)		18	18
The post had no human characters	164		
Total	266	25	291*

* Some posts had Palestinian and Israeli individuals at the same time, so the total number of posts including human aspects exceeds the total number of posts under study

The portrayal of Israelis was few, only 8% of the posts included Israeli character in them. Also, only two figures were represented, soldiers with 72% and civilians with only 28% of all the Israeli characters portrayed. On the other hand, 39% of the Palestinians characters were children in the middle of destruction or suffering, 48% were youth, males and females, they were portrayed while being arrested by Israeli soldiers or demonstrating or standing in front of Israeli settlers or soldiers. Few of the most common pictures and videos circulating at the first 5 days of the study where the videos and pictures of youth laughing while being handcuffed or detained by Israeli soldiers. Only 13% were old men and women with grey hair or walking sticks and they were portrayed either as yelling at settlers and Israeli soldiers or crying over dead relatives or cutting of trees. All Palestinians were unarmed civilians.

Table (3)

Frames of posts distributed by month

Frame	May	June	July	August	Total
Israel is an apartheid state (comparing the living conditions between Israelis and Palestinians – showing the destruction of Palestinian homes – comparing the military power – demonstrating excessive use of Israeli force with Palestinian civilians)	49	8	16	1	74 28.4%
Rating Facebook	-	1	-	-	1 0.3%
Palestinians will never stop fighting (expressed by words written or spoken or images expressing victory and standing against Israeli forces)	22	3	40	3	68 26.1%
Boycott Israeli products and any one supporting Israelis	2	1	-	-	3 1.1%
The people are standing alone against all governments (accusing any government of supporting Israel by words, songs or visuals)	1	1	-	-	2 0.8%
Expressing support to Palestinians from individuals from other countries	80	1	22	1	104 39.8%
Expressing happiness to Israelis' losses	1	-	-	-	1 0.3%
What's happening is the Palestinians fault	1	-	-	-	1 0.3%
Posts with no clear frame	1	4	-	-	5 1.9%
Total	157	19	79	5	261 100%

		Value	Approximate Significance
Nominal by Nominal	Contingency Coefficient	.538	<.001
N of Valid Cases		261	

There is a significant difference between the frames used in the post and the months of the study with significance level 0.001 and contingency coefficient 0.538. the most used frame was the posts

expressing solidarity and support to Palestinians from outside of Gaza. The second most common frame was the one depicting Israel as a war criminal and an apartheid state. The third most common frame was the one featuring Palestinians fighting back and expressing the idea that they will never surrender or stop fighting for their freedom.

The posts started by personalizing the sheikh jarrah neighborhood problem and simplifying it because of Jacob the settler's video. This video triggered the first wave of sympathy as it summarized that Palestinians' problems in just one sentence said by the Israeli settler to a Palestinian lady, "If I don't steal it (your home) someone else will."

The posts used Jacob to personalize and represent the Israeli side, while it used Mona and Mohamad El Kurd to personalize and represent the Palestinian side. Jacob is a middle-aged man whose answers portray him as very ignorant and passive and basically a pawn in the hands of Israeli government. On the other hand, Mona and Mohamad El Kurd are two young people, twin, who are portrayed as active participants in their society's problems since childhood and who are educated and optimistic and represent the voice of the future.

The most popular posts of the movement highlights and portrays Palestine in a specific way. First came the images and videos of smiling young men and women while being pushed to the ground and arrested by Israeli forces. Second, the video of the old grandmother standing in front of a heavily armed Israeli soldier saying that she was older than the state of Israel. And during the bombing of El Quds, videos of terrified children during the bombings and the kids who saved their precious pet fish from their crumbled home.

These videos specifically framed the Palestinian side as unarmed peaceful citizens tying to defend their homes and right to live against a heavily armed and ruthless superpower which wants to snuff them out. It is framed basically as a David and Goliath story.

Sustaining the interest of the audience

The content analysis showed that #saveshiekhjarrah movement started with the attack on worshippers inside Al Aqsa Mosque, the third most holy mosque for Muslims, on the most holy day of the most holy month to Muslims. This one incident triggered the movement. The

outrage of Muslims communities around the globe, especially in the Arab world and Asia, focused the eyes on Palestine once again and started the sharing of the video of the attack, thus becoming a trend and gaining attention.

