

Moral Beauty during Gaza War: The Role of Social Media in Connecting New Generation in Times of Crisis

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Abstract:

Since October 7, 2023, the war in Gaza has initiated a wide range of global response, with social media playing a key role in broadcasting the different aspects of the humanitarian crisis in real time. For young Egyptians aged 12 to 25, this digital exposure marked a profound moment of moral awakening, as they witnessed the suffering and resilience of their peers in Gaza through emotionally charged content. This study examines how portrayals of “moral beauty”—defined as acts of courage, compassion, and solidarity—within Gaza-related media stimulated moral elevation and inspired prosocial behavior among Egyptian Gen Z. The research explores how emotionally charged content initiates a flow of affective states: beginning with moral distress, progressing through admiration, and concluding in a desire to act. In the light of positive media psychology, shifting the focus from potential media harms to the positive emotional experiences that media can elicit, particularly the emotion of elevation, the study developed an expanded theoretical framework integrating the *Inspirational Media Model* with the concept of *Emotional Flow* within narratives offering an understanding of how digital media can cultivate empathy and nurture acts of solidarity that transcends borders. Through focus group discussions, the study investigates how social media facilitated exposure to morally elevating narratives and provided platforms for younger generations engagement with the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Results suggested that young Egyptians, frequently engaged with emotionally charged social media content related to Gaza, experienced a powerful emotional flow from sadness and anger to admiration and moral inspiration. This exposure nurtured strong character identification and reflective moral processing, in the context of cultural and religious identities, they reconsidered their values, express solidarity, and engage in prosocial behaviors.

Keywords: Moral Beauty, Gaza War, Moral Elevation, Positive Media Psychology, Social Media Engagement, Inspirational Media, Emotional Flow, Humanitarian Crisis, Prosocial Behavior, Youth Activism, Reflective Moral Processing, Identification, Cultural Context.

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الجمال الأخلاقي في حرب غزة:

دور وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في ربط الجيل الجديد وقت الأزمات

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ملخص الدراسة:

منذ بداية احرب في غزة في السابع من أكتوبر 2023، ظهرت موجة واسعة من التفاعلات العالمية، وقد لعبت وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي دوراً محورياً في نقل مختلف جوانب الأزمة الإنسانية بشكل مباشر وعلى مدار الساعة. وقد شكلت هذه التجربة الرقمية لحظة فارقة من اليقظة الأخلاقية لجيل زد من المصريين الذين تتراوح أعمارهم بين 13 و 28 عاماً، حيث شهدوا معاناة أقرانهم في غزة وصمودهم من خلال محتوى ملهم ومشحون عاطفياً. وتهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل كيفية تصوير الجمال الأخلاقي، من خلال أعمال الشجاعة، والرحمة، والتضامن، في المحتوى المتعلق بغزة، وكيف ساهم ذلك في إثارة مشاعر الارتقاء الأخلاقي وتحفيز السلوكيات المؤيدة للخير لدى هذا الجيل. واستناداً إلى علم النفس الإيجابي في الإعلام ونموذج الإعلام الملهم، تختبر الدراسة كيف يؤدي المحتوى العاطفي إلى تدفق وجداني يبدأ بالشعور بالضيق، مروراً بالإعجاب، وينتهي برغبة في القيام بسلوك إيجابي نافع. وتأتي هذه الدراسة ضمن الاتجاه الجديد الخاص بتحويل التركيز من الآثار السلبية لوسائل الإعلام إلى الدور الإيجابي وهنا الملهم الذي يمكن أن تقوم به السرديات الخاصة بالمحتوى المشحون عاطفياً. وطوّرت الدراسة نموذجاً يدمج بين نموذج الإعلام الملهم ومفهوم التدفق العاطفي داخل السرديات الخاصة بقضية غزة، لفهم كيف يمكن للإعلام الرقمي أن يعزز التعاطف ويغذي أفعال التضامن العابرة للحدود. ومن خلال مجموعات النقاش المركزة، تبحث الدراسة في كيفية تسهيل وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي للتعرض لسرديات أخلاقية ملهمة، وتوفير منصات لانخراط هذا الجيل مع الأزمة الإنسانية في غزة. وتشير النتائج إلى أن هذا الجيل، الذي تفاعل بشكل متكرر مع محتوى عاطفي متعلق بغزة، قد شعر بتدفق وجداني قوي من الحزن والغضب إلى الإعجاب والإلهام الأخلاقي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الجمال الأخلاقي- حرب غزة- الارتقاء الأخلاقي- علم النفس الإيجابي في الإعلام- التفاعل مع وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي- الإعلام الملهم- التدفق العاطفي- الأزمات الإنسانية- السلوك الاجتماعي الإيجابي- التأمل الأخلاقي- التوحد مع الشخصيات- السياق الثقافي

Introduction

Since October 7, 2023, the escalation of conflict in Gaza has catalyzed an unprecedented wave of global humanitarian engagement. Digital platforms, particularly social media, have emerged as central channels for real-time crisis communication, that disseminate true emotionally charged narratives of civilians enduring bombardment, injury, and displacement. These platforms have not only amplified visibility but also mobilized international solidarity through viral hashtags and public campaigns advocating for Palestinian rights.

Among the most emotionally impacted demographics were younger populations worldwide—including Egypt—who, for perhaps the first time, encountered the immediacy of war through continuous live-streamed content. This digital closeness to suffering, often involving peers of similar age, evoked a complex scale of emotional responses. Egyptian Gen Z (13-28 years old), in particular, were exposed to raw, unfiltered portrayals of resilience, loss, and resistance, fostering a profound sense of moral engagement and empathy.

