



The Importance and Emotional Impact on Muslim Youth of Consuming News on Social Media about the Palestine-Israel Conflict

Adibah Ismail^[1] and Zahidah Nazihah Zanalhuddin^[2]

^{1,2} Universiti Utara Malaysia, 06010 Sintok, Kedah Darul Aman, Malaysia
adibah@uum.edu.my

Abstract. The utilisation of news on social media platforms is on the rise, particularly in the current technological age where nearly everyone is connected to social media. News on social media provides efficient and convenient access to a wide range of information and real-time updates especially news related to conflict, crisis and war. It is imperative because this kind of news somehow has limited coverage from mainstream media. Therefore, the objectives of this study were to identify the utilisation of social media among Muslims youth to obtain news on the Palestine-Israel conflict, specifically exploring the importance and emotional impact on them. Through in-depth interviews, it was found that people utilise social media to get updates on the Palestine-Israel conflict. Even though it affected their emotions, it did not stop them from keeping updated on the news about the conflict. This research also shows that the news on social media is important for people to get updates on conflict, crisis and war news.

Keywords: News Consumption, Social Media, Palestine-Israel Conflict.

1 Introduction

The Palestine-Israel conflict is a continuous and complicated geopolitical matter that has deep historically significant, cultural, ideological, spiritual, and political origins. The conflict's origins can be traced to the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Palestine is a geographical area situated in Western Asia, including both the State of Israel and the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The State of Israel has a largely Jewish population, but the West Bank and Gaza Strip were Palestinian Arabs and majority of them were Muslims [1].

The October 7, 2023 attack by Hamas known as Al Aqsa Flood operation on the Israeli occupied land has marked a significant escalation in the Israel-Palestine conflict [2]. The news regarding the war has been covered not only by traditional news media but also extensively covered through digital and social media platforms. The usage of social media as a news source has changed the media environment and influence on war reporting. According to [3] the social media coverage has significantly impacted

the public perceptions on Palestine-Israel conflict and influenced how the public perceives the Israel-Hamas war, impacting both understanding and opinions. She also stressed the significant decline of trust in mainstream media.

1.1 Problem Statement

The emotional connection to Palestine among Muslims extends beyond religious significance. Apart from the Al-Aqsa Mosque perceived to be the third holiest Muslim sites after Mecca and Medina, many Muslims also view the Palestinian struggle as resistance against oppression, injustices, violence and displacement. Francesca Albanese, a United Nations expert believed that the Israel crime towards Palestinians is not just war, it is genocide [4]. News reports about this violence trigger strong reactions across the Muslim world [5].

According to [6], media outlets that are aligned with the stronger side (Israel) tend to assign blame to the Palestinians, whereas media outlets that are aligned with the weaker side (Palestine) attribute blame to both Israel and them, with tabloids placing a greater emphasis on blaming the enemy. The declining of trust in mainstream news outlets whose reports are biased towards Israel, is pushing people towards alternative online sources and social media for information. Social media news on Palestine-Israel conflict, like through Instagram and TikTok, is crucial for Muslim youth as it influences opinions, fosters solidarity, and puts pressure for international action [7]. It has become a better choice compared to mainstream media because of its instant outreach, multimedia content, and influence on public opinion and policy decisions [8].

It is important to note that while the Palestinian cause resonates strongly with many Muslims globally, individual perspectives and levels of engagement can vary widely based on factors such as personal background, political views, and local contexts [9]. The complexity of the situation calls for nuanced understanding and dialogue to address the concerns of all parties involved. Generally, this research will explore the challenges of consuming social media news on the Palestine-Israel conflict and its impact on the Muslim youth's emotions.

2 Literature Review

According to [10], social media is a dynamic and influential tool for shaping and manipulating public opinion, particularly among Muslim communities. The impact of this influence can have benefits as well as negative effects, since it has the capacity to affect opinions and beliefs regarding Islam and the Muslim world [11], particularly inside Muslim communities. Information disseminated through social media platforms on Palestine has the potential to significantly impact Muslims by fostering a sense of unity and connection among them. On top of that, certain types of news about Palestine on social media can make things more difficult for Muslims. People share information that isn't always correct or is biased, which can lead to mistakes. This could lead to fights and disagreements among Muslims who have different points of view.