Table (4)

The frequency of posts each day

Day	Frequency	Day	Frequency	Day	Frequency
9th of May	7	7th of June	1	6th of July	2
10th of May	14	8th of June	-	7th of July	2
11th of May	15	9th of June	1	8th of July	2
12th of May	26	10th of June	-	9th of July	3
13th of May	2	11th of June	-	10th of July	-
14th of May	12	12thof June	2	11th of July	2
15th of May	18	13th of June	-	12th of July	3
16th of May	17	14th of June	1	13th of July	-
17th of May	14	15th of June	2	14th of July	2
18th of May	13	16th of June	-	15th of July	3
19th of May	5	17th of June	-	16th of July	3
20th of May	3	18th of June	1	17th of July	4
21st of May	1	19th of June	-	18th of July	3
22nd of May	2	20th of June	-	19th of July	2
23rd of May	-	21st of June	1	20th of July	3
24th of May	2	22nd of June	2	21st of July	3
25th of May	-	23rd of June	-	22nd of July	4
26th of May	1	24th of June	-	23rd of July	4
27th of May	-	25th of June	1	24th of July	4
28th of May	1	26th of June	1	25th of July	3
29th of May	-	27th of June	-	26th of July	3
30th of May	4	28th of June	-	27th of July	4
31st of May	-	29th of June	2	28th of July	3
1st of June	-	30th of June	1	29th of July	4
2nd of June	-	1st of July	1	30th of July	5
3rd of June	1	2nd of July	2	31st of July	4
4th of June	-	3rd of July	-	1st of August	1
5th of June	2	4th of Jul	-	2nd of August	4
6th of June	1	5th of July	2		

Although Shiekh Jarrah movement stimulated a lot of feelings in Egyptians and Arab citizens, the interest in the situation was short lived. As the results discussed above shows, the highest levels of interactions lasted only for 10 days. The number of posts found using

the most popular hashtags during the three-month period of the study shows the fluctuating attention towards the issue.

Table (5)

The frequency of posts by month

Month	Number of posts	Percentage
May	157	58.7%
June	19	8 %
July	80	31.4%
August (until only the 2nd of august the day of the court ruling)	5	1.9%

❖ The study included only the first and second of August, so the statistics of this month weren't included in the above table

The greatest number of posts is of course found in May, the beginning of the attention to the issue, and then it lower significantly during the month of June and finally it picks up again slightly in July right before the Israeli court ruling in 2nd of August. Also, most of the posts were concentrated on the first week of the study, excluding the first two days, from the 10th of May until the 18th of May with total of 93.6 % of all posts in the Month of May and 56.7% of all the posts in the three months.
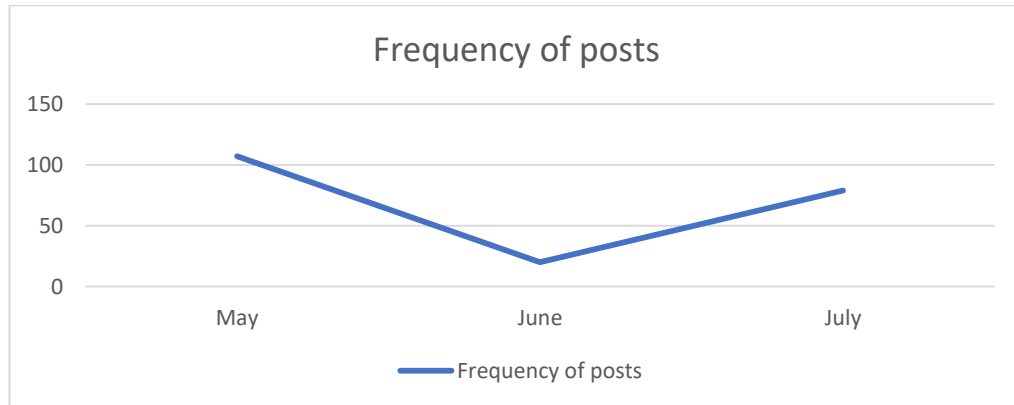
Figure (1)

The frequency of posts with hashtags related to Sheikh Jarrah in the months of the study

Interestingly there were only two posts found on May 13 using any of the search hashtags. This was during the calls for boycotting Facebook and all its related apps and giving the app low ratings in both Google app and Apple store. This call appeared after the accusations that Facebook is deliberately banning posts supporting Palestinians and against Israel.