Problem statement and significance

Drawing on frameworks from *positive media psychology*, this study explores how exposure to acts of *moral beauty*—defined as expressions of altruism, courage, and compassion depicted in media—can elicit *moral elevation*, a prosocial emotion that inspires individuals to act compassionately beyond their immediate social circles (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Oliver et al., 2012). The Gaza humanitarian crisis offers a compelling context to examine these psychological processes in real time, particularly through the lens of the *inspirational media model*, and the *perspective of emotional flow* which posits that emotionally resonant media can initiate a dynamic flow of affective states—such as distress, anger, admiration, hope, and a desire to have a meaningful contribution. The study reviews the literature of moral beauty and moral elevation, suggesting an expanded theoretical model built upon the integration of the *Inspirational Media Model* developed by Oliver et al, (2021) and the concept of *Emotional Flow* within narratives suggested by Nabi and Green, (2015) to understand the complex context of

emotional and behavioral responses of the Egyptian youth to the prolonged humanitarian crisis in Gaza. The study aims to:

- 1- Understand the role of social media as a catalyst for emotional engagement and prosocial mobilization during the Gaza humanitarian crisis.
- 2- Examine the interplay between moral beauty, moral elevation, and prosocial behavior within the context of the inspirational media concept, and the flow of emotions perspective.

This study is particularly significant as it explores audience emotional reactions to an international humanitarian crisis that lasted for almost two years, and in which social media and digital platforms played a significant role in the global engagement. Unlike other wars, the bravery, resilience, courage and bravery of the Palestinians were closely followed on the spot worldwide, and especially by Gen Z, who identified with the moral beauty in the narratives of the people in Gaza, the inspirational social media content generated a flow of emotions, and the moral elevation feeling incited them to rethink their values and role in the world.

Literature Review

Moral Beauty and Prosocial Behavior

Moral beauty, defined as the perception of virtuous or admirable human behavior, has been shown to elicit positive emotional responses and inspire prosocial actions (Diessner et al., 2013). Moral traits- such as kindness, integrity and honesty, proved to have deeper and more enduring influence on people (Baum & Abdel Rahman, 2025). Haidt (2003) introduced the concept of moral elevation as the emotional response to witnessing acts of moral beauty, characterized by feelings of warmth, optimism, and a desire to become a better person and help others.

Algoe and Haidt (2009) demonstrated that exposure to morally beautiful acts can lead to increased prosocial motivation and behavior. This finding has been validated by subsequent studies, such as Schnall et al. (2010), who found that participants exposed to morally elevating stimuli were more likely to volunteer for a subsequent task.

Schnall, Roper, and Fessler (2010) provided empirical evidence that moral elevation leads to increased humane behavior. Their experiments showed that participants who experienced elevation were more likely to volunteer for a subsequent task and to spend more time helping the experimenter.

The relationship between media exposure, emotional responses, and behavioral intentions has been a subject of extensive research in media psychology. In a meta-analysis, Coyne et al. (2018) found a significant positive relationship between prosocial media content and prosocial outcomes across various contexts.

Recent research has further refined our understanding of moral elevation and its effects on prosocial behavior. Telesca, Rullo, and Pagliaro (2024) conducted a study examining how group membership and moral models influence the relationship between moral elevation and prosocial behavior. Their findings suggest that the effectiveness of moral elevation in promoting prosocial actions may be moderated by group dynamics and individual perceptions of moral exemplars meaning that the behavior may depend on whether the elevated individual perceives the moral exemplar as part of their in-group or out-group. Additionally, the alignment between the exemplar's actions and the individual's moral values appears to play a crucial role.

Media Portrayals of emotionally challenging content

A significant contribution to the understanding of moral elevation in media contexts comes from Oliver, Ash, and Woolley (2012). In their chapter "The experience of elevation: Responses to media portrayals of moral beauty," the authors shift the focus from potential media harms to the positive emotional experiences that media can elicit, particularly the emotion of elevation.

Oliver et al. (2012) argue that the experience of elevation in response to media portrayals is not only common but also provides insight into seemingly paradoxical positive evaluations of sad or emotionally challenging content. Some key concepts are highlighted in their study that can mediate the exposure-elevation relation, among which are the familiarity, proximity and relevance to the audience.

In his study about “Gaza, Moral Matters in Hard Times”, Bishara (2024) argues that understanding moral matters in the context of Gaza requires a nuanced, participatory approach that captures the lived experiences and ethical reflections of those affected. Bishara frames the Gaza War as a moral crisis, interrogating how international actors, media narratives, and civil societies respond to atrocities committed during armed conflict. The study focused on how individuals interpret and emotionally respond to injustice.

Social Media's Role in Crisis Communication and Humanitarian Efforts

Social media platforms have become vital to crisis communication and humanitarian efforts in recent years. Reuter and Kaufhold (2018) provide a comprehensive review of social media use in crisis management, highlighting its potential for rapid information dissemination, community building, and resource mobilization.

In the context of humanitarian crises, Starbird and Palen (2011) demonstrated how Twitter was used for information sharing and coordination during the 2010 Haiti earthquake. More recently, Lev-On (2012) examined the role of Facebook in facilitating civic participation during crisis events, finding that the platform served as a catalyst for both online and offline engagement.

The concept of "voluntweeters," introduced by Starbird and Palen (2011), provides insight into how social media users self-organize during crises to disseminate information and coordinate relief efforts. Their study of digital volunteerism during the 2010 Haiti earthquake demonstrated how Twitter users adapted the platform's features to support crisis communication and response.