The drawbacks of news on social media encompass the possibility of disinformation and the absence of editorial supervision. Social media platforms can serve as ideal environments for the rapid dissemination of unverified or biased information, hence creating the possibility for a rise of disinformation. Social media has adverse effects, including the absence of verification about the source, authenticity, and validity of approved viewpoints, which consequently contributes to the proliferation of fake news [12]. The lack of effective fact-checking processes can contribute to the spread of inaccurate or deceptive news. Moreover, the phenomenon on these platforms might strengthen preexisting prejudices, restricting exposure to a range of alternative opinions. The concise nature of messages and headlines on social media can oversimplify intricate matters, resulting in a superficial comprehension of news events. Ultimately, the continuous flow of information can lead to information overload, posing difficulties for users in determining the credibility of sources and prioritizing the consumption of actual news.

Social media enables rapid dissemination of information, providing Muslims with the opportunity to articulate their emotions, demonstrate solidarity, and engage in real-time discussions about the issue. It facilitates the dissemination of information, coordination of demonstrations, and support for supportive initiatives. Social media platforms facilitate the exposure of Muslims to diverse perspectives, hence promoting discussions over the issue. Collectively, it fosters a feeling of mutual worry and an appeal for fairness among Muslims across the globe. Social media has become a more important tool for traditional news outlets covering conflict, which could result in sensationalized or biased reporting [8]. The abundance of misleading content on social media presents difficulties in identifying reliable information, underscoring the importance of thorough fact-checking and source authentication.

Research suggests that restricted accessibility on social media platforms might have a significant impact on the way people consume news. Users exhibit a tendency to limit themselves to a restricted selection of news sources, resulting in a tendency to absorb information that is aligned with their previous opinions [13]. In contrast, [14] highlights that social media offer benefits to their users, such as increased visibility and the chance to connect with others.

According to [15], over 50% of social media news consumers actively participate in personal news curating methods, which have the potential to either enhance or restrict their exposure to news on social media platforms. A few significant patterns are shown by research conducted on the consumption of news in the digital era. It was revealed that consumers commonly engage in direct visits to their preferred news outlet. While there, they tend to browse extensively, demonstrating a significant preference for entertainment news.

2.1 Social Media News

According to [16], regarding the growing importance of social media as a primary source of information for individuals from Generations Y and Z, it is possible that television may become outdated as a medium of news within the next few decades. Social media has taken over as an increasingly major news consumption channel in the United

States, with 36% of Americans between the ages of 18 and 29 obtaining their news from these platforms [17].

Due to the recent emergence of news consumption on social media, there is currently limited study available on this topic. However, the current paper is informed by two distinct sets of difficulties that have been identified in previous research. Firstly, it is essential to develop a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of the phenomenon. Furthermore, there is the concept that news on social media arises from a unique collection of methods known as "ambient journalism" [18].

[19] stated that social media has become a prominent and ever-growing platform for news and information, shaping how millions of people consume and interact with resources. This transition indicates a change away from the conventional one-way communication model of traditional journalism towards a more interactive paradigm that involves two-way interactions. Users have transitioned from being passive consumers to actively engaging in debates, expressing their ideas, and making valuable contributions to the collective narrative. This transition highlights the influential impact of social media, where the distinction between news creators and readers becomes less clear, promoting a lively and collaborative news environment. Consequently, the distribution of information has become less central and more democratic, enabling a variety of voices to influence the conversation in this continuously shifting digital environment.

As stated by [20], studies on news consumption via social media indicate that it is a notable and expanding trend, especially among the youth. They also mention that social media consumers depend on influential figures for news, and these platforms are progressively vital providers of news. This phenomenon also underlines the expanding impact of social media on the whole news environment, undermining established journalism models and emphasizing the importance of adapting to these changing patterns of news consumption.

3 Methodology

This study utilized in-depth interviews with five informants who were selected mainly because they are active users of social media news. In this research, the informants have similar demographics data as they were Muslim youth who use social media daily to obtain news on the Palestine-Israel conflict, aged between 22 to 24 years old. They were found to be using social media for a minimum of two hours and up to the maximum of ten hours daily. Additional characteristic that was set to find the appropriate informants for this research is they actively shares postings related to the Palestine-Israel conflict in their social media account. This shows the interests of all informants on the topic. All five informants were engaged with a few social media mainly TikTok, Instagram, WhatsApp and Facebook.

In addition, for an exploration study like this one, [21] focus on contextual relevance and data richness. It was helpful in exploring the challenges of consuming conflict news from social media and its impact. Additionally, the use of the human-as-instrument method helps researchers interact with participants and understand their experiences and points of view. This method takes into account the fact that research is subjective,

and that experts' personal experiences and ideas affect the way the research is done. The human-as-instrument method provides a more complete and thoughtful understanding, making up for the lack of closeness that comes with more objective approaches. In terms of saturated data, this approach says that researchers should keep collecting data until they hit a point where new data doesn't give them any more insights.