During these days, the calls for actions were concentrated on spreading the word and showing support using only online activities.

Calls for action

The total number of posts containing calls for actions were 108 from the total of 261 posts under study with a percentage of 41.4% of the total number of posts. The calls for action during the movement were basically simple including both online and offline activities. The online activities calls were the majority of calls for actions in the posts under study using the hashtags. The offline calls were minimal but it got a slight increase by the end of the study period nearing the trial date.

Table (6)

Posts with calls for action vs. posts with no calls for action

	frequency	Percent
Posts with calls for actions	108	41.4%
Posts with no calls for action	153	58.6%
Total	261	100%

Out of the 108 posts 31 posts contained ambiguous calls for actions like "support Palestine" or "be patient" or "free Palestine", which consists of nearly 11.9% of the total number of posts under study and 28.8% of posts including a call for action. These types of calls don't really give the individuals a clear path to what to do exactly, which makes it difficult to follow the call for action they promote.

Table (7)

Calls for actions in the posts

Type of call for action	Call for action	frequency	percentage	Total frequency	Total percentage
Online activity	Share the hashtag	57	52.7%	64	59.1 %
	Rate Facebook	5	4.6%		
	Sign petitions	2	1.8%		
Offline activity	Boycott	7	6.4%	13	12 %
	Donate	4	3.7%		
	Demonstrate	2	1.9%		
Ambiguous calls	Free Palestine	18	16.7%	31	28.8 %
	Support Palestine	5	4.6%		
	Be patient	2	1.9%		
	Stop the war	6	5.6%		
Total		108	100%	108	100%

The online activities started with calls to share the videos to spread awareness of the situation worldwide and to activate the most popular hashtags. These were most calls, as 64 posts included these types of calls with a percentage of 24.5% of the total number of posts and 59.1% of all posts including calls for actions. Another online call was initiated by Mark Ruffalo to sign an online petition to put sanctions on Israel until it stops its Apartheid state actions. There were also calls to boycott Facebook and Instagram and give them 1-star ratings on google play and Apple store.

As for the offline activities calls, they ranged between boycotting Israeli products and other countries that support them, donating for Palestinian families and participating in marches to support Palestinians and call for international tribunal to sanction Israel. The percentage of the calls for offline activities consisted of only 12% of the total number of posts calling for action and only 5% of the total number of posts under study.

Interestingly, the offline activities, which included marches and demonstrations, were mainly located in Europe and Canada and not in the Middle East.

Calls for Action Through Time
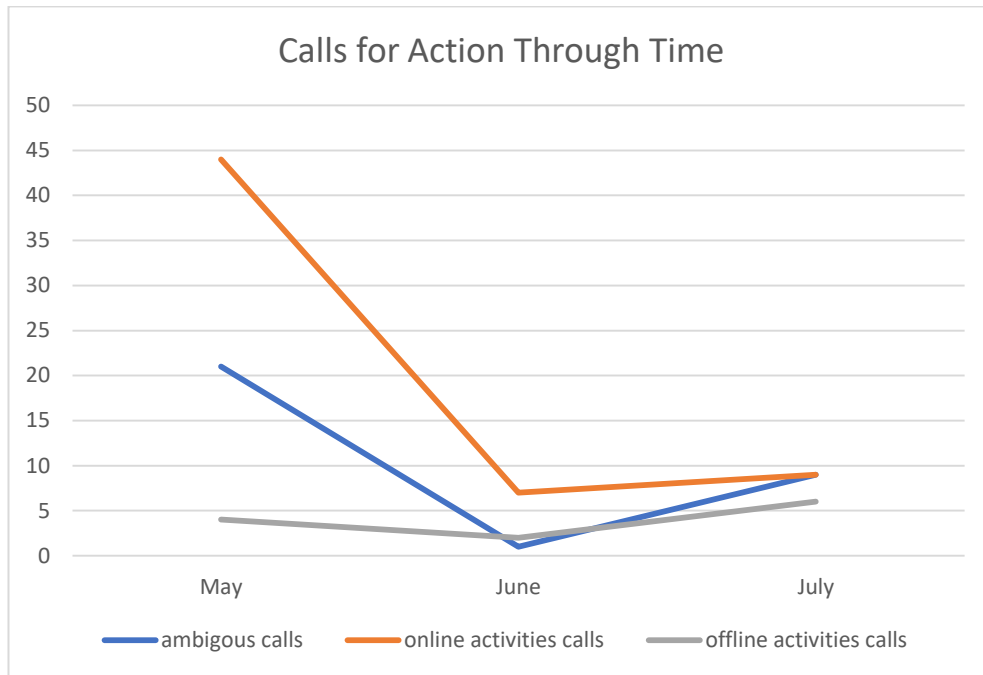
Figure (2)