Youth Engagement in Social Causes through Digital Platforms

In his study, Aboualhuda (2023) surveyed 419 Egyptian youth aged between 18 and 40 to assess their exposure to social media influencers (SMIs) and the impact of such exposure on their awareness of the Palestinian Issue following the 2023 War on Gaza. The sample was predominantly female, with women comprising 71.1% (n = 298) of respondents, while men accounted for 28.9% (n = 121). In terms of age distribution, the majority (77.6%) were between 18 and 25 years old,

followed by 11.9% aged 35 to 40, and 10.5% aged 25 to 35. Nearly half of the participants (49.4%) reported engaging with SMIs on a daily basis. Statistical analysis revealed a significant positive correlation ($p < 0.05$) between the frequency of exposure to SMIs' content and the respondents' awareness of the Palestinian issue in the aftermath of the 2023 conflict. This indicates that increased interaction with influencer content is associated with heightened awareness and understanding of the issue. The study used the Media System Dependency theory, which posits that media exposure during times of crisis can shape individuals' knowledge, emotions, and actions. The emotional responses and sentiment were notably influenced by SMI content. Respondents reported heightened empathy towards Palestinian civilians, especially children and victims of the war. Emotional solidarity and expressions of compassion, often catalyzed by personal stories and visual content shared by influencers. Feelings of anger, sadness, and moral outrage in response to perceived injustices and civilian casualties. These emotional reactions were not only passive but often translated into active online engagement, such as sharing posts, commenting in support, and participating in digital campaigns. Regarding the behavioral response to influencer-led narratives, the regression analysis confirmed that exposure to SMIs significantly predicted behavioral engagement, reinforcing the idea that influencers serve as mobilizing agents in times of conflict.

Many studies focused on young people's engagement with social and political causes that have been shaped by digital technologies. They found that it was associated with increased civic engagement online, Kahne et al. (2015), and focusing specifically on humanitarian causes, it encouraged youth activism, Kligler-Vilenchik & Shresthova, (2012).

Theoretical Framework

The Model of Inspirational Media

The field of positive media psychology has emerged as a framework for understanding how media content can promote well-being and prosocial outcomes. Oliver et al. (2012) conducted a series of studies demonstrating that exposure to elevating media content led to increased

feelings of connectedness to humanity and greater motivation to help others.

Expanding on this work, Janicke and Oliver (2017) proposed the concept of "Inspirational Media" as content that elicits self-transcendent emotions, including moral elevation, and motivates individuals towards prosocial goals. Their research suggests that such media can have lasting effects on viewers' attitudes and behaviors.

The **Model of Inspiring Media**, was then developed by Oliver, Appel, Raney, Bartsch, and Dale (2021), it offers a compelling lens through which to understand how media content can evoke deep moral emotions and motivate prosocial behavior. *This framework shifts the focus from traditional media effects—often centered on entertainment, persuasion, or aggression—to the transformative potential of media that portrays human virtue, resilience, and moral beauty.*

At its core, the model posits that **inspiring media content**—stories that highlight compassion, courage, sacrifice, or moral integrity—can elicit emotional responses such as **elevation**, **awe**, and **gratitude**. These emotions are not just momentary reactions; they are deeply felt experiences that can reshape viewers' perceptions of humanity and their own moral identity. Elevation, in particular, is described as a warm, uplifting emotion that arises when witnessing acts of moral excellence. It often leads to a desire to follow virtuous behavior and to contribute positively to society.

The model emphasizes several key mechanisms:

- **Narrative and Character Engagement:** Viewers are more likely to experience elevation when they feel emotionally connected to the characters and perceive their actions as morally admirable.
- **Perceived Moral Beauty:** The portrayal of moral virtue must be framed in a way that highlights its beauty and significance, rather than reducing it to mere obligation or duty.
- **Reflective Processing:** Inspiring media encourages viewers to reflect on their values, relationships, and role in the world, often leading to increased empathy and prosocial motivation.