The interviews were conducted for 15 minutes to 40 minutes depending on the informant's knowledge and input on the topic. Throughout the interview process, the researcher also recorded the interview and took notes to facilitate the analysis process. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data to identify, analyze and report the data patterns. It involves six phases, which are understanding the data, generating the starting code, identifying the theme, and finally writing the report [22].

4 Findings and Discussions

People typically rely on mainstream media for updates regarding wars or conflicts, as these sources have been widely recognized for their accuracy and reliability. However, the current trend, particularly in the context of the Palestine-Israel conflict, indicates a preference for social media news, especially among younger generations. This research findings highlights the importance of the trend, and it's impacts on Muslim youth emotions.

4.1 Importance of Social Media News

The digital age has transformed news consumption, with social media being a primary platform for breaking news [23]. For youth, the ease of access enhances their engagement with global issues, though it may also contribute to information overload. Informants 1 and 3 also agreed that the instantaneous feature of the social media allowing users to access real-time updates on the Palestine-Israel conflict anytime, anywhere made them prefer social media news than waiting for the mainstream media:

"I personally prefer social media more because I think it is easier and much more convenient. Social media is important especially in terms of accessibility because we can read and obtain the news, anywhere and anytime we want just by searching about it. All users can easily access it without spending any penny with the condition that they have access to their social media account. The most important thing is the effort to obtain news on social media on the Palestine-Israel conflict." (Informant 3)

Interestingly, informants also stressed the distinctive advantage of social media in reaching global communities. They wanted to be part of the large audience who create global impact through their solidarity by sharing content related to the Palestine-Israel conflict. Informants shared that it strengthens their sense of purpose and advocacy because social media ensures that information about the conflict reaches a wide demographic, amplifying the message and creating a global impact.

It is a kind of satisfaction when they can share thoughts and emotions with other users who share the same views. The global reach of social media makes it an ideal platform for disseminating information on international conflicts [24]. Research shows that platforms like Twitter and Instagram can influence public opinion by exposing users to new perspectives.

4.2 Emotional Impact of Social Media News

Although social media news offers the advantage lacked in the mainstream media, Informants also expressed a few negative impacts of social media news consumption on their emotions. Muslim youth expressed high level of anxiety due to the constant exposure to distressing news updates on social media. Sometimes, anxiety attacks when they face the lack of real-time updates or the sudden silence from reliable sources, leading to feelings of uncertainty. Informants also admitted that sometimes they overthink about the Palestinians situation which contributes to a heightened sense of helplessness.

I always feel anxious, especially when the journalist updates the latest news. But after a while they are not updating more about the issue so of course we feel curious and clueless. We will always feel anxious while waiting for any future update. I keep refreshing their social media account, waiting eagerly for any current update, following updates on the issue to ease my emotion and anxiety. (Informant 3)

I have Palestinian friends and their families are there. What's sad about it is that you don't know anything, when suddenly you receive news like "my Auntie's family are bombed, we have lost contact with my families over there." They are sharing the news with me. So it's more of like anxious, anxiety for us not to know the live updates. (Informant 4)

This aligns with studies on media fatigue and compassion fatigue, where continuous exposure to tragic events through media results in psychological strain [25]. Muslim youth engaging deeply with conflict-related content may experience heightened anxiety due to the 24/7 cycle of distressing news.

Apart from that, Informants also reported that they feel confused due to the complexity of the conflict. Despite their belief in the clarity of the situation, many are baffled by the global ambiguity surrounding the issue and the lack of resolution. This confusion reflects the challenges of information disorder in social media environments, where conflicting narratives, bias, and propaganda may obscure understanding [26]. It suggests the importance of media literacy in navigating nuanced geopolitical issues.

Informants also expressed the feeling of helplessness due to their geographical distance from the conflict and their inability to assist directly. This emotion is amplified by their reliance on social media to spread awareness, a method they perceive as inadequate compared to direct action. The inability to contribute in meaningful ways can lead to frustration and disillusionment, especially in global conflicts where direct intervention is impossible [27].

Another important finding that is closely related to the nature of social media is trust issues. Informants expressed skepticism toward content in social media news that might have been sensationalized or misleading.

“Sometimes I doubted the news that I received because it could be a propaganda, it could be an agenda for some of the Israelis, also the Americans injecting fake news towards the Muslims” (Informant 1).

This ties into the broader issue of misinformation and disinformation in the digital age. The presence of propaganda, both from Israeli and Palestinian sympathizers, further complicates the task of discerning accurate information [28]. This theme emphasizes the need for critical digital literacy.