The types of Calls for Actions along the three months

The high number of calls for online actions in comparison to offline actions support the claim that social media encourages "slacktivism", as individuals feel better about themselves when they participate in online activities that will take no time or effort from them and will not put them in any danger like being detained if they participate in marches and demonstrations.

At the same time, the calls to lower the rate of Facebook and its affiliated applications worked and forced the Facebook executives to apologize and say they'll correct the problem with the "algorithms"[65].

Information provided in the posts

The results show that the content of the posts is mainly visual and often with no words at all except the hashtag. Visual content is good at eliciting emotional response, but language is more effective in creating awareness and delivering information.

Table (8)

The type of content of the posts

Type of material used	frequency	Percentage
Cartoon	18	6.9%
Drawing	1	0.4%
Photo	107	41%
Video	85	32.5%
Song	19	7.3%
Writings only	31	11.9%
total	261	100

The content of the posts varied between videos, songs, images or drawings or cartoons and text only. The use of photos or drawings or cartoons was the majority of posts with a number of 136 posts from the total of 261 posts amounting to 52% of the total number of posts. The second most popular content was the video content, including videos of actual events, interviews or songs, with 40% of all the posts. The writing only posts consisted of only 12% of the total number of posts.

This is a very logical result, since naturally individuals or users will be attracted more to visual content more than writing only content. Also, using visual material with some writings with it or the use of videos attracts the attention and gives information at the same time, which is considered good use of Facebook capabilities.

The only drawback to that is that only 3% of the posts containing photos, drawings, or cartoons, were accompanied with words giving information on the situation in Sheikh Jarrah. And only 2% of the videos were explaining the situation or the consequences or giving historical background.
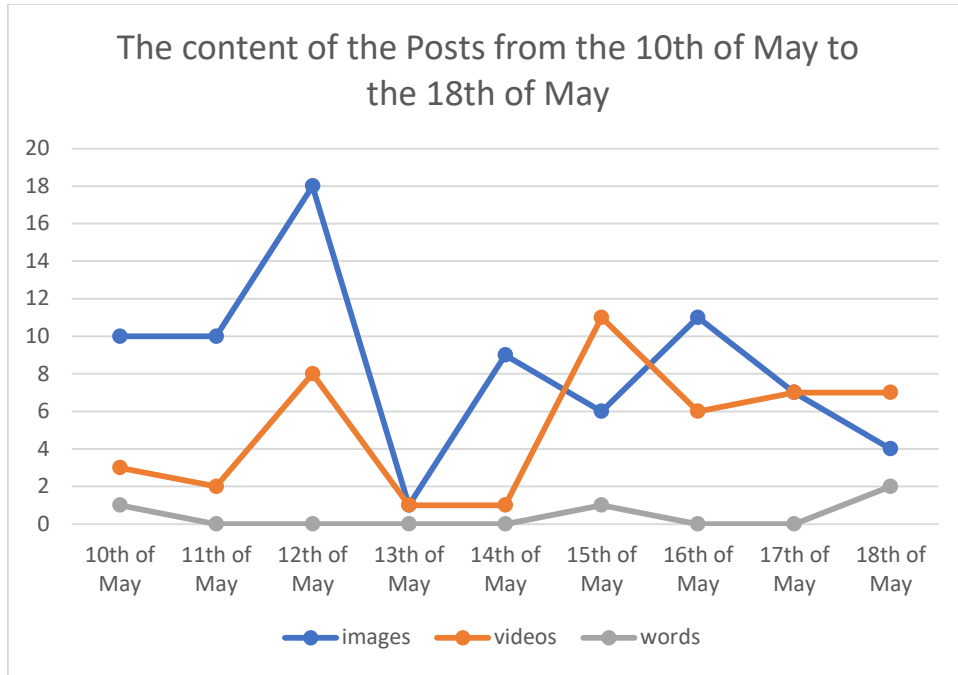
Figure (3)

The Use of different content types during the first week

The results show that although there was high interaction with the posts with these hashtags from the 10th of May to the 18th of May, the posts didn't relay enough information to increase the awareness of the individuals seeing these posts. As shown in table (9), the number of posts containing information on the problem itself or its reasons or consequences is only 5% of the total number of posts under study.