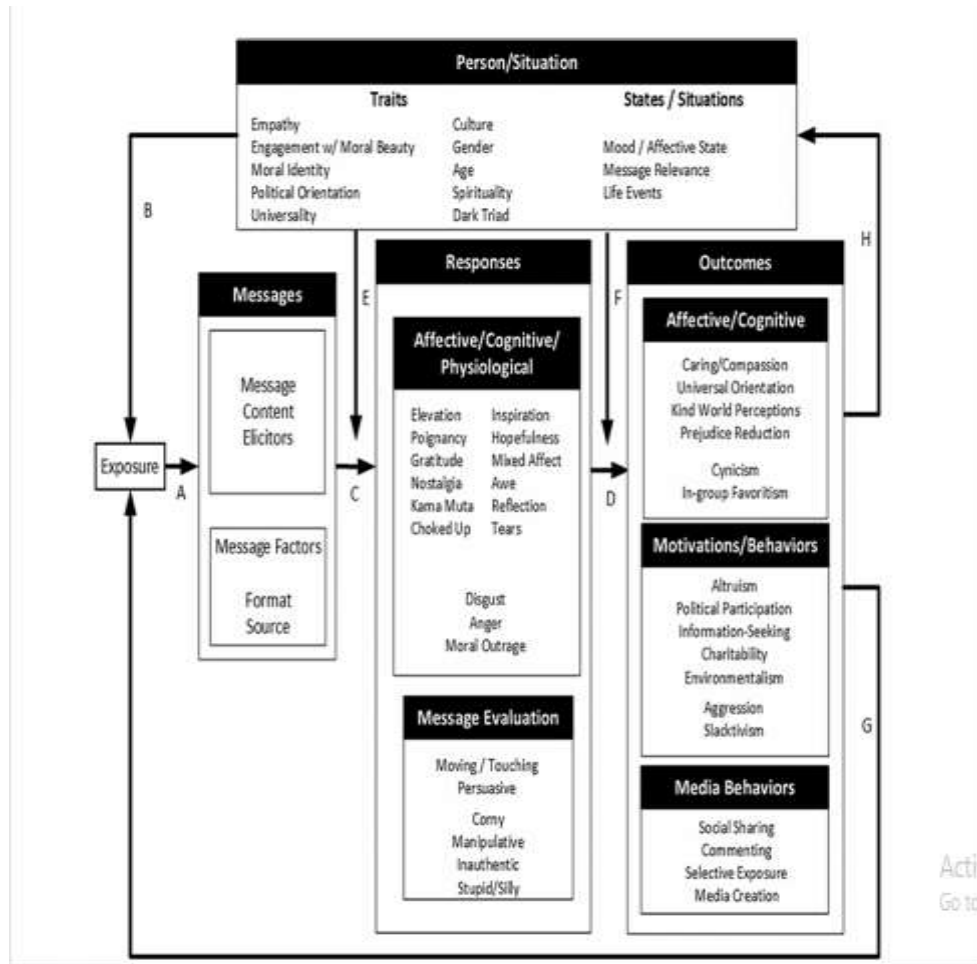


Figure 1. Components and connections in the model of inspiring media. (Model of Inspiring Media, Oliver, M. B. et al, 2021)¹

Importantly, the model recognizes that these emotional and cognitive processes are shaped by **individual differences** (e.g., personality traits, cultural background) and **social context**. What sets this model apart is its emphasis on **moral emotional engagement** rather than cognitive persuasion. It recognizes that viewers are not just passive recipients of media messages but emotionally and morally responsive individuals. The model integrates insights from moral psychology, narrative theory, and affective science to explain how certain types of media—especially

¹ A screenshot of the Model of Inspiring Media by Oliver, M.B. et al, (2021).

those portraying moral virtue—can lead to meaningful personal and social change.

Component	Description	Role in the current Study
Inspiring Media Content	Stories of moral virtue, courage, compassion	Gaza war content showing resilience, humanitarian acts
Viewer Engagement & Identification	Emotional connection with characters or subjects	Egyptian youth identifying with Palestinian figures
Self-Transcendent Emotions	Elevation, awe, gratitude	Triggered by morally framed social media posts
Reflective Moral Processing	Thinking about values, moral identity	Youth reflecting on justice, empathy, and civic duty
Prosocial Motivation	Desire to help, emulate virtue	Motivation to act digitally or socially
Behavioral Outcomes	Advocacy, sharing, donations, activism	Online solidarity, content sharing, awareness campaigns

Limitations of the Inspirational Media Model:

- **Cultural Specificity:** Most empirical studies have been conducted in Western contexts. Emotional responses to moral media may vary across cultures, especially in the middle east countries with the background of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- **Platform Dynamics:** The model does not fully account for how different platforms (e.g., TikTok vs. Instagram) shape emotional engagement and behavior.
- **Temporal Effects:** It remains unclear how long the effects of elevation last and whether they lead to sustained behavioral change.

The Role of Emotional Flow in Narrative Persuasion

A critical aspect of understanding media effects on emotional responses and behavioral intentions is the concept of emotional flow within narratives. Nabi and Green (2015) proposed *the persuasive affect model*, which suggests that emotional responses to media content can influence information processing and subsequent attitudes and

behaviors. It provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how the emotional journey experienced during exposure to narrative content can influence persuasive outcomes.

Nabi and Green (2015) argue that the desire for emotional shifts can guide individuals' media selection, which is particularly relevant in the context of social media engagement with humanitarian crises. Users may seek out content related to the Gaza crisis not only for information but also for emotional experiences, such as feeling moved or inspired.

Moreover, the authors propose that the "*Emotional Flow*"—which refers to a series of emotional shifts that are experienced while engaging with a certain narrative—can stimulate and sustain engagement with the content. This sustained engagement may enhance the narrative's persuasive influence. In the context of the Gaza crisis, this suggests that social media posts or news stories that evoke a range of emotions (e.g., sadness at the suffering, anger at injustice, hope from acts of kindness,) may be particularly effective in maintaining audience engagement and promoting prosocial behavior.

While, the **Model of Inspiring Media** (Oliver et al., 2021) focuses on how morally uplifting content evokes self-transcendent emotions like elevation, leading to prosocial behavior. Nabi and Green's (2015) *Persuasive Affect Model* adds a dynamic layer: it explains how the **sequence and variation of emotions**—what they call *emotional flow*—enhances narrative engagement and persuasive impact. Therefore, the researcher suggests an expanded theoretical framework that incorporates the main notions from the "*Inspiring Media Model*", with the "*Emotional Flow*" perspective, to suggest a simple integrated process model of inspiring media, emotional flow and prosocial outcomes.

Expanded Theoretical Framework:

- Emotional Flow enhances the *depth and duration* of engagement with morally framed content.
- Sequential emotional shifts (e.g., sadness → hope → admiration) increase the likelihood of sustained attention and attitude change.

- Social media posts that evoke multiple emotions are more likely to be shared and discussed, reinforcing collective moral engagement.