In addition, Informants also expressed their feeling of anger and rage towards the injustice they read and watched from the social media news. They feel frustrated over the continued conflict and the passivity of international bodies. This feeling always fuels the moral outrage for Muslim youth to engage in social media and advocate for action [29].

All informants also reported sadness and emotional distress when exposed to graphic content about the suffering of Palestinians, particularly children. The constant social media news exposure to tragic images and videos contributes to emotional exhaustion and overwhelm among informants. Social media amplifies this effect due to its immediacy and the emotional weight of user-generated content [30].

5 Conclusion and Future Directions

This research concludes that social media plays a critical role in shaping Muslim youth's understanding and engagement with the Palestine-Israel conflict. The findings confirm that social media news serves as an essential platform for raising awareness, fostering unity among Muslims, and offering live updates often missing from traditional media sources. It also empowers youth to combat misinformation, participate in advocacy efforts, and engage a global audience, thus becoming a powerful tool for both personal comprehension and collective mobilization.

The informants also admitted that this social media news has impacted their emotions where emotions such as anxiety, confusion, helplessness, anger, and sadness emerge from thematic analysis. These emotional responses reflect the youth's psychological struggle to process the ongoing violence and the seeming inability to influence or contribute to the resolution of the conflict.

However, alongside its benefits, social media consumption has a profound emotional impact on the youth. Emotions such as anxiety, confusion, helplessness, anger, and sadness emerged from thematic analysis, revealing the psychological strain experienced by these individuals. This reflects their emotional investment in the conflict and the challenges they face in coping with its complex and distressing nature, as they struggle with the lack of direct influence or ability to contribute to a resolution.

Given the significant emotional and informational impact of social media on Muslim youth, future research should explore the role of media literacy to help young generation cope with their media consumption and to navigate the impacts on their emotions. It is also important to explore the effectiveness of media literacy programs in helping youth critically analyze social media content, discern misinformation, and manage the emotional strain of continuous exposure to traumatic news. In addition, comparative studies could be conducted to examine the differing impacts of various social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Instagram, TikTok) on youth engagement with conflict-related news. This could help identify which platforms are most effective for advocacy and awareness and which may contribute more significantly to emotional distress. Finally, it is high time to conduct long-term studies to track the emotional well-being of Muslim youth engaging with conflict-related news on social media. This would provide deeper insights into the lasting psychological effects and the potential for burnout or compassion fatigue. Hopefully, attention towards social media news consumption can bring forward some guidelines and strategies to improve both youth media engagement and emotional resilience when it comes to news related to Palestine-Israel conflict or conflict reporting in general.

Acknowledgments. n.a.

Disclosure of Interests. The author declares no competing interests.

References

1. Smith, C. D. (2020). *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli conflict: A history with documents* (10th ed.). Bedford/St. Martin's.
2. Shaath, & Owda. (2023, October). Hamas' October attacks and the Israeli war on Gaza: Reflections from Palestinians. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/2023/10/hamas-october-attacks-and-the-israeli-war-on-gaza-reflections-from-palestinians?lang=en>.
3. Minges, M. (2023, November 21). How does the media impact public perception about war? *American University*. <https://www.american.edu/sis/news/20231121-how-does-the-media-impact-public-perception-about-war.cfm>.
4. Farge, E. (2024, March 26). UN expert says Israel has committed genocide in Gaza, calls for arms embargo. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/un-expert-says-israel-has-committed-genocide-gaza-calls-arms-embargo-2024-03-26/>.
5. Ahmad, R., Airlangga, P. H., Widya, A. S., & Putri, R. N. (2024). Socio-religious behavior on consumption pattern during Israel and Palestine conflict in Muslim society. *International Journal of Socio-Legal Studies*, 1(2). <https://doi.org/10.62033/iasjol.v1i2.22>.
6. Friedman, E., & Herfroy-Mischler, A. (2020). The Media Framing of Blame Agency in Asymmetric Conflict: Who is Blaming Whom for the 2014 Israeli-Palestinian Peace Negotiations Failure? *Journalism Studies*, 21(13), 1873–1892.
7. Andy, S., Mayang, K., Putri, I. A., & Daniyal, A. (2024). Social media Instagram, TikTok, dan X dalam pengungkapan pelanggaran hukum dalam konflik antara Palestina dan Israel.