Table (9)

The type of information presented in the post throughout the three months

Type of Information	May	June	July	August	Total
Defining the problem	7 2.7%	1 0.4%	2 0.8%	-	10 3.8%
Exploring the reasons	1 0.4%	-	-	-	1 0.4%
Explaining the consequences	-	-	2 0.8%	-	2 0.8%
Linking what's happening to other issues	15 5.7%	2 0.8%	18 6.9%	1 0.4%	36 13.8%
Describing a specific incident	42 16.1%	5 1.9%	9 3.4%	2 0.8%	58 22.2%
No information	93 35.6%	11 4.2%	48 18.4%	2 0.8%	154 59%
Total	158 60.5%	19 7.3%	79 30.2%	5 2%	261 100%

On the other hand, the posts that contained only the hashtags with no information are 59% of the total number of posts. This leads to the conclusion that Facebook posts, especially user generated ones with no news source affiliation, don't carry real information about the political situation under study, but rather the emotions that the situation evokes in the users.

Table (10)

The date and Material used of Posts containing information about the issue

Day	Type of information	Material used
8th of May	define the problem	image
9th of May	define the problem	video
11th of May	define the problem	video
12th of May	reasons	video
23rd of May	define the problem	video
24th of May	define the problem	cartoon
30th of May	define the problem	writings
30th of May	define the problem	video
29th of June	define the problem	writings
8th of July	consequences	video
8th of July	consequences	writings
12th of July	define the problem	writings
22nd of July	define the problem	video

The information that was presented in the posts using the hashtags under study were fragmented and couldn't build the needed cognitive structure on the situation to make a knowledgeable decision towards it.

Discussion

Results show that Facebook is a very good tool to gain the attention of a very large number of people in a very short time and that they have the potential to entice emotions enough to drive people to act online and offline to make a difference. Unfortunately, like any social media trend, the attention of the audience is short lived, and Facebook can't really give the users a real understanding of the political issue. The use of hashtags can fragment the political issue even more, creating less coherent understanding rather than giving a more focused and detailed information on the matter.

Social media allowed Palestinian to present the problem from their point of view and give a fresh perspective to a very old, and to most people boring and complicated, conflict. Also, since these videos were shot and posted by normal citizens, it might have given more credibility to it and it was packed with situations showing injustices with so many feelings that might prompt the audience to participate in offline supporting activities.

It broke through the very complicated political conflict between two states to frame it in a simpler and more visualized image of people being deprived of their basic rights by a very powerful entity. This framing did not just allow the movement to spread faster, but it also used personal experiences to appeal to people worldwide.

Nevertheless, the content of most of the posts did not relay real information on the situation and its roots. There was no mention of the reasons or consequences of the escalating situation or the roots of the dispute. Only two posts contained real information on the exact location of the area under dispute and some facts on the number of Palestinians being evicted. This result suggests, in agreement of previous studies, that social media, including Facebook, can be very effective in creating awareness of the topic in a very short time and

across all boundaries, but it does not really contribute to increasing the knowledge of said topic.

On the other hand, since Facebook, and most of social media, is basically a visual platform, it has the potential to create a momentum of feelings that can be used to drive individuals to participate in offline political activities. In the case of Sheikh Jarrah, individuals did not use Facebook to effectively garner the power of feelings to do an action in the real world and not just the virtual one. Almost 90% of the posts under study included some kind of visual material, whether an image, cartoon, drawings, music video clips or videos from eyewitnesses, but only 5% of the total number of posts under study contained calls for offline political activities. This could be due to the lack of leadership or an organizing entity giving individuals a clear action to do.

Individuals focused on the online activities they could do to support Palestinians. One of the most popular calls for action in the posts under study was to share the hashtags as much as possible. This call was so popular that one tenth of all the posts contained the words "don't stop sharing" and the hashtags related to the issue only. However, this does not mean that the online activities do not have an impact on real life. Two things happened during the first eleven days, which were the peak of sharing Palestine and Sheikh Jarrah news. First, the drop that happened in Facebook ratings on google play and apple store. Although this study cannot prove the effect of online calls during Sheikh Jarrah dispute on the lowering of ratings, largely due to being unable to find posts including this type of calls and using the hashtags under study, the strength of online activities cannot be denied.