Integrated Process Model of Inspirational Media, Emotional Flow, and Prosocial Outcomes

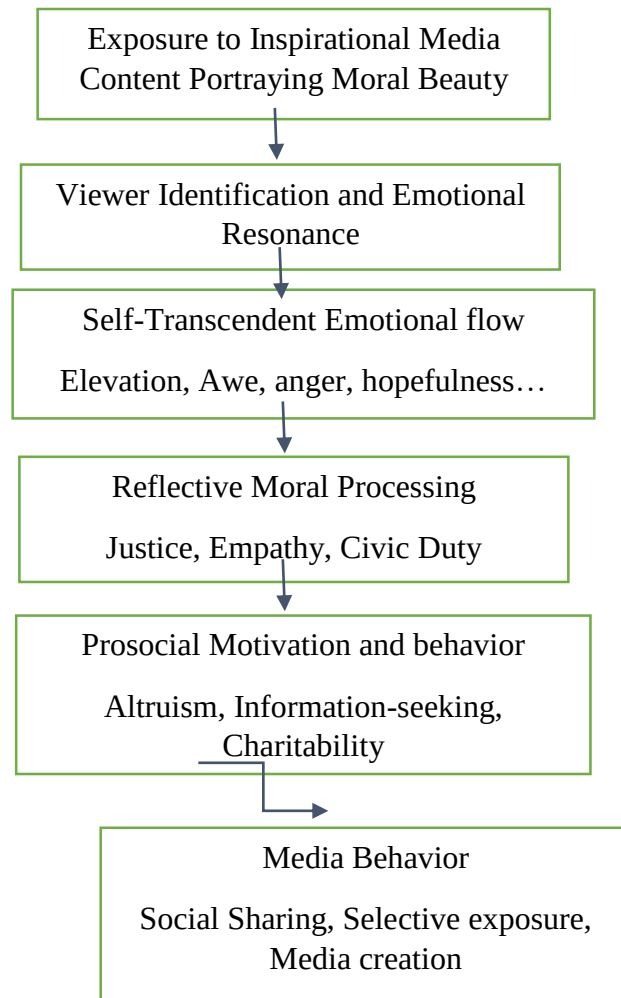


Figure 2. The Integrated Process Model of Inspiring Media and Emotional Flow (Developed for this study)

Methodology

The study used a Focus group discussion as a qualitative method to collect data as the study aims to stimulate rich insights about participants' moral processing, emotional responses, and prosocial behaviors. The dynamic of the focus groups interactivity enables participants to share the unspoken dialogue, it allows them to reflect on each other's perspectives and co-construct shared meaning. This method is convenient to the current study as it is exploring the flow of emotions among a young generation, the discussion encouraged them to talk, share and reflect on their own experiences. As Bajnok et al. (2024) emphasize, "the interactive nature of focus groups makes them particularly effective for capturing collective interpretations and values, especially in contexts involving ethical dilemmas and social identity." The study used Four focus group discussions with a total of 48 respondents from Gen Z in Egypt (Cairo and Giza governorate), 12 of which are aged 13-17 who are still in their elementary or secondary school through an online focus group setting. The other three focus groups were conducted in a classroom setting at a private Egyptian university with 36 respondents aged 18-28. The participants are university students, teaching assistants and graduates distributed randomly on one of the three focus groups, each one consisted of 12 participants.

Research Variables

1. Media Exposure Variables

- Type of content consumed (e.g., videos, posts, stories)
- Frequency and platform of exposure (Instagram, TikTok, X)
- Emotional framing of content (e.g., heroic, tragic, hopeful)

2. Emotional Experience Variables

- Emotional flow: sequence of emotions felt (sadness, anger, hope, admiration)
- Intensity of emotional response
- Experience of moral elevation or inspiration

3. Behavioral Response Variables

- Prosocial motivation (e.g., desire to help, donate, advocate)
- Actual behaviors (e.g., sharing content, commenting, organizing)

4. Reflective Moral Processing, Cultural Context and Identification:

- Reflective moral processing (e.g., changes in worldview, moral reflection, youth reflecting on justice, empathy, and civic duty)
- Egyptian youth interpreting Gaza-related social media messages within the context of their cultural, religious, and national identity
- Identification with Palestinian figures and topic involvement (e.g., Egyptian youth feeling connected to Palestinians, involvement in the topic)

Research Questions and Measured Variables

Media Exposure Variables

RQ1.1: What types of social media content (e.g., videos, posts, stories) related to the Gaza war are most frequently consumed by Egyptian Gen Z? (*Social Media Exposure*)

RQ1.2: How often do Egyptian Gen Z engage with Gaza-related content on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and X? (*Frequency of Exposure*)

RQ1.3: How is the emotional framing (e.g., heroic, tragic, hopeful) of Gaza-related content perceived by Egyptian Gen Z, and how does it influence their engagement? (*Emotional Framing and Engagement*)

Emotional Experience Variables:

RQ2.1: What emotional sequences (e.g., sadness, anger, hope, admiration) do Egyptian Gen Z report experiencing while consuming Gaza-related social media content and how intense are those emotions? (*Emotional Flow and Intensity*)

RQ2.2: To what extent do Egyptian Gen Z report experiencing moral elevation or inspiration after viewing Gaza-related social media content? (*Moral Elevation*)

Behavioral Response Variables:

RQ3.1: What prosocial motivation (e.g., desire to help, donate, advocate) are expressed by Egyptian Gen Z after exposure to Gaza-related content? (*Prosocial Intentions*)

RQ3.2: What actual behaviors (e.g., sharing content, commenting, organizing events) are undertaken by Egyptian Gen Z in response to Gaza-related social media messages? (*Prosocial Behavior*)

Reflective Moral Processing, Cultural Context and Identification:

RQ4.1: How do Egyptian Gen Z interpret Gaza-related social media messages within the context of their cultural, religious, and national identity? (*Cultural Context*)

RQ4.2: Do you feel involved and identify with the Palestinian figures on social media? (*Character Identification*)

RQ.4.3: Did the exposure to inspirational media content changes your worldview and makes you reflect the notions of justice, empathy and civic duty? (*Reflective Moral Processing*)

Results

Media Exposure:

RQ1.1: What types of social media content (e.g., videos, posts, stories) related to the Gaza war are most frequently consumed by Egyptian Gen Z?