- Jurnal Teknik Informatika dan Teknologi Informasi.*
<https://doi.org/10.55606/jutiti.v4i1.3419>.
8. Zahoor, M., & Sadiq, N. (2021). Digital public sphere and Palestine-Israel conflict: A conceptual analysis of news coverage. *Liberal Arts & Social Sciences International Journal*, 5(1), 168–181. <https://doi.org/10.47264/idea.lassij/5.1.12>.
 9. Ikhwan, M., & Falah, M. B. (2024). Palestinian independence and religious extremism: Using the Palestinian issue as a Khilafah Islamiyah propaganda tool on Instagram. *West Science Islamic Studies*, 2(1), 38–50. <https://doi.org/10.58812/wsis.v2i01.600>.
 10. Mohammed, A. A., & Inusa, A. (2020). Impacts of social media in influencing public opinion in the muslim communities. *International Journal of Heritage, Art and Multimedia*.
 11. Shuriye, A. O., Adeyemi, B. K., & Huud, S. (2013). Impacts of new media technology on muslim-western relation. *Journal of Asian Scientific Research*, 3(12), 1210–1219.
 12. Bhutani, B., Rastogi, N., Sehgal, P., & Purwar, A. (2019). Fake News Detection Using Sentiment Analysis. 2019 Twelfth International Conference on Contemporary Computing (IC3), 1-5. <https://doi.org/10.1109/IC3.2019.8844880>.
 13. Cinelli, M., Brugnoli, E., Schmidt, A. L., Zollo, F., Quattrocioni, W., & Scala, A. (2020). Selective exposure shapes the Facebook news diet. *PLOS ONE*, 15(3), e0229129. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0229129>
 14. Masip, P., Suau, J., & Ruiz-Caballero, C. (2017). Questioning the selective exposure to news: Understanding the impact of social networks on political news consumption. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 62(3), 300–319. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764217708586>.
 15. Merten, L. (2020). Block, Hide or Follow—Personal News Curation Practices on Social Media. *Digital Journalism*, 9, 1018 – 1039. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2020.1829978>.
 16. Čerepinko, D., Bagarić, Ž., & Dujić, L. (2020). Digital Video Generation and Their Viewing Habits: The Death of Television News?. *Collegium Antropologicum*, 43, 289-297.
 17. Murthy, B. P., LeBlanc, T. T., Vagi, S., & Avchen, R. N. (2021). Going Viral: The 3 Rs of Social Media Messaging during Public Health Emergencies. *Health Security*, 19(1), 75–81. <https://doi.org/10.1089/hs.2020.0157>
 18. Boczkowski, P. J., Mitchelstein, E., & Matassi, M. (2017). Incidental news: How young people consume news on social media. *Proceedings of the Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*. <https://doi.org/10.24251/hicss.2017.217>
 19. Ngoc, N. M. (2022). Journalism and social media: the transformation of journalism in the age of social media and online news. *European Journal of Social Sciences Studies*, 7(6). <https://doi.org/10.46827/ejsss.v7i6.1316>
 20. Bergström, A., & Belfrage, M. J. (2018). News in social media. *Digital Journalism*, 6(5), 583–598. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2018.1423625>
 21. Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1981). Effective evaluation: Improving the usefulness of evaluation results through responsive and naturalistic approaches. Jossey-Bass.
 22. Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
 23. Nelson, J. L., & Taneja, H. (2019). The small, disloyal fake news audience: The role of audience availability in fake news consumption. *New Media & Society*, 21(1), 202–218. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818758715>.
 24. Huang, T., & Wang, X. (2022). Digital activism on social media: The case of the Palestine-Israel conflict. *Journal of Communication*, 72(1), 29–52. <https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqab043>.

25. Newman, N., & Fletcher, R. (2020). Digital news report 2020. *Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism*. Retrieved from <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2020>.
26. Wardle, C., & Derakhshan, H. (2019). *Information disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making*. Council of Europe. Retrieved from <https://rm.coe.int/information-disorder-toward-an-interdisciplinary-framework-for-research/168076277c>.
27. Kaplan, L. J. (2020). Vicarious trauma and the social media era. *Trauma Psychology Today*, 6(2), 12–18. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tpt0000117>.
28. Guess, A. M., Nyhan, B., & Reifler, J. (2020). Exposure to untrustworthy websites in the 2016 US election. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 4(5), 472–480. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-020-0833-x>.
29. Jackson, R. L. (2021). The power of moral outrage in digital activism. *Social Media + Society*, 7(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120982972>.
30. Roh, T., & Kim, D. (2022). Empathy fatigue in social media: Impact of continuous exposure to distressing news on emotional well-being. *Journal of Media Psychology*, 19(3), 145–161. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1016-9040/a000298>.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