The use of hashtags polarized the posts the audience is exposed to. If the individual or user used a specific hashtag to search for news items or posts related to the issue of a political issue, he/she will be exposed to only one point of view. People who use the same hashtag have similar minds and opinions on a specific issue. This will only increase the isolation effects of Facebook experience. In the case of Sheikh Jarrah hashtags, the posts didn't give a lot of information on the situation and its origins and consequences, but it was filled with

emotions from its visual content. Emotions like hope were expressed strongly by the images of smiling youth against Israeli soldiers. Anger was also one of the emotions that were portrayed in the posts stressing the brutality of the Israeli soldiers and the injustices Palestinians are undergoing daily. In addition to the images and videos of the destruction of El Quds due to Israeli bombing.

The period of interest in the issue was limited to the first week of conflicts, which indicates that using hashtags doesn't increase the attention span to the topic. Also, recent research examined the "burn out" effect from using a specific hashtag for a long time that users get bored or even have negative reactions to the posts with this hashtag. More research is needed to explore this possibility more and to determine the factors that could speed up or prohibit the "burn out" effects of hashtags. In addition, research is needed to answer the question how to maximize the use of hashtags and avoid its shortcomings?

The censorship of Facebook to some of the posts and classifying some of the material as harmful or disturbing caused a lot of anger in the Arab world and Egypt. The very small number of posts found when searching for these hashtags suggest one of three things. First, users could have deleted their posts after a while so they weren't found when the search was done. Second, the Facebook algorithm which limits the posts to a specific geographical area could be in effect when searching for a specific hashtag. This also explains the very low number of posts shared by international individuals. The third and last explanation is related to Facebook management itself. During the peak of the interest in the issue, many users complained that their posts were erased and they were given warnings from Facebook that their account will be suspended.

Egyptian and Arab youth made two things in their efforts to fight this censorship, which they thought is unethical and prohibits their rights to freedom of speech. One way was to call for reporting Facebook to Play store and apple store and give it a low rating. This technique was so successful that Facebook's rating dropped from 4 to 2.5 on play store and 2.4 on apple store according to the Tribune[66]. Another way they devised, was writing their posts in Arabic with no dots. This way

Facebook won't recognize the words but the Arabic speaking users would understand the content.

Conclusion

In today's world, social media power cannot be denied. Although there is a lot to be known of the machination of using social media in social movements successfully, each new movement gives new information on the interactions between users, what triggers an issue to go viral and how to maintain the attention of users in a world full of new trends every hour.

The Palestinian issue is one of the oldest and complicated political issues in the world. It's been ongoing for 73 years and counting. The mere time span of the problem made it something normal in the lives of Arabs and Egyptians. And with the recent normalization of relationships with Israel led by the United Emirates and Kuwait, many young people in the Arab world don't really grasp what's going on in Palestine and they have no real awareness of the history of the problem and the current situation. The #savesheikhjarrah movement was one of the very few recent movements that was able to capture the attention of Arab youth and the world for a little while. This study aimed to finding out why this movement was more successful than other movements concerning the same issue.

Limitations

One main limitation of this study is that the Palestinian issue is a very complicated issue with lots of opened files. This study tackled only one small aspect of the larger conflict which doesn't give us the whole picture. Future research needs to consider studying the social media of the Israeli side in addition to studying the different media efforts used by both parties at a specific time for all issues, not just one issue at a time.

Another significant limitation is the Facebook algorithms. These algorithms are used in this specific application to give users a very personal experience while using Facebook. Thus, limiting the search findings to geographical area, previous personal preferences and history which makes it hard to be sure that the data used in the study are complete. In addition to the censorship of what is considered to be

harmful posts, that caused the removal of many posts at the beginning of this movement. Another interesting research might be analyzing the posts using the studied hashtags but from another part of the world to see how geographical area affects the exposure to posts about a specific issue.

Finally, this study depended on posts using hashtags. Although using hashtags is now a wildly spread activity while posting on Facebook, it doesn't mean that all the posts talking about this movement used any hashtag at all.

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