“I mostly watch short videos on Tiktok or Instagram, it can be only 30 seconds about an injured child, or the rescuing of humans from under the rubble, but it says with me all the day.” (16 years old girl)

“I follow Instagram stories, especially from the influencers I am following, they share updated information and some useful links for donations and help, and hashtags too.” (19 years old girl)

“I follow a few threads on X (Twitter). They break down what’s happening hour by hour, and I like that I can read people’s reactions and see how others are interpreting the events.” (21 years old man)

“I always follow Moataz Azaiza, and Saleh Aljafarawi as he is almost my age, I use to get the updates on Gaza through Instagram stories and X.” (28 years old man)

RQ1.2: How often do Egyptian youth engage with Gaza-related content on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and X?

"During the hard days of the war, I was always on my phone to check for updates. When things are stable, it's less, but I always see posts almost every day, it keeps me feeling that I am with them." (20 years old girl)

"I discuss what's happening in Gaza with my family and friends, so, I always feel that I need to know and follow what's happening, at least once a day." (21 years old man)

"We are permanently engaged to the content, especially during the first months of war, I remember that I was checking my phone every minute to search for any updates, if the world will act to save them." (26 years old man)

RQ2.3: How is the emotional framing (e.g., heroic, tragic, hopeful) of Gaza-related content perceived by Egyptian Gen Z, and how does it influence their engagement?

"It's painful to see images of bombings, children crying, families being displaced, but it makes me want to share it so other people can see what's happening in Gaza." (17 years old girl)

"When I saw that video of Palestinian doctors working for hours to save lives in the unequipped hospitals and hallways under bombardment. It was beautiful to see this kind of dedication and resilience, I felt inspired by the mix of tragedy and heroism" (22 years old man)

"If the content I watch contains too much graphic videos, I prefer not to continue watching and I scroll away, and probably don't share it. But if the story itself is framed with dignity and strength, I'm more likely to comment or share." (23 years old girl)

"When I watch a content in media that emphasizes the Palestinians under the rubble and their perseverance to continue fighting for their lives, seeing them cooking, baking, singing, celebrating the feast although they have no home, it's heroic despite the tragedy they are living in, they gave a lesson of heroism and true faith." (19 years old girl)

Emotional Experience:

RQ2.1: What emotional sequences (e.g., sadness, anger, hope, admiration) do Egyptian Gen Z report experiencing while consuming Gaza-related social media content?

“I think I usually start feeling sad—seeing the destruction and loss. Then I feel anger, especially when I read about children being killed, or a father losing his daughter, or a mother losing her son. But sometimes, I end up feeling admiration for how resilient people in Gaza are, life goes on, they stay defending their land till the end.” (16 years old girl)

“We started appreciating what we have after we watched teenage boys and girls like us struggling from things that we take for granted, like our homes, parents, schools, a mix of feelings like sadness, compassion, admiration for their resilience.” (17 years old girl)

“For sure when the war lasted too long, and the winter came, we felt despair and anger, then as a young man, I felt that we must have a role in advocating the cause, sharing videos, writing posts, expressing our feelings. As A media graduate, I used my skills to encourage boycotting and volunteering with my peers to help in every possible way.” (27 years old man)

“I can say I have a range of emotions. I can remember my feelings the day of the Israeli invasion to the Gaza strip on the 27th of October, 2023, I felt sadness, grief, then injustice, then when I watched their resilience and the global support they have from people all over the globe, I finally felt hope and kept supporting them in all the possible ways, it’s the only way I possess to help them.” (18 years old girl)

RQ2.2: To what extent do Egyptian Gen Z report experiencing moral elevation or inspiration after viewing Gaza-related social media content?

“When I saw videos of kids in Gaza who care about each other even when they were scared as they don’t find their families or they are afraid of the strikes and the dark, I imagined myself in their situation, feeling hungry, cold and scared. But, something about their resilience,

when the morning comes and they smile to the camera, I felt like I wanted to be braver and kinder too.” (14 years old boy)

“Yes, I remember I saw a story about that boy who lost his family but still smiled and helped other kids, it made me feel I should appreciate what I have, my home, my parents, my country, water, roads... and that I’m not a little girl that can’t do anything, I think everyone of us should have a role in helping others in Egypt and in Gaza.” (15 years old girl)

“The bride celebrating her marriage in the middle of the rubble, gave me a lesson in persistence, and fighting for our rights in life no matter what happens, humanity will always prevail.” (15 years old girl)

“Seeing the strength and compassion the people in Gaza show everyday took me to other horizons of emotions and made me feel morally uplifted. These scenes changed my thinking about the true meaning of courage and humanity.” (22 years old male)

Behavioral Response:

RQ3.1: What prosocial motivation (e.g., desire to help, donate, advocate) are expressed by Egyptian Gen Z after exposure to Gaza-related content?

"After seeing so many stories of people in Gaza, I felt like I needed to do something and help them. I started to feel that I need to advocate for them, that we should share their stories so that the people around the world get the real side of the story, and maybe will be able to help them.” (15 years old girl)

"Every time I see an inspiring reel or a story about the situation in Gaza. I wanted my friends to see these acts of kindness and maybe feel inspired to help too." (19 years old girl)

“For the first time, we actually boycotted the brands that support Israel. Things that we didn’t imagine we can live without, like big food restaurants, famous cloth stores, mobile applications. Local brands substituted them in the market, even if they weren’t at the same level of quality, we shifted to them, and it actually helped our economy. This gave us a sense of worthiness and contribution. Every time we prefer to choose a local brand over the one that we were used to buy because it supports Israel in her war on Gaza, it felt good.” (20 years old girl)

RQ3.2: What actual behaviors (e.g., sharing content, commenting, organizing events) are undertaken by Egyptian Gen Z in response to Gaza-related social media messages?

"It was one of the times where I was really active and engaged online in sharing posts, putting stories and help my mother in sending donations to Gaza, like clothes, food and money, it makes me feel happy trying to be a good person." (14 years old girl)

"I was always sharing posts and stories about Gaza since the beginning of the war, but I felt it's not enough, we have to do more, so when I got the chance, I volunteered with my university when it organized a convoy to support Gaza with the Egyptian food bank, it was huge, and I felt pride that I was able to help even with my effort." (25 years old man)

"This transcends borders, we used the social media like Instagram posts to share our concern and help share the cause, we participated in volunteering work to send aids to Gaza, to collect money to help the refugees cross the borders to Egypt, we boycotted the products supporting Israel" (23 years old man)

Reflective Moral Processing, Cultural Context and Identification:

RQ4.1: How do Egyptian youth interpret Gaza-related social media messages within the context of their cultural, religious, and national identity?

"As Egyptians, we have a long history of supporting the Palestinian cause. When I see these stories on social media, it feels like they are near us, I can identify with them, understand and feel what they are going through." (21 years old girl)

"Palestine has always had a special place in our hearts, due to proximity of the land, our religion and the long history we share together as Arabs. So, as much as I can understand how war can affect anyone like the Ukrainians for example, but Gaza is different, I can feel their suffering in a more holistic way." (21 years old man)

"Sometimes the contrast between what I see on social media and how our local news channels cover the situation is striking. It makes me seek out more diverse sources of information." (22 years old man)

RQ4.2: Do you feel involved and identify with the Palestinian figures on social media?

“Bisan was one of the most influential girls, she is our age, we imagine ourselves in her place, it inspired us when we see her courage, bravery, smile and resilience. We wait every hour to follow what Moataz Azaiza shares, the scenes in the hospitals, the scared babies, the mosques, we felt that life is bigger than our borders. Those inspirational social media figures influenced how we see them, as if we are living with them, we watched them do their daily routines, their struggles in getting food and water, displacement every day, air strikes and feeling of fear, feeling cold when the winter came. I can say we really identified with them.” (23 years old girl)

“The girl who is studying for her high school diploma in the street, working to get money for food and beverages. I imagined myself in her situation. This made me think about my capabilities of enduring such circumstances, which made me admire them more, I admire their faith and courage.” (17 years old girl)

RQ.4.3: Did the exposure to inspirational media content changes your worldview and makes you reflect the notions of justice, empathy and civic duty?

“We felt that our problems are so small, and that small actions really matter, that’s why we all started to share on social media, when we feel that we did something good, we feel good about ourselves.” (13 years old girl)

“I can say the Hijab spread among my friends between 15-17 years old Egyptian girls as a consequence of what happened in Gaza. The girls were touched by the faith of the Palestinians people, they started to perform their prayers in time, videos of celebrities starting to read the Quran to know from where those Palestinians are getting their strength, global influencers who converted to Islam. All of this changed us permanently.” (16 years old girl)

“I remember the day of the territorial invasion of Gaza, my friends were in a party the previous night, their mindset changed, as if it has reset them to a new different mode, we saw the world for the first time differently, we found ourselves searching for their stories, sharing

them, trying to be their voice, we changed our Instagram profile pictures and notes to support Gaza, we felt of value when we did that, we changed our perspectives toward celebrities that we loved upon their attitude towards the genocide in Gaza. I think our generation changed due to this war, we felt more responsible, and we admire their faith, patience, and strength.” (17 years old girl)

“Seeing these acts emphasizes our feeling of mercy for every human being in life, it was an eye opening experience that I can say it changed us for good. We are trying to be better human beings and always be kind and help others.” (21 years old man)

“My brother, he is 7 years old, I can say that the new generation are aware about the Palestinian cause, from the social media and their peers, they feel sad about them, they identified with the kids there and are compassionate about their scary life, they wonder “what if Israel comes to Egypt, would they face the same destiny?” My brother wanted to adopt the Palestinians kids to live with us to save them from the war and the death, he and his friends boycotted the products that supported Israel in her war on Gaza.” (17 years old girl)

“In the middle of total despair, and feeling helpless, we watched on social media the video of the Egyptian merchant who was throwing oranges into the trucks leaving for Gaza, this simplest act brought tears to our eyes, a feeling that everyone can do anything to help, not only Palestine, but our own community. Media could be very impactful and inspire us to do this in real life, what I did is smiling at people in the streets, helping others.” (24 years old girl)

Discussion:

This study explores how Egyptian Gen Z engage with Gaza-related social media content and how such exposure evokes emotional flow, moral elevation, reflective moral processing and is reflected in prosocial motivation and behavior. The findings reveal that social media platforms—particularly Instagram, TikTok, and X—serve not only as sources of information but as emotional and ethical spaces where Gen Z encounter narratives of suffering, resilience, and moral beauty.

Participants described an intense **emotional flow** while engaging with Gaza-related content. The initial feelings of **shock, sadness, anger and helplessness** often transitioned into **admiration, and a sense of moral responsibility**. As one 17-year-old girl reflected, “*We saw the world for the first time differently... we found ourselves searching for their stories, sharing them, trying to be their voice.*” This emotional transformation was not passive, it catalyzed reflection, and a redefinition of self.

Narrative and character engagement was a key mechanism behind this transformation. Gen Z shaped emotional connections with the individuals portrayed in the social media content, particularly children, mothers, and ordinary heroes. These figures were not abstract symbols but relatable, morally admirable characters. One participant described how her 7-year-old brother wanted to “*adopt the Palestinian kids to live with us to save them from the war.*” This illustrates how even the youngest viewers adopted the narratives and responded with empathy and resourcefulness.

The portrayal of **moral beauty**, defined as acts of courage, compassion, and faith, was central to the experience of **moral elevation**. Participants admired the strength and patience of Palestinians, often contrasting it with their own lives. “*We admire their faith, patience, and strength,*” one girl said. Another participant recalled how a simple video of an Egyptian merchant throwing oranges into aid trucks “*brought tears to our eyes... a feeling that everyone can do anything to help.*” These moments of perceived virtue were not framed as duty, but as profoundly moving and inspirational.

This sense of elevation often led to **reflective moral processing**. Gen Z reported rethinking their values, their role in society, and their relationships with others. A 21-year-old man shared, “*It was an eye-opening experience... we are trying to be better human beings and always be kind and help others.*” These reflections extended beyond the Palestinian cause, inspiring broader commitments to justice, empathy, and sense of global responsibility.

Remarkably, these interpretations were by default deeply shaped by **cultural, religious, and national identity**. Participants viewed the

Palestinian struggle through the lens of shared Arab heritage, Islamic values, and a collective sense of moral responsibility. As one participant noted, *“Our generation changed due to this war... we felt more responsible.”* This cultural resonance intensified the emotional and ethical impact of the content, transforming digital engagement into a form of moral witnessing and solidarity.

In sum, the findings suggest that when emotionally framed, morally charged social media content, is aligned with cultural identity and compelling narrative, it can profoundly influence Gen Z. The inspirational social media content can elevate, inspire, and mobilize them, not only in support of humanitarian causes but in reimagining their own roles and ethics.

Conclusion:

The current study examines how the Egyptian Gen Z, aged 13-28, who were exposed to social media content related to the Gaza humanitarian crisis were emotionally affected and subsequently engaged in prosocial behavior responses reflecting acts of moral beauty and moral elevation. The study theoretical framework routed in positive media psychology, a perspective overlooking the positive impactful role of media, in contrast to the traditional perspective about the negative social media effects. The study focused on content that incites moral elevation through showcasing acts of moral beauty. The Inspirational Media Model and the Emotional Flow concept were integrated in a suggested model to study the role of portraying acts of moral beauty on moral elevation and prosocial behavior. The study used focus group discussions to stimulate young Egyptians to share their thoughts and emotions, and encourage the reflection on moral elevation inspired by social media content. Participants reported strong emotional responses to social media content showing acts of kindness, bravery, or solidarity in Gaza. They described being inspired by images and stories of resilience and heroism. Some participants expressed a sense of moral admiration for Palestinians being able to stay positive and help each other in such inhumane circumstances. In the same context, participants reported feeling motivated to take action after exposure to morally elevating content, and that they tend to share content that can be described as heroic over the tragic one that may contain severe graphic

imageries. Participants said they participated and advocated in initiatives inspired by social media like the boycotting and the collect of aids for Gaza. The participants in their responses stated that they were clearly influenced and moved by the social media content related to Gaza and that the shared cultural and religious context accentuated its impact on them. Moreover, participants remembered the same stories, they mentioned some of the most influential social media “heroes” in Gaza, they were generally moved by the acts of bravery, generosity and altruism the Palestinians are showing in their daily life. Consequently, we can assume that the notion of the inspirational media was convenient for understanding how the narratives about Gaza, genuinely containing elements of moral elevation, generated feelings of moral elevation, and were subsequently translated into prosocial motivation and behavior. Furthermore, the results suggest that the emotional flow experienced from following the emotionally charged social media content related to Gaza, probably end with a positive feeling of hope.

Limitations and Further Studies:

This study has some limitations, the focus group discussion was limited on younger Egyptian generations in urban communities from Cairo and Giza which does not reflect the Gen Z from other rural population or other countries. The sample emphasized Instagram, Tiktok and X as the most used platforms during the Gaza war, which may overlook other platforms such as Facebook and YouTube. The current study used focus group discussion, where emotional and behavioral responses were self-reported, this could reflect a certain bias due to social desirability or memory distortion. Finally, the Inspirational Media Model is a quiet recent model, that still needs further development, especially examining the sustained emotional and behavioral engagement that could evolve from the morally elevating content and its interaction with the emotional flow over time. The expanded model suggested by the study may generate further research ideas in other aspects of positive media effects.

Future research could be covering some areas that need further investigation, for instance, examining cross-cultural interpretations of moral beauty, using a longitudinal design to track the emotional

responses to inspiring media content and subsequent prosocial behaviors. Furthermore, future studies, could follow a mixed-methods approach, using sentiment analysis with focus groups for message evaluation, and data triangulation could help reflect more insights. In addition to the narrative analysis to examine the specific storytelling techniques and symbolic elements that evoke moral elevation among Gen Z. Studies can also investigate how the different platforms shape emotional engagement and evoke moral elevation, not only in the cases of crisis, but applying the perspective of positive media psychology could help develop online content that inspires, elevate and impact the society's moral engagement and behaviors.

